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Relational Interreligious Dialogue: Interdisciplinary Arguments from Creator/Creature Theology and Quantum Entanglement

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RELATIONAL INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: INTERDISCIPLINARY
ARGUMENTS FROM CREATOR/CREATURE THEOLOGY
AND QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Joyce Ann Konigsburg

May 2017

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By

Joyce Ann Konigsburg

Approved March 28, 2017

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ABSTRACT

RELATIONAL INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: INTERDISCIPLINARY ARGUMENTS FROM CREATOR/CREATURE THEOLOGY AND QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT

By

Joyce Ann Konigsburg

May 2017

Dissertation supervised by Marinus Iwuchukwu, Ph.D.

Globalization, technological advances, and worldviews that perceive religious others with suspicion, all intensify society's awareness of religious plurality and the subsequent necessity for effective interreligious dialogue. Engaging in interreligious dialogue through daily encounters, conversations, common concerns, and shared religious experiences advances religious pluralism. Nevertheless, the current state of interreligious dialogue is at an impasse; its existing substantive ontological approaches introduce, perpetuate, or worsen challenges of hegemony, elitism, and marginalization, as well as tensions between the diametric goals of religious unity versus unique religious identity. Substantive ontological models emphasize religious autonomy instead of any relational connections between religious traditions. These prevalent methods hinder effective interreligious dialogue.

In response, this project proposes relational ontology as a constructive method to address existing issues within interreligious dialogue. Relational ontology asserts that reality is being as being-in-relation. By employing relational ontology, interreligious dialogue participants recognize their fundamental interconnected unity while respecting each religious tradition's particularity. Moreover, relationality assists in neutralizing power inequalities and marginalization. To illustrate relational ontology and explain its advantages for interreligious dialogue, this project evaluates the models of quantum entanglement and Christianity's Creator/creation relationship. Placing interdisciplinary perspectives from science and religion in dialogue essentially instantiates the project's methodology, it validates relational ontology as an effective method for improving the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue.

DEDICATION

In memory of my dad, Richard Balukonis and my grandma, Genevieve Forystek

with love and gratitude

To my dear husband, Brian, my mom, Josephine Balukonis, and my daughter, Jennifer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project's fundamental idea is that relational approaches improve interreligious dialogue. Because relationality likewise improves the dissertation process, it only seems fitting to acknowledge the significant relationships that have inspired and sustained my theological journey. Thus, I humbly recognize my creaturely relationship with the wholly other Creator, who lovingly bestows the gift of my very existence and whose grace guides all my accomplishments for God's own glory.

I am also grateful for the many academic relationships that direct my education and contribute to this project. I wish to thank my professors at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas for instilling their masters' level academic instruction upon my catechetical foundation of faith and for encouraging me to pursue a Ph.D. in Theology. Similarly, I appreciate the theology professors at Duquesne University for conveying their expertise and guidance in developing my theological voice as well as my skills as a professor. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation director, Marinus Iwuchukwu, for his desire to work with me as well as for his helpful suggestions and support throughout this project. I also value the careful reading and comments from my theology committee members, Elizabeth Cochran and Sebastian Madathummuriyil, with special thanks for the contributions of Theodore Corcovilos from the Physics department. Three additional academic mentors and friends deserve specific recognition: Maureen O'Brien, William Wright, and Aimée Upjohn Light.

My gratitude extends to precious relationships with family and friends. A sincere, heart-felt thank you for all your countless prayers, companionship, shared insights, words

of encouragement, examples of courage and perseverance, and the occasional prodding to meet deadlines, followed by listening, understanding, and laughter. Initially, we were others and strangers; I am so grateful we became friends. From my heart, I appreciate your many meaningful contributions to this project and to my life. Additionally, I am blessed with my daughter, Jenni. I value your love, your steadfast confidence in me, and your sense of humor. My mom likewise deserves a special thank you and a hug. I am grateful for your unconditional love, your unwavering faith in me, and your inspiring example of what it means to be a successful woman of integrity. I am very proud to be your daughter.

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INTRODUCTION

Project Summary

From early civilization's first tribal skirmishes about the potency of their gods to historical clashes between civilizations and religions to the present, poignant, national security concerns about terrorism, interreligious dialogue plays a significant role in understanding and resolving issues regarding religious plurality. When people perceive national or religious others with suspicion, their rhetoric calls for preventative barriers, marginalizing bans, as well as surveillance at national and religious borders. The political and social focus on autonomy, along with isolating those who are different, reflects similar challenges confronting interreligious dialogue. Prevalent substantive ontology, as an approach that emphasizes the individuality of religious traditions over and against any relational connections between them, hinders the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue. Therefore, the primary thesis of this project is to investigate how relational ontology, as exemplified through the models of quantum entanglement and the Creator/creation relationship, is a constructive solution to averting or resolving challenges in interreligious dialogue.

Several issues influence the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue. One concern is disproportionate hegemony, especially Western religious privilege, which historically emerges as imperialism and colonialism. This presumed primacy imposes beliefs, opinions, and concerns on others, resulting in exclusion and marginalization of less powerful participants from interreligious dialogue. Another challenge involves differing opinions between postmodern, postliberal perspectives and their preceding modern, liberal worldviews. Such contrasting opinions generate conflict along with confusion

about the direction and purpose of interreligious dialogue. Disagreements originate from a variety of inconsistent approaches to religious pluralism, especially difficulties in addressing the dichotomy between unity and particularity. The unity–particularity conundrum encompasses beliefs and identity in addition to truth statements from multiple religions. Current substantive ontological approaches introduce, perpetuate, or worsen these and other obstacles confronting interreligious dialogue.

Relational ontology reduces interreligious conflict and tension by providing a paradigm that accentuates unity without conflating diversity into sameness. The relational approach associates each religious other, individually and as a corporate tradition, with the interrelated whole, yet, it values and respects the variations, differences, and identities that define religious particularity. Furthermore, relational models mitigate power imbalances in relationships between people and among religions. Relational ontology asserts that reality is being as being–in–relation, all people are interconnected. Thus, relational approaches expose centers of power and marginalization as human constructs to be eradicated. In sum, introducing relational ontology as a method for interreligious dialogue provides a more effective and less confrontational paradigm for encountering other religions by facilitating greater trust, successful discourse, and positive mutually beneficial relationships.

Relationships without dialogue are ineffective; dialogue without relationships suffers the same fate. Hence, the primary goals of interreligious dialogue are to promote mutual understanding and encourage healthy, constructive relationships directed toward joint activities and tasks that benefit the common good. Dialogue occurs by sharing daily encounters, conversations, collective social concerns, and mutual religious experiences.

Rather than utilize substantive ontology, which highlights the individual nature of each religious entity, relational ontology acknowledges each religion's particularity but privileges relations and unity between religions as prior to each religious entity *per se*. In other words, a religion's existence or being is being-in-relation.

Purpose, Scope, and Methodology

Consequently, the project proposes a methodological shift from prevailing substantive ontology with its emphasis on the unique and individual religious other to a relational approach that focuses on interconnectedness and unity between diverse religious traditions. The purpose of this effort is threefold. First, the objectives are to identify and assess difficulties encountered during interreligious dialogue. Second, the task is to demonstrate how a relational approach eliminates or mitigates problems of hegemony, marginalization, and tensions balancing particular religious identity with mutual efforts toward unity. Finally, the purpose is to construct a case for relational ontology and advocate it as an alternative way of engaging in interreligious dialogue.

Although many models of relationality exist across academic disciplines, the study limits its in-depth investigation of relational ontology and its associated benefits to the scientific theories of quantum entanglement and to theological concepts comprising the Christian Creator/creation relationship. These models exemplify physical and spiritual dimensions of metaphysical interconnectedness in reality, respectively. As a result, they demonstrate that being is being-in-relation. Through the recognition and actualization of relational ontology, religious traditions successfully alleviate or avert dialogic challenges that involve power imbalances and marginalization along with the tensions of unity and particularity that affect religious identity. Hence, employing relationality in interreligious

dialogue fosters increased understanding, deeper relationships, cooperation, and positive direction with the hope of eventual reconciliation, acceptance, and peace.

This qualitative inquiry entails descriptive, analytic, and constructive research to resolve the challenges impeding effective interreligious dialogue. Its methodology initially examines the function and current state of interreligious dialogue to identify some of the challenges and issues that prevent mutual understanding and respectful discourse. After analyzing and categorizing existing problems, the method engages the philosophical concept of relational ontology, not as an all-encompassing meta-narrative, but one alternative, creative, constructive solution to the challenges and ineffectiveness occurring within interreligious dialogue. Next, the method defines relational ontology then critically evaluates its advantages and disadvantages as a viable solution to address existing interreligious dialogue issues.

The project actually instantiates itself as an example of this methodology by assessing several relational models from a variety of religious traditions and spiritualities as well as performing an in-depth study of the Christian Creator/creation relationship. Utilizing Christianity's notions of the Creator/creation relationship is an effective test case; it demonstrates how to apply relational ontology to a particular religion as well as among religions. Christian tenets assert an ontological distinction between the Creator and creation, which complicates but also confirms relational ontology as a reasonable model. Moreover, the methodology incorporates an interdisciplinary dimension by analogically investigating relational characteristics from physics, specifically the quantum entanglement of subatomic particles. The method places the two approaches in conversation in order to analyze, evaluate, and justify that being is being-in-relation.

Establishing relational ontology as fundamental to reality also insinuates that it is essential to humanity, religious traditions, and interreligious dialogue. After considering the evidence along with the results, the project validates and promotes relational ontology as an approach that resolves or mitigates challenges to effective interreligious dialogue.

Chapter Synopses

In analyzing the current state of interreligious dialogue, the first chapter identifies several crucial challenges that hinder its effectiveness. The first concern involves tensions between interreligious dialogue, theologies of religions, and comparative theology. Two other critical issues include power inequality and the unity/particularity conundrum. The former involves Western imposition, colonialism, and imperialism, with specific focus on how hegemony influences representation and marginalization during dialogic encounters. The latter issue strives for interreligious unity and cooperation without the loss of each tradition's particular identity, beliefs, and language.

Chapter two explores whether relational ontology, which asserts that being is being-in-relation, is a more effective alternative method for interreligious dialogue than prevailing substantive approaches. The evaluation includes advantages and disadvantages of both metaphysical perspectives of existence, philosophical as well as ethical issues regarding the self-other relationship, in addition to a critique of several religious and spiritual models espousing relational ontology. Models of relationality exist in many academic disciplines, including philosophy, science, theology, and epistemology.

Chapters three and four discuss scientific and theological relational paradigms, respectively. From a physics perspective, chapter three examines quantum entanglement as an analogy for human and interreligious relationality. Quantum physics and religion

share similar challenges involving interpretation while interdisciplinary science–religion dialogue proposes further enhancements in interreligious discourse. Chapter four demonstrates the application of relational methodology within a particular religious tradition; the chapter reflects specifically on the Christian Creator/creation relationship. The necessity of Christian ontology distinction, however, supports but also complicates relational ontology as a method for interreligious dialogue. After discussing the divine attributes of transcendence and immanence, chapter four investigates contrastive and non–contrastive transcendence, along with apophatic, kataphatic, and spiritual practices for mitigating relational difficulties with the Christian Creator/creation paradigm.

The final chapter engages two ostensibly disparate interdisciplinary perspectives of quantum entanglement and the Christian Creator/creation relationship in dialogue to ascertain how they confirm the premise of relational ontology, which states that being, is being–in–relation. Essentially, this analysis validates relational ontology as intrinsic to reality as well as a relevant and crucial method for interreligious dialogue. From the investigative results, the chapter constructs a model of relational ontology that improves the state of interreligious dialogue by either eliminating or significantly mitigating challenges that impede its goals and effectiveness.

CHAPTER 1 – RELIGIOUS PLURALITY AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Introduction

Globalization and shifting worldviews increasingly accentuate and amplify society's awareness of religious plurality. The reality of multiple religions manifests regularly in the public sphere through daily encounters, conversations, common ethical concerns, and shared spiritual experiences. This rapidly evolving interconnectivity sets precedents by providing novel opportunities to interact with, learn about, and appreciate diverse faiths. Yet amid, or perhaps because of, an accelerated exchange of ideas and information through sophisticated advances in communication, transportation, and computer/network technology, people continue to search for meaning while seeking answers to life's ultimate questions. The world's religions present diverse responses to such significant queries; however, these answers commonly generate contradiction, controversy, confusion, as well as conflict. Consequently, how members of each tradition respect and relate to the religious other remains a vital question.

Alterity evokes a broad spectrum of reactions. One defensive response used by religious denominations, especially those holding absolute truths, is "to create passionate allegiances that divide people from one another,"¹ engender antagonism, and perpetuate ethnic or racial conflicts. A more positive approach addresses religious plurality by engaging in dialogue. Although occasionally perceived as argumentative or antagonistic, dialogue empowers people to reconcile apparently incompatible beliefs, practices, and truths, which lead to increased understanding of different religious perspectives.

¹ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), vii.

Paradigm shifts in worldviews regarding religious plurality also compel interreligious dialogue to mature rapidly as it enters into the mainstream of most societies. Dialogic encounters advance a contemporary awareness of religious diversity, not as an issue to be remedied, but as a reality to be embraced and realized. However, this chapter identifies several crucial challenges that hinder effective interreligious dialogue. Beginning with the current condition of interreligious dialogue, which involves tensions with theologies of religions and comparative theology, the chapter then examines religious hegemony as well as its resultant imposition and marginalization. Next, the chapter analyzes disparate notions of religious unity and particularity that cause identity and language issues. The chapter concludes that the prevailing ontological approaches create or worsen problems during interreligious dialogue and suggests employing relational ontology as a solution.

State of Interreligious Dialogue

For more than fifty years, the primary goals of interreligious dialogue have been to improve knowledge by encouraging positive, mutually beneficial relationships among multiple religions. Its purpose is to share narratives, tenets, along with practices that promote practical collaboration by appreciating uniqueness rather than reducing traditions to their lowest common denominators. Leonard Swidler and other religious scholars define dialogue as “a two-way communication between persons who hold significantly differing views on a subject.”² Hence, the interactive exchange does not imply complete agreement; it is not a speech, lecture, or sermon, nor does it entail

² Leonard Swidler, “Part One: The Importance of Dialogue,” in *Triologue: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue*, eds. Leonard Swidler, Khalid Duran, and Reuven Firestone (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), 7.

polemics, debate, or proselytizing. Instead, it provides intentional responses to religious plurality that counteract ignorance, marginalization, religious triumphalism, prejudice, in addition to animosity. During dialogue, participants approach each other with heightened, sensitive openness to differing religious viewpoints.

Interreligious encounters historically aggravate culture clashes and aggression that often lead to conflict. Significant world events of the twentieth century, ecumenical efforts among Christian denominations, encouragement from the World Council of Churches, documents from the Second Vatican Council, and papal dialogic endeavors with like-minded representatives from various religions developed initial practices to inspire genuine, open dialogue. Existing guidelines, processes, including dialogic tools continually improve in response to increasing global interdependence and shifting worldviews. Yet, outdated models, ineffective ontological approaches, and changing contextual frameworks call into question persistent issues involving religious hegemony and tensions from the unity–particularity dichotomy among belief systems. In the current state, these challenges impede interreligious dialogue from achieving its goals.

Interreligious Dialogue

James Fredericks claims that dialogic methods developed more than 40 years ago are now obsolete. Primarily, he criticizes theologians who spend more time talking about dialogue than practicing it.³ Scholars also make presumptions that dismiss differences between and within religions, impose their self-appointed expertise on another’s beliefs,

³ James L. Fredericks, “Introduction,” in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), xv. For more information on his critique of interreligious dialogue, refer to *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999) and *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

or fail to realize that each tradition's texts and practices are complex and worth studying in their own right. The Vatican document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, describes further obstacles to interreligious dialogue, especially a lack of conviction regarding its value. Additional impediments include assuming a polemically defensive approach or exhibiting attitudes of intolerance, suspicion, or closed-mindedness.⁴ Participants possessing these deficiencies stifle interaction, engender distrust, and inhibit fruitful encounters.

Lack of knowledge and appreciation for one's own beliefs and practices as well as of additional religions' tenets certainly constrains meaningful discourse. Paul Mendes-Flohr concurs that conviction and knowledge of one's own religion is necessary, for "if one takes one's own faith seriously, one must perforce demand that others take one's faith seriously, even if but to protest."⁵ Many traditions are particularly sensitive to previous historical encounters and their events. An awareness of how Jewish participants combat internal struggles of suspicion along with mistrust, for example, or mindfulness that Muslims battle misinformation and stereotyping eases tensions during dialogue.⁶ Because people perceive the world through particular historical and cultural contexts, normative judgments are inevitable. Catherine Cornille posits that dialogic interaction presupposes "a certain suspension of judgment in order to understand the other on its own

⁴ Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html> (accessed February 1, 2013), para. 51-4. For more information on obstacles to interreligious dialogue, refer to Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 151.

⁵ Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Promises and Limitations of Interfaith Dialogue," *Criterion* 50, no. 1 (2013): 3.

⁶ David M. Elcott, "Meeting the Other: Judaism, Pluralism, and Truth," in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 40.

terms,”⁷ which necessitates an examination of one’s own convictions as well. Being open to different perspectives while contemplating how these new insights inform a person’s understanding of the divine as ultimate reality, maintains a theological relevance for interreligious dialogue.

Prejudiced approaches to diverse opinions impede respectful relationships that require freedom from stereotyping, making assumptions, or promoting hidden agendas. Michael Barnes adds that interreligious dialogue “requires a very positive sensitivity, to the nuances of faith and, above all, to claims to truth.”⁸ Participants should select their words and their positions carefully to avoid animosity or misunderstanding. Furthermore, an overemphasis on discussing common ground or too exhibiting much complacency rather than taking a stand are dialogic issues leading to consensus building, political correctness, besides a false sense of cohesion. Engaging only with likeminded people does not further diverse religious knowledge nor constitute authentic dialogue.

Additional difficulties arise when interreligious dialogue encounters secular interests. Both religious and non-religious participants repeatedly encounter dissimilar, contradictory, or ideological contexts that influence their perceptions of reality. Such inconsistency generates reciprocal suspicion that hinders productive communication. During discussions, Oddbjørn Leirvik thinks that “non-believers are wary of religion becoming more visible in the public sphere [and] religious people fear that mounting secularism will block believers’ faith-based engagement in general society.”⁹ This

⁷ Catherine Cornille, “Introduction: On Discernment in Dialogue,” in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), ix–x.

⁸ Michael J. Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 4.

⁹ Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014), 39.

nuanced issue is sensitive to several groups including European Protestants who regard “secularity and even secularist policies as integral to their non–hegemonic understanding of faith.”¹⁰ Actions such as dismissing differences within traditions, misunderstandings between religions, stereotyping, and prejudice develop into suspicion during religious–secular discussions and thus exemplify prevailing dialogic challenges.

Theologies of Religions

Similar to interreligious dialogue, various theologies of religions develop in response to religious plurality and increased interfaith encounters. If dialogue represents the praxis and the theory of interreligious activity, then theologies of religions are the philosophical perspectives that frame or define a religion’s identity along with its relationship to different traditions. Each belief system constructs its own theological models so many theologies of religions exist. Nevertheless, they frequently are variations of Alan Race’s initial typology, which includes the three broad categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.¹¹ Diana Eck generally describes an exclusivist as a person who believes that his or her community and its tenets, view of reality, and encounters with God are the one, unique truth; however, inclusivists admit truth may exist in various faiths, but they frame it within their own creeds.¹² A pluralist acknowledges multiple religions as a *de facto* and a *de jure* reality resulting from diverse peoples seeking,

¹⁰ Ibid., 34.

¹¹ For more information on first generation theologies of religions, refer to Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London, England: SCM Press, 1993).

¹² Diane Eck, “Is Our God Listening? Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism,” in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, ed. Roger Boase (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 27–8.

finding, and then responding to divine encounters in different times, cultures, and societies.¹³ These models inform the opinions, perceptions, and subsequent reactions among dialogic participants.

Theologies of religions generate controversy regarding their effectiveness, including whether they positively contribute to or actually hinder interreligious dialogue. Peter Feldmeier questions whether the threefold approach is an exhausted endeavor after critics claim it is an outdated, ineffective, and “dubious project.”¹⁴ More specifically, Fredericks asserts that the material is repetitive, the method imperialistically interferes with authentic interreligious exchange, and it inadequately meets hermeneutical requirements for critically interpreting a variety of sacred texts.¹⁵ This hermeneutical inadequacy also introduces what Fredericks calls the “domestication of difference... systematic distortions in the reception of the ‘other,’”¹⁶ which silences then threatens contributions from religious others. Additional theologians’ critiques insinuate that the three options are variations on exclusivism or that the three-fold topology is too systematic, thus lacking any historical context.

¹³ Ibid., 38. For more information about pluralism as a *de facto* and *de jure* reality, refer to Marinus Iwuchukwu, *Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism: Engaging Walter Ong and Jacques Dupuis Toward Effective Interreligious Dialogue* (Köln, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010).

¹⁴ Peter Feldmeier, “Is the Theology of Religions an Exhausted Project?” *Horizons* 35, no. 2 (2008): 253–5.

¹⁵ Fredericks, “Introduction,” xiv; *Buddhists and Christians*, 20. For more information on critiques involving theologies of religions, refer to James L. Fredericks, “A Universal Religious Experience? Comparative Theology as an Alternative to a Theology of Religions,” *Horizons* 22 (1995): 67–87; Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 117–21; Christiaan Jacobs-Vandeguer, “Navigating the Circle of Interreligious Dialogue and Theologies of Religions,” *Australian eJournal of Theology* 19, no. 3 (December 2012): 210–1; J.A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, DC: University of America Press, 1992); Perry Schmidt-Leukel, “Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: the Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 13–27.

¹⁶ Fredericks, “Introduction,” xiv.

Due to the overall negative impressions regarding the paradigm, detractors call for a moratorium on employing theologies of religions methods. Perry Schmidt–Leukel refutes critics’ assertions that the topology has an inconsistent structure, is misleading because it obscures real issues or downplays diversity, in some cases is too broad or too narrow, is too abstract and sterile, is offensive, or is pointless.¹⁷ Much of this criticism misunderstands current theologies of religions or still refers to outmoded models’ already corrected deficiencies. Nevertheless, debate involving these problems directs attention away from the more important aspects of dialogic engagements between participants.

Furthermore, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism each present their own unique problems for interreligious dialogue. Theologies of religions inhibit discourse according to Fredericks, when they inoculate participants from accepting or appreciating insights from various traditions.¹⁸ Feldmeier argues that being faithful to one religious truth is a hallmark of exclusivism though interpreting specifically selected supportive texts out of context does disservice to a religion’s nature and purpose.¹⁹ Exclusivists fail to acknowledge that revelation, inspiration, and wisdom exist outside one’s faith. By constraining each tradition’s truths to those that agree with their absolute tenets, Eck explains that inclusivist religions either correct or complete various truths (fulfillment), supplant, replace, or displace entire belief systems (supersessionism), consider all religions as subsets of the true faith, or create one world organization such as Baha’i.²⁰

¹⁷ Schmidt–Leukel, “Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism,” 23–7. Paul Hedges also defends theologies of religions in his book *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London, England: SCM Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths*, 167.

¹⁹ Feldmeier, “Is the Theology of Religions an Exhausted Project?” 264.

²⁰ Eck, “Is Our God Listening?” 32–7.

Moreover, Jacques Dupuis contends that inclusivism elevates doctrine above the divine and places limits on God's actions within traditions.²¹ When perceived as rejection or humiliation, inclusivist attitudes of superiority impede other participants from effectively contributing to interreligious dialogue.

In attempting to affirm various sacred creeds and ends, religious scholars argue that pluralists do a disservice to the world's religions. Gavin D'Costa believes pluralists neglect real religious differences because they fail to realize that culture, politics, and religion influence one's viewpoints toward dissimilar faiths.²² For Peter Phan, pluralist arguments encompass internal inconsistencies such as being intellectually imperialistic, presuming common spiritual experience, dismissing social and historical influences on doctrine and ritual, besides misunderstanding the purpose and praxis of interreligious dialogue.²³ Paul Knitter, who equates pluralism to his mutuality model, acknowledges that ironically, efforts toward mutuality often are at the expense of multiplicity. Thus, the interreligious exchange becomes "bland and boring [because] its advocates are so intent on getting everyone to agree on what they have in common that they lose all possibility of really disagreeing about what makes them different."²⁴ Although S. Mark Heim views pluralistic theologies as a remedy for a toxic exclusivism, he says pluralism seems more

²¹ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 89.

²² For more information on Gavin D'Costa's views regarding theologies of religions, refer to Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theologies of Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) and *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 192–212.

²³ Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 90–2.

²⁴ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 162.

inclusivist when it uses “elements of ‘the modern Western myth’ as the absolute basis”²⁵ for validating then unifying religions. This form of mutuality encourages relativism.

Relativism is an issue for pluralism if one ignores religious diversity or fails to apply value judgments to various traditions. According to Rabbi Irving Greenberg, value judgments and pluralism are based on the principle that absolute truth still exists, but since “absolute values do not cover all possibilities... pluralism is an absolutism that has come to recognize its own limitations.”²⁶ John Hick admits pluralists face the additional challenge of determining evaluation criteria. At first glance, Hick’s recommendation to establish ethics as a common ground, with justice as a starting point, seems appropriate for interreligious engagement. However, Heim believes that “to make ‘justice’ the compulsory subject of dialogue... is unjust”²⁷ because no common cultural or religious understanding of justice exists; therefore, selecting one religion’s notion of justice privileges it over all of the faiths. D’Costa likewise worries about creating a global ethic then establishing its primacy over belief systems and metaphysics as criteria for judging individual and community behavior.²⁸ Ethical criteria entail limitations resulting from the extensive diversity of doctrines, the numerous interpretations, plus the variety of practices, all of which render value judgments incomplete.

²⁵ S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1095), 108. For more information on modern Western myths, refer to Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 160.

²⁶ Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 203.

²⁷ Heim, *Salvations*, 195.

²⁸ Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 30.

Comparative Theology

Fredericks, Francis X. Clooney, and other scholars describe comparative theology as an alternative to theologies of religions. This relatively new approach addresses Hugh Nicholson's complaints about theologies of religions' *a priori* nature, generalized meta-religious theories, limited focus on soteriological topics, along with its "global, totalizing perspective on other religions"²⁹ and the presumption of knowing a tradition's tenets better than the actual adherents. Comparative theology offers a constructive, confessional theological method that increases understanding of one's own religion by comparing and correlating its beliefs and textual sources with those of another faith. However, Perry Schmidt-Leukel argues, "doing comparative theology is not an alternative to the theology of religions but should be an integral part of it, preventing us from aprioristic and apodictic judgments."³⁰ Clooney downplays the clash between comparative theology and theologies of religions by asserting that they help "uncover and ameliorate each other's hidden flaws."³¹ Nevertheless, tensions between comparative theology and theologies of religions introduce political as well as theological challenges for interreligious dialogue.

Scholars also disagree about whether or not comparative theology is actually a form of dialogue. David Tracy supports comparative theology as a dialectic process that involves reading classic texts, examining art, rituals, and practices, then performing critical correlations by comparing theological similarities and differences that inform

²⁹ Hugh Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), 45.

³⁰ Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism," 27.

³¹ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2010), 196.

one's own faith.³² Clooney concurs by extending the notion of dialogue to include the interior interchange of theological ideas that comparative theology initiates. Yet Knitter questions whether this new method is a form of interreligious dialogue since negotiation, understanding, and transformation appear to be one-sided on the part of the comparator, rather than a bi-directional interaction. Paul Hedges agrees with Knitter since "dialogue implies a meeting of minds and therefore people. That is to say, a person cannot (fully) engage in interreligious dialogue simply by reading books about another tradition."³³ Although sacred texts or art passively present information, during interreligious discourse people actively share religious worldviews through engagement, interaction, along with argumentation that possibly leads to understanding then transformation.

Comparative theology itself is not without its challenges. Critics describe the new discipline as ambivalent and underdeveloped in its relation to theology. In fact, Clooney agrees with Nicholson that the notion and audacity of comparison entails difficulty and ambiguity, especially in distinguishing between comparative theology and comparative religion.³⁴ Marianne Moyaert recognizes that comparative theology possesses "normative and *prejudiced* underpinnings: it does not claim to start *tabula rasa*;"³⁵ instead, studies derive from existing theological concerns. Likewise, D'Costa explores the discipline's theological presuppositions and judgments by questioning "why should we, theologically

³² Fredericks, "Introduction," xi–xii. Also refer to David Tracy, "Comparative Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Religions* Vol. 13, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 9125–34.

³³ Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 63. For more information on Paul Knitter's views of comparative theology, refer to his book *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 209–10.

³⁴ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 195. For more information on Hugh Nicholson's critique, refer to the article "Comparative Theology after Liberalism," *Modern Theology* 23, no. 2 (April 2007): 229.

³⁵ Marianne Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: from Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 1 (January 2012): 40, italics original.

speaking, enter into comparison [and] what happens after comparison.”³⁶ These questions highlight the struggles comparative theology encounters even as it educates and informs participants of interreligious dialogue.

Clooney realizes that prejudice and presuppositions inform as well as direct theological work, including comparative theology. Still, he recommends addressing presuppositions after completing the comparative analysis, especially in sensitive, special cases. Moyaert concurs because comparison “requires a long and patient engagement with the textual world of the other”³⁷ so it should precede judgment to avoid jumping to conclusions and to prevent closed-mindedness and charges of imperialism. A person needs to encounter alterity first before one can decide how to relate to each religion. Kristin Kiblinger agrees with Knitter that participating in interreligious dialogue without specifying one’s religious location generates suspicion. Instead, acknowledging and disclosing one’s preliminary theological presuppositions about various traditions prevents bias and distortion during interreligious encounters.³⁸ Rather than utilizing a process in which theologies of religions’ perceptions toward the religious other influence dialogue, comparators like Clooney and Fredericks promote the opposite approach; it seems that they want comparison and interreligious dialogue to precede theology.

Additionally, the discipline’s practitioners do not share unified goals, theories, or procedures. Some scholars, such as Clooney, aim to become specialists by concentrating

³⁶ D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 40.

³⁷ Moyaert, “Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue,” 41. See also Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 196.

³⁸ Kristin Beise Kiblinger, “Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology,” in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), 22–4.

on a limited number of belief systems; but Keith Ward embraces comparisons across many faiths with the goal of understanding their similarities.³⁹ Ward, who distinguishes between comparative and confessional theology, works with theologies of religions as a Christian pluralist. Clooney and Fredericks reject theologies of religions' topographies as over-simplified, inaccurate, polemical, and obsolete. Comparative processes and sources also vary. Clooney works primarily with scriptural and theological texts; other scholars, such as Fredericks, move beyond manuscripts by employing them as starting points for comparisons and for personal friendships.⁴⁰ Due to internal ambiguities, comparative theologians sometimes encounter important issues when applying their outcomes or communicating their results to academia.

Religious Hegemony

Political and religious hegemony historically imposes cultural norms, including their specific ideology, on less powerful people. Hence, the lingering effects of Western colonialism, imperialism, and especially previous missionary work introduce challenges to the current effectiveness of interreligious dialogue. Participants ideally approach dialogic negotiation on equal terms but in reality, one person or tradition is more powerful than another is. This presumed primacy enables proselytizing in addition to controlling the selection of representatives, objectives, and logistics for interactions through exclusion, elitism, plus marginalization. Cornille believes that previous actions and "judgments have been operative consciously or unconsciously, implicitly or

³⁹ For more information on Clooney's and Ward's different perceptions of comparative theology, refer to Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 53, 18; Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁰ Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths*, 173–7.

explicitly throughout the history of encounter between religions”⁴¹ for better or worse. Lessons learned from past encounters indicate increased sensitivity and efforts to mitigate power imbalances foster trusting, open relationships during interreligious dialogue.

Western Colonialism, Imperialism, and Mission

Historical records contain numerous examples of various traditions’ hegemonic exploitation, particularly in the forms of Western colonialism and imperialism. These actions engender animosity, persecution, as well as war, thereby damaging or severing interreligious, intercultural, and international relationships.⁴² Earlier missionary efforts considered interreligious discourse unnecessary and unproductive, if not impossible, especially since Kwok Pui-lan’s postcolonial research reveals that colonizer privilege and power rendered other faiths’ voices ineffectual in conversation.⁴³ Jeannine Hill Fletcher asserts that religious problems, which began under colonialism, persist in postcolonial times when interreligious dialogue propagates the ideals of non-Western faiths as peculiar rather than “take the other’s complexity and difference seriously enough.”⁴⁴ As a result, interreligious dialogue often discounts the challenges of historical as well as cultural contexts and their long-lasting effects on relationships.

⁴¹ Cornille, “Introduction: On Discernment in Dialogue,” ix.

⁴² For more information on religions’ relationships throughout history, refer to John B. Cobb Jr. and Ward M. McAfee, Eds., *The Dialogue Comes of Age: Christian Encounters with Other Traditions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010); Jenny Dagers, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Jacques Dupuis, *Christians and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴³ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 125–49.

⁴⁴ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, “As Long as We Wonder: Possibilities in the Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 534–5.

Some of the earliest interreligious encounters were the result of missionary work in conjunction with colonialism. During that time, the practice of an indigenous religion frequently determined whether missionaries believed a person to be a savage or a human. Jenny Dagers' explains that evangelical efforts eventually focused on Christianizing the "natives" by replacing their existing beliefs with the true faith to ensure their salvation.⁴⁵ Exclusivist colonizers, Moyaert claims, considered the religious other to be "someone who must still convert, rather than as a believing subject in her own right who can speak for herself and can make an independent contribution to dialogue."⁴⁶ Fletcher adds that subsequent missionary efforts introduced Western culture along with religion in order to "civilize' and 'control' native peoples"⁴⁷ thus making it easier to govern in colonial regions. Governments rewarded positive missionary efforts but withdrew support for actions contrary to established ideas of civilization. In Africa for instance, missionaries thought people "needed to be reshaped, re-clothed, renamed, and often remarried, all according to Western standards of the day."⁴⁸ Conversion activities frequently yielded unfavorable results. With polygamy, for example, men could retain only one wife, so the extra, discarded wives experienced financial difficulty along with social turmoil. These aggressive cultural and religious changes, though aimed at civilizing people, cultivated animosity instead of gratitude or piety.

Mission and power are two sides of the same coin. When European imperialism is strong, dominant missionary efforts to convert and civilize others flourish. Because each

⁴⁵ Dagers, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions*, 71–2.

⁴⁶ Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 28.

⁴⁷ Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 46.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

society or religion possesses unique beliefs they claim are superior and normative, Kwok criticizes exclusivists for being “blatantly imperialist” in condemning indigenous gods, goddesses, and ancestor worship.⁴⁹ Furthermore, she considers inclusivist approaches ambiguous, dangerous, and patronizing. Feldmeier questions whether the inclusivist approach is actually imperialist since each tradition retains its own “non–negotiables” in dialogue then interprets additional sacred truths from its own viewpoints.⁵⁰ Therefore, all religions are to a certain degree missionary and inclusivist according to Knitter, Heim, and John Cobb, since all participants witness to their specific truths then contributes to dialogue from distinct worldviews formed by unique cultural and historical experiences.⁵¹ Knitter warns, “by not being aware of how much we are all, always, *inclusivists*, we become, unavoidably, *imperialists*.”⁵² If dialogic participants dictate normative content and standards to all belief systems rather than listening to various opinions or respecting alternative contributions, then religious imperialism results.

Critics maintain that pluralism also leads to religious imperialism when it seeks unity at diversity’s expense. Pluralists often do not realize “that the universal can be grasped only through the particular, so they end up imposing their own particularity on others,”⁵³ which Knitter says leads to “theocentric foundationalism.” Heim emphasizes the same point because “if those who hold up ‘God’ as the absolute for all religions do

⁴⁹ Kwok Pui–lan, “The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (London, England: SPCP 1994), 68–9.

⁵⁰ Feldmeier, “Is the Theology of Religions an Exhausted Project?” 265.

⁵¹ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 199, 163–4. Also refer to Heim, *Salvations*, 222–29; S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 294–5; John B. Cobb, Jr., “Dialogue,” in *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*, eds. Leonard Swidler, John B. Cobb Jr., Paul F. Knitter, and Monica K. Hellwig (London, England: SCM, 1990), 8.

⁵² Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 218, italics original.

⁵³ Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 44.

not specify whose God they are talking about, they will make themselves into God.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, D’Costa accuses pluralism of being “inherently an act of intellectual colonialization by explaining how religion should be understood”⁵⁵ through meta–narratives utilizing common rules rather than listening to diverse voices and stories. To assert one’s viewpoint as universal without acknowledging one’s specific context or to deny added contributions introduces arrogance, which intensifies dialogic challenges.

Another result of colonialism and its Eurocentric hegemony is hybrid identity. Kwok distinguishes between liberal, pluralist notions of hybridity as a combination of cultures or religions versus “hybridity in postcolonial discourse [which] deals specifically with the colonial authority and power of representation [that fortifies] the white feminist double role of oppressor and oppressed.”⁵⁶ For the colonized, a hybrid or hyphenated–identity causes pain, fragmentation, and a sense of lost cultural and sacred memory. In India for example, religious and cultural identity are interrelated; when Indians convert from Hinduism to Christianity, they lose part of their Indian identity. Any postcolonial actions to remedy imperialist effects on identity often exacerbate the situation since they transpire from primarily European power positions and perspectives.

The combination of arrogance and hegemony invites religious imposition. While an existing power disparity between Eastern and Western worldviews is highly visible in interreligious discourse, it is often ignored by participants.⁵⁷ Kwok indicts academia for

⁵⁴ S. Mark Heim, *Is Christ the Only Way? Christian Faith in a Pluralistic World* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1985), 144.

⁵⁵ D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 10.

⁵⁶ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 170. Note: The last section of this chapter discusses religious identity and hybridity along with their related challenges for interreligious dialogue.

⁵⁷ Wesley S. Ariarajah, “Power, Politics, and Plurality: The Struggles of the World Council of Churches to Deal with Religious Plurality,” in *The Myth of Religious Supremacy*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 176.

proliferating Western Christian imposition and white male supremacy; since “in most interreligious dialogues conducted in Western ecumenical or academic settings, a handful of Third World elites, usually all males, are invited to speak as representatives of their traditions to a largely white Christian audience.”⁵⁸ Though Kusumita Pedersen concedes disproportionate numbers of Christians engage in interreligious activities, she also notes that Christians comprise the largest population segment, possess ample resources that support scholarship as well as publication, and actively seek reconciliation for past wrongdoing.⁵⁹ None of these conditions necessarily prevents different religions from playing important roles or participating in interreligious dialogue. Kwok counters that academic dialogic events and subsequent outcomes imply a pseudo–unity reflecting participant demographics rather than reality because they ignore contributions from various traditions, particularly the work of African, Asian, and Latin American Christian and feminist theologians.⁶⁰ Continued imposition, along with its semblance of unity from the powerful participants, obstructs dialogic goals by silencing subaltern voices.

Interestingly, well–intentioned theologians from time to time propagate Western imposition due to their explicit use of Christian language and ambiguous concepts of salvation. Two examples include Heim’s notion of salvation as multiple religious ends and Knitter’s correlational, globally responsible model; the latter imposes ideas of global responsibility, justice, human wellbeing, and the divine instead of generating different

⁵⁸ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 202.

⁵⁹ Kusumita P. Pedersen, “The Interfaith Movement: An Incomplete Assessment,” in *State of the Interreligious Movement Report, June 2008*, Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/_includes/FCKcontent/File/State_of_the_Interreligious_Movement_Report_June_2008.pdf> (accessed August 9, 2013), 242–3.

⁶⁰ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 201.

meanings through particular filters.⁶¹ Even the seemingly innocuous terms “religion” or “belief” Hedges says are awkward; they evoke Western Christian white political privilege but alienate systems such as Buddhism and Jainism, which do not conform to normative academic definitions of the terms.⁶² Dialogic participants consciously or unconsciously employ the Western word “religion,” thus perpetuating a single cultural construct as universal instead of employing alternative analogous terms such as “dharma” or “jiao” that also denote various traditions.⁶³ Delineating then classifying objects as either sacred or secular also advances universalism, which in turn exemplifies Western imposition by introducing false or non-related categories into the exchange. Moreover, myths, dreams, and narrative instigate powerful religious norms. Combined with political, economic, social, and cultural pressures, these norms influence one’s perspectives in dialogue.

Religious truth claims are likewise problematic. Knitter asserts Hick and other pluralists oppose ideas of absolute truth, yet seemingly impose Western Enlightenment thinking, “truth is historically conditioned and therefore relative.”⁶⁴ Although Phan concedes that truth is historically conditioned, he disagrees with Hick that universal truth claims are epistemologically impossible.⁶⁵ Fletcher distinguishes inclusivism, which

⁶¹ For more information on these models, refer to Heim, *The Depth of Riches*, 19–21; Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 46.

⁶² Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 64–87. For more information, refer to George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1984); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (London, England: SPCK, 1978).

⁶³ Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 84. Hedges also points out that utilizing the Western term “Confucianism” rather than “ju jiao” or “ru jia” or “ru xue” is similar to using “Mosesism” when referring to “Judaism.”

⁶⁴ Paul F. Knitter, “Is the Pluralist Model a Western Imposition?” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 34–5.

⁶⁵ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 87–90.

“privileges Christianity in the old patterns of hierarchical ordering,”⁶⁶ from pluralism’s parity among traditions, even though the latter functions as a “container–construction of religion,”⁶⁷ by designating belief systems as fixed sets of objects bounded then isolated by islands of culture. Container–construction is another Western cultural export that enforces standards while preserving power asymmetry among different faiths or cultures.

When hegemonic traditions paradoxically emphasize equality among participants, it sends mixed messages that cause confusion during dialogue. Knitter asserts that those in power “may be unconsciously promoting the status quo of dominance”⁶⁸ by fostering mutuality and universality that results in “the ‘McDonaldization’ of dialogue [amid] an unequal distribution of power among the participants.”⁶⁹ He further posits that dominant groups highlight affinity, cooperation, and equal contribution in dialogic exchanges to “deflect attention from the unequal distribution of power underlying it.”⁷⁰ Kwok agrees that overemphasizing parity in theologies of religions and interreligious dialogue often obscures dominance–submission patterns thereby creating a hierarchy of faiths, with Christianity at the top.⁷¹ Furthermore, religions employ similar tactics toward gender diversity, Kwok says, by excluding women from powerful positions during theological discussions. Hedges ironically notes that the people most likely or willing to embrace the

⁶⁶ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, “Religious Pluralism in an Era of Globalization: The Making of Modern Religious Identity,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 398.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁶⁸ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 161.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* For more information on the McDonalization of dialogue, refer to Kenneth Surin, “The Politics of Speech: Religious Pluralism in the Age of the McDonald’s Hamburger,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 201.

⁷⁰ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 162.

⁷¹ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 205.

religious other in dialogic encounters also may be the most unaware of how such an imbalance of power affects discourse.⁷² Whether conscious of power imbalances or not, postcolonial studies advocate valuing impartiality of differences in dialogue as crucial for negating obstructive religious hegemony.

One example of religious hegemony is supersessionism. From its beginnings, Christian attitudes of superiority not only dismissed Judaism as a religion but also marginalized it from interreligious discourse. Interestingly, Tim Winter does not associate Islamic supersessionism with religious hegemony; he argues that the term “has negative implications for dialogue only when read as cause for triumphalism, rather than as a spur to the contrite awareness of a heavy responsibility.”⁷³ Many theologians, such as Leirvik, disagree with Winter. They identify connections between supersessionism and political influence, though “theological—claims of supersession are not always wedded to political power,”⁷⁴ especially by religions in majority positions. The government need not be a theocracy for belief systems to manipulate culture, social ethics, economics, laws, as well as interreligious dialogue.

Sebastian Madathummuriyil cites another example of Christianity’s hegemonic attitudes in India. Disrespect and rejection of “other religions as superstitions, distortions, erroneous and in need of either purgation or conversion”⁷⁵ alienated Christianity from Hindu faith and culture. In fact, the Syro–Malabar Church also endured prejudice and

⁷² Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 99.

⁷³ Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies*, 126.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Sebastian Madathummuriyil, “‘Being’ as Dialogue: Exploring Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in India,” *Church and Society in Asia Today* 16, no. 1 (April 2013): 44.

misrepresentation during various Western attempts toward its “Latinisation [sic].”⁷⁶ The resultant, reciprocal, “hegemonic attitude of Hindus towards Christianity, coupled with the memories of colonialism, stands out as major divide in interfaith relationships in India.”⁷⁷ The emerging Hindutva’s (Hindu Nation) and its disinterest in dialogue are major obstacles for Hindu–Christian relations.

Comparative theology also reveals signs of hegemony. Clooney blatantly admits, “it is impossible to find comparative enterprises entirely free of hegemonic impulses, or religious encounters with the other that are nothing but crassly hegemonic.”⁷⁸ Unlike bi-directional dialogue, the reader imposes interpretations upon a text, which the author is unable to refute as either being out of context or misunderstood. The dominant reader actively influences the interaction by selecting specific questions then retrieving answers from the passive textual source. Kiblinger and Knitter believe that acknowledging one’s theologies of religions position fosters unbiased, unprejudiced textual interpretations,⁷⁹ but Nicholson argues that such realization resolves hegemonic problems in comparative work.⁸⁰ Representatives in powerful positions define the authoritative interpretation of sacred writings and determine the canon of texts, which actually represent a tradition.

Representation Challenges

To combat perceived or real imbalances of power, equality among participants is crucial during interreligious exchanges. Although some scholars believe Swidler’s

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁸ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 195.

⁷⁹ Kiblinger, “Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology,” 22–4.

⁸⁰ Nicholson, “The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism,” 49.

“Dialogue Decalogue” to be hegemonic, the “Seventh Commandment” states that “dialogue can take place only between equals... each must come to learn from the other.”⁸¹ Michael Barnes concurs that open, honest discourse leads to trust and understanding, but admits “dialogue is rarely between two equals”⁸² since participants possess various motivations, misguided or patronizing intentions, and a disparity of necessary dialogic skills. Furthermore, every person contributes to religious discussions from a particular, dissimilar set of spiritual experiences, worldviews, and life histories.

Significant amounts of education and preparation are essential for acquiring the fundamental expertise to enter interreligious dialogue on equal terms with knowledgeable participants. According to Tracy, delegates must possess “the intellectual, moral, and... religious ability to struggle to hear another and to respond; to respond critically and even suspiciously when necessary.”⁸³ Proficiency in the areas of public speaking, debating, and negotiating are crucial besides the non-verbal communication indicators involving appropriate dress, decorum, and postures. Therefore, Paul Griffiths advocates utilizing “representative intellectuals” in dialogue to articulate, explain, and defend their doctrinal traditions correctly, logically, and appropriately.⁸⁴ Such representatives are well versed in their tenets’ meanings, nuances, and development. Although usually from religions with clearly defined hierarchies, non-hierarchical belief systems likewise have representative intellectuals. Some radically egalitarian associations “self-consciously repudiate the very

⁸¹ Swidler, “Part One: The Importance of Dialogue,” 29; Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 159; Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 207–13.

⁸² Barnes, *Christian Identity*, 115.

⁸³ David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1990), 4.

⁸⁴ Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1991), 3.

idea of intellectuals representing their views.”⁸⁵ Yet liberation theologians, for example, represent Latin American house churches and Zen Buddhists use intellectuals to argue against needing doctrines, or ironically, representative intellectuals.

Authorized expert participants sanction dialogic events while maintaining focus on their tradition’s theological objectives. Anton Karl Kozlovic, Tracy, along with other scholars, concede that specialists are appropriate in corporate situations requiring official spokespeople who “come to the dialogue as persons somehow significantly identified with a religious [or ideological] community.”⁸⁶ Moreover, Kozlovic worries that small community factions or grassroots participants might provide “a misleading, inaccurate and distorted picture of the faith *per se*,”⁸⁷ especially to people unfamiliar with a religion or its nuances. Without authorized representatives, Bradford Hinze fears that discourse remains at the level of popular religion or as trivial accounts of “individual, narcissistic experiences.”⁸⁸ These restrictive attitudes unfortunately foster hegemony, patriarchy, elitism, and marginalization in dialogue.

When theological exchange occurs exclusively between scholars and authoritative representatives, the general community has very little involvement in the process of developing or gaining greater insight into sacred tenets and practices. Swidler, Scott Daniel Dunbar, and others optimistically propose, “dialogue should involve every level of the religious, ideological communities, all the way down to the ‘persons in the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁶ Anton Karl Kozlovic, “Who Should Be Allowed to Participate in Official Interreligious Dialogues? A Review of Issues,” *Marburg Journal of Religion* 6, no. 2 (June 2001): 1; Leonard Swidler, “Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Interreligious Dialogue: Facing the Next Frontier*, ed. R. W. Rousseau (Montrose, PA: Ridge Row Press, 1982), 10.

⁸⁷ Kozlovic, “Who Should Be Allowed,” 2.

⁸⁸ Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2006), 240.

pews.”⁸⁹ Including a variety of participants ensures a plethora of viewpoints during interreligious dialogue. According to Julia Sheetz–Willard, an open approach counteracts the notion that “one voice from a culture, socioeconomic class, or religious tradition purportedly speaks for the whole group in all its diversity.”⁹⁰ In Germany for instance, Muslim scholars argue that dialogic participants are often “white, German converts to Islam—hardly representative of the Muslim population in the country, which is made up primarily of immigrants.”⁹¹ This situation illustrates the challenges of representation as well as the advantages of privilege in society or religion.

Inequality occurs between religious traditions as well. Some organizations consider interreligious dialogue to be a low priority and thus relegate it to subordinates. Unfortunately, powerful attendees often ignore subaltern representatives and dismiss their contributions. Hinze claims power disparity affects “the quality of judgments and decisions made in the dialogical procedure [since results] will be commensurate with the ability of individual and the group to speak well, listen well, and deliberate well about the community”⁹² they represent. To complicate the situation, Pedersen notes that no criteria exist to define a valid religion, verify official representatives, or determine participant abilities or experience.⁹³ Even with specific standards, evaluating qualifications between

⁸⁹ Leonard Swidler, “A Dialogue on Dialogue,” in *Death or Dialogue: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*, eds. Leonard Swidler, John B. Cobb Jr., Paul F. Knitter, and Monica K. Hellwig (London, England: SCM Press, 1990), 60. For more information regarding participants in dialogue, refer to R. M. Shapiro, “Moving the Fence: One Rabbi’s View of Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Interreligious Dialogue: Voices from a New Frontier*, eds. M. D. Bryant and F. Flinn (New York, NY: New Era/Paragon House, 1989), 35; S. D. Dunbar, “The Place of Interreligious Dialogue in the Academic Study of Religion,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35, nos. 3–4 (Summer–Fall 1998), 466.

⁹⁰ Julia Sheetz–Willard, et al., “Interreligious Dialogue Reconsidered: Learning from and Responding to Critique and Change,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 255.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁹² Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue*, 256.

⁹³ Pedersen, “The Interfaith Movement: An Incomplete Assessment,” 242–4.

Buddhists and Muslims or Hindus and Jews for instance, complicates and ironically negates the equality requirement for dialogue. Furthermore, the act of establishing standards and norms runs the risk of excluding traditions and marginalizing people from meaningful interchange.

Marginalization

Restricting interreligious dialogue to experts or employing standards marginalizes potential participants and encumbers discourse. An example of exclusion is “Abrahamic exclusion,”⁹⁴ which occurs when representatives from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam determine agendas that restrict contributions from non–Abrahamic religions’ delegates. Marginalization transpires by ignoring, overlooking, discrediting, or otherwise preventing people from interacting with those at the powerful center of society. Consequences regularly include stereotyping or over–generalizing dissimilar members of society. If people at the center of power perceive others as dissimilar or strange, the former group customarily relegates those unlike themselves to the weaker borders of society. This act establishes boundaries for subaltern people, removes their authority, and then treats them as though invisible, which hinders them from being present and relating to those in power. Voices from society’s borders and the least represented groups are less likely to be heard or taken seriously during dialogic negotiations.

Women are among the marginalized participants that religious representatives isolate, ignore, or treat as invisible. As a result, Ursula King says that women’s voices “are simply unheard and presumed to be included under whatever men have to say about

⁹⁴ Ibid., 228–57.

dialogue.”⁹⁵ Maura O’Neill agrees that the absence of women’s voices severely weakens interreligious dialogue, making it “irrelevant if a rainbow of women’s voices, the poor, and the disenfranchised as well as the scholars and the leaders, were not heard,”⁹⁶ shared, appreciated, and understood. Instead of welcoming and respecting less powerful people, religions, or cultures, Hedges explains that exclusionary attitudes demonstrate patriarchal, hierarchical superiority by tolerating the subaltern even while insinuating that they need improvement.⁹⁷ Fredericks admits that comparative theologians are predominately North American or European Christian males and their work with sacred texts frequently “legitimizes an androcentric construction of the tradition”⁹⁸ that idealizes women while marginalizing them as outsiders within their own religions. Regrettably, many attendees are unaware of how privilege influences dialogue or how power imbalances are not unidirectional; who constitutes the other depends on a one’s position and viewpoint. Women and subaltern others repeatedly ignore or refuse to challenge power structure disparities. Inaction enables powerful people to determine boundaries and dictate who to marginalize from religious encounters.

Engaging in dialogue entails risks, especially for people at the edges of societal or religious borders. Jonathan Magonet thinks that a marginalized person perceives power imbalance as a “threat to his or her status before the dialogue even begins.”⁹⁹ This threat

⁹⁵ Ursula King, “Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions,” in *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*, ed. J. D. May (London, England: Cassell, 1998), 44.

⁹⁶ Maura O’Neill, *Mending a Torn World: Women in Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 6.

⁹⁷ Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 97–8.

⁹⁸ Fredericks, “Introduction,” xviii.

⁹⁹ Jonathan Magonet, *Talking to the Other: Jewish Interfaith Dialogue with Christians and Muslims* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 91.

derives from the novelty of participation, fear of losing identity, previously unsuccessful experiences, besides a sense of inequality in the relationship. Marginalized minorities, women, the poor, immigrants, refugees, disabled, uneducated, or other underrepresented society members experience such fear and isolation. For these subaltern people, Sarah Cunningham asserts, “it is a very lonely existence and a very isolated one, yes, even a threatening one, to be a member of a minority group and yet not be able to have honest, open, candid, and trust in dialogue with those of the dominant group.”¹⁰⁰ Marginalization reinforces segregation because likeminded people are more comfortable sharing similar spiritual experiences, rather than engaging in dialogue across boundaries with people radically different from themselves.

Yet discourse and engagement occur at intersections of difference, that is, at the borders of society or religions. In forming religious identity, boundaries provide either a starting point for dialogue or justification for prejudice and isolation. Including diverse opinions from marginalized minorities, victims, or oppressed groups introduces a variety of perspectives into interreligious dialogue. These subaltern groups at society’s borders possess negative viewpoints based on life experiences, which “offer insights into social and political realities that those in the center simply cannot have.”¹⁰¹ Knitter suggests the marginalized be provided “a special voice in the conversation and their experiences and witness have a ‘hermeneutical privilege’ in searching for the true and the good,”¹⁰² thus

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Cunningham, “A Meeting of the Minds,” in *Women of Faith and Dialogue*, ed. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 11.

¹⁰¹ Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 92.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 91.

furthering cognitive justice. Yet privileging people at the edges of power is ineffective if individuals or religious groups choose to marginalize themselves from dialogue.

People sometimes self-marginalize when they eschew organized religion or they feel disconnected, unprepared, or intimidated. Potential delegates question the relevance of interreligious engagements, especially when their tradition is absent, underrepresented, or misrepresented during discussions.¹⁰³ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski notes, for example, that comparative theology involves Asian belief systems more often than monotheistic faiths. He surmises the reason is either personal preference, the result of hegemonic supremacy, or perhaps a latent effect of supersessionism, which would “view Judaism as a precursor to Christianity and not sufficiently differentiated from it.”¹⁰⁴ Regardless of the motive, the result marginalizes rabbinic Judaism (and often Islam) as too similar a comparative or dialogic partner as opposed to the perspectives and theological questions that religions such as Buddhism or Taoism offer.¹⁰⁵ Members from various religions also decline or leave meetings if they object to specific participants, topics, or procedures. Even if guidelines were to prohibit absolute truth claims in order to promote discussions that are more open, William Placher notes that “evangelical Christians, Hasidic Jews, traditional Muslims, and so on are not really eligible to join that dialogue, because they are unwilling to accept the proposed rules of the game.”¹⁰⁶ As a result, exclusion intensifies when people ignore or reject opportunities to engage in discourse.

¹⁰³ Sheetz-Willard, et al., “Interreligious Dialogue Reconsidered,” 257.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, “Comparative Theology and the Status of Judaism: Hegemony and Reversals,” in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), 97.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 144; Heim, *Salvations*, 103.

Interestingly, interreligious dialogue has the potential to alienate people from their own religious affiliations. As people begin to understand then trust religious others, camaraderie between various marginalized groups creates a stronger bond than the connections within traditions. Moreover, their worldviews expand and evolve from interreligious encounters and shared experiences. When dialogic participants convey these new insights to their respective communities, they frequently alienate non-participants. Unfortunately, intra-religious divisions commonly occur when those not engaged in exchanging theological information call into question the loyalty and religious identity of their transformed peers.

Tensions between Unity and Particularity

In addition to hegemonic oscillations involving religious centers and margins, shifting perspectives toward postmodern worldviews coupled with changes in liberal attitudes stimulate tensions in the interreligious debate regarding unity and particularity. Knitter asserts that many world religions exemplify modernity's preference for unity from a trust in absolute truth, reason, objective knowledge, and historical consciousness, while postmodern thinking highlights diversity due to historical and cultural filters that influence all human experience and knowledge.¹⁰⁷ An emphasis on variety precludes the possibility of universal filters, meta-narratives, as well as general truths. Postmodern rejection of a single reality in favor of plural perspectives is problematic for religions

¹⁰⁷ Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 39–41. For more information on modernity and postmodernity, and their effects on religion, especially interreligious dialogue, refer to Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003); Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005); Feldmeier, "Is the Theology of Religions an Exhausted Project?"; Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*; Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*; Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

subscribing to absolute truth. This is the crux of the interreligious controversy, how to reconcile unity with particularity among the world's religious traditions.

Conflicting worldviews present a challenge during interreligious encounters, especially concerning absolute versus diverse truth statements. Swidler's decades-long work began during the Post-Enlightenment suspicion of universal truths, which he claims makes dialogue both possible and necessary since truth is historically and culturally situated as well as shaped by the intentionality of one's purposes and questions.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the notion of multiple truths initiates doubts about conventional religious tenets, which in turn generate reactions of stress, withdrawal, too much acquiescence, or the demonization of others.¹⁰⁹ Cobb suggests that dialogic participants refrain from relativizing their beliefs and instead assert them as universally valid with the caveat of avoiding arrogance by also listening to the universal insights of each religion. Yet, Knitter affirms the necessity, value, and reality of diverse claims, not in isolation, but by bringing them together in "relationships of mutuality"¹¹⁰ and conversation. Conflicting worldviews with their notions of truth as one as opposed to many exemplify the unity-particularity issue.

Liberal and conservative scholars also are at odds regarding the consequences of interreligious dialogue. According to Leirvik, liberals fear traditions will gain political strength from interreligious interaction while conservatives think discussion "will lead to

¹⁰⁸ Sheetz-Willard, et al., "Interreligious Dialogue Reconsidered," 250-1. For more information on the historical development of interreligious dialogue, refer to Aasulv Lande, "Recent Developments in Interreligious Dialogue," in *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, eds. Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 32-47.

¹⁰⁹ John B. Cobb Jr., *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way beyond Absolutism and Relativism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 137.

¹¹⁰ Knitter, "Is the Pluralist Model a Western Imposition?" 33.

a watering down of religions, since one's own position may be relativized,"¹¹¹ altered, or misunderstood as a result. Even though they perceive the challenges from opposing viewpoints, both groups express apprehension that over time, interreligious dialogue modulates difference by accepting sameness as a universalized form of plurality.

Perceptions regarding sameness and difference originate, in part, from religious identity. From extreme perspectives, engaging in discourse from particular, rigid spiritual identities fosters conflict that thwarts openness; yet unifying approaches, such as multiple religious belonging and hybridity propagate confusion about participants' views and contributions. Similarly, the use of sacred language and symbols promote intra-religious unity even as they define interreligious particularity. Global participation in dialogue entails multiple languages, which further exacerbates theological misunderstanding and misinterpretation, especially coupled with ignorance or lack of experience with another's faith or culture.

Unity–Particularity Conundrum

Prevailing worldviews assert that all religions are different due to varying cultural and historical contexts. Each tradition's unique narratives plus special sacred experiences exhibit irreducible particularity. Barnes admits that acknowledging uniqueness is one of the most difficult challenges in interreligious dialogue; it is easier to gloss over or avoid differences rather than create disagreements.¹¹² Yet Douglas Pratt says discourse reveals a realistic conception of plurality between and among belief systems because “no religion

¹¹¹ Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies*, 40.

¹¹² Barnes, *Christian Identity*, 80.

is itself one unitary thing, despite any rhetoric to the contrary.”¹¹³ Although tempting to generalize or downplay a tradition’s distinctiveness, each faith’s particularity provides dialogic space for addressing the religious other. Very little value exists in discussions when participants surround themselves with corroborating publications or likeminded people with shared experiences instead of addressing dissimilar or unfamiliar beliefs.

Unity is a bit more difficult to discern. During interreligious dialogue, Hedges notes that participants minimize internal differences in order to present their tenets as consistent, universal truths.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Fredericks thinks, “understanding what is strange in terms of what is familiar is basic to any act of understanding.”¹¹⁵ Scholars also utilize common goals or emphasize similar historic religious development as unifying principles. Hick, for example, investigates comparable or parallel progress “from a self-centered to an Other-centered, or Reality-centered, way of living”¹¹⁶ throughout the histories of several faith traditions. According to DiNoia, substituting “religiously indeterminate concepts like ‘Reality’ or ‘Mystery’ for otherwise distinctively conceived religious objects”¹¹⁷ employs dialogue as a mechanism to identify then integrate diverse spiritual perspectives into a unified, pluralistic, transcendent proposal. Fletcher questions if these efforts toward unity move “too quickly to a facile inclusion of the ‘other’”¹¹⁸ since techniques that identify commonalities and similarities result in discounting

¹¹³ Douglas Pratt, “Pluralism, Postmodernism, and Interreligious Dialogue,” *Sophia* 46 (2007): 253.

¹¹⁴ Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 117.

¹¹⁵ Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 16.

¹¹⁶ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 300.

¹¹⁷ DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 140.

¹¹⁸ Fletcher, “As Long as We Wonder,” 534.

differences. Agreeing with many feminist theologians, she claims that universalizing definitions and methodologies are false because they marginalize women who “don’t see *themselves* portrayed in the collective.”¹¹⁹ Attempts at unity, including an emphasis on sameness, ignore or reject diverse gender, racial, cultural, and historical features among each tradition’s members, divisions, denominations, or various ministries.

Interreligious dialogue therefore requires a balance between honoring difference and respecting sameness. Fletcher supports an emphasis on particularity; otherwise, closed-mindedness prompts alterity, which perpetuates hegemony.¹²⁰ Yet too much attention to detail distorts the total reality of belief systems; it discounts the diverse lived community practices affected by geographical, historical, and cultural influences as, for example, with Zen, Mahayana, and Theravada Buddhism. In fact, the Buddhist principle of eclecticism states, “differences between faiths should not be overdrawn or created where none exist [however] we must be no less candid about our differences than we are sanguine about our similarities.”¹²¹ Cataloging unites or groups traditions by similarities, such as Sikhism’s shared roots with Islam and Hinduism, or Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as “religions of the book.” Fletcher cautions against categorization because it manipulates differences into smaller, controllable entities of sameness for exploitation.¹²² Moreover, classifying belief systems implies distinctiveness is a problem to be remedied through sameness, yet sameness often produces stereotyping and alterity among religions.

¹¹⁹ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, “Shifting Identity: The Contribution of Feminist Thought to Theologies of Religious Pluralism,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 19 (Fall 2003): 14, italics original.

¹²⁰ Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 94.

¹²¹ Havanpola Ratanasara, “Interfaith Dialogue a Buddhist Perspective an Examination of Pope John Paul II’s Crossing the Threshold of Hope,” Presentation at the Intermonastic Dialogue Gethsemani Monastery, Louisville, Kentucky, July 1996, <<http://www.urbandharma.org/bcdialog/bcd2/interfaith.html>> (accessed July 1, 2015).

¹²² Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 83, 85.

The dichotomy between religious unity and particularity exists in a challenging tension that manifests itself during interreligious dialogue. William Earnest Hocking argues that religion is universal due to a “human craving for absolute truth, which is valid for all peoples”¹²³ and it is particular because it only exists in a human community and the community in turn influences it. According to Barnes, some traditions, for example, Judaism, Hinduism, and Confucianism tend to be more particular since they are sensitive to local community influences, while Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam emphasize the universal or unifying aspects of faith.¹²⁴ Whether a belief system accentuates difference or sameness affects its representatives’ perspectives as well as their attitudes toward other dialogic participants.

Nevertheless, too much emphasis on either position inhibits fruitful encounters. In Hedges’ critique of the unity–particularity conundrum, unity suggests that religions agree on all–important theological matters so particularity’s function becomes one of managing disagreements that mediate learning and transforming experiences.¹²⁵ Fletcher asserts that emphasizing either sameness or difference is detrimental to effective interreligious dialogue since both views function to distance otherness; difference distances the other while sameness rejects the otherness of the other.¹²⁶ Instead, both positions are crucial during discourse. Embracing similarities creates open trusting relationships while recognizing differences develops deeper shared religious insights.

¹²³ William Earnest Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1940), 32.

¹²⁴ Barnes, *Christian Identity*, 68.

¹²⁵ Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 229.

¹²⁶ Fletcher, “Shifting Identity,” 10.

Religions exhibit internal unity through collective doctrines, rituals, in addition to shared spiritual and transcendental experiences. Externally, traditions are diverse, unique, non-interchangeable entities. Theologies of religions present a variety of perspectives that address unity and particularity as well as absolute truth issues within interreligious dialogue. Even though most faiths demonstrate exclusivist tendencies by rationalizing their unique tenets, Eck surmises that for exclusivists, radical diversity promotes isolation since they reject various religions' viewpoints of reality and consider religious choice as a threat.¹²⁷ Inclusivists manage the unity-particularity conundrum, Moyaert says, by oscillating between all-encompassing integration versus suspicion or negation of the specific, the different, and the unique, depending on whether the other sacred truths confirm or disagree with inclusivist creeds.¹²⁸ As a result, Fredericks claims "inclusivism can distort other religious traditions [and] minimize religious differences."¹²⁹ Dialogue participants reveal inclusivist tendencies when they apply their religion's pious language, terms, and symbols to convey truth. However, conflicting issues in dialogue occur when one group proclaims its truth is universal rather than restrict usage and terms to within its unique belief system.

Because exclusivism and inclusivism emphasize one universal truth, relating to the particularity of multiple religions is problematic. For Knitter and others, pluralism and diversity are not contradictory concepts, although conflicting truths exist within as well as between faiths. Pluralists endeavor to understand then respect various religions' particular sacred truths, Eck says, as long as traditions avoid making universal claims

¹²⁷ Eck, "Is Our God Listening?" 27-8.

¹²⁸ Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 31.

¹²⁹ Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 15.

from their specific worldviews.¹³⁰ Through their distinct theological methods, Raimon Panikkar, Cobb, and Heim propose approaches to affirm distinct plural truths, different ultimate realities, and multiple ends/salvations, respectively.¹³¹ Nevertheless, Moyaert thinks pluralism shares with inclusivism the potential for neglecting the true otherness of the religious other either from a universal common ground or from a specific religion's criteria.¹³² She also criticizes pluralism's quest for unity and its descriptive metaphors of paths up the same mountain or rivers into one ocean as "subtly oppressive."¹³³ Moreover, because not all traditions ask the same questions or seek equivalent notions of salvation, pluralists tend to exclude those faiths in favor of a common schema.¹³⁴ Recognizing similarities while validating diversity does not negate the distinctiveness of each belief system, instead it contributes to more effective interreligious dialogue.

Both Hick and Heim support opposing sides of the universality versus uniqueness issue. Hick deconstructs spiritual uniqueness by believing Ultimate Reality and a common salvific goal connects religions; however, he promotes the authentic, positive recognition of religious plurality by starting from one's own creed, reaching out, and then accepting various tenets as equally valid.¹³⁵ Heim argues against universalism by assuming that traditions are independent and seek different ends. He preserves religious diversity when

¹³⁰ Eck, "Is Our God Listening?" 38.

¹³¹ For more information on these theologies, refer to Raimon Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness," in *Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 89–116; Cobb Jr., *Transforming Christianity*; Heim, *The Depth of Riches*, 209–39.

¹³² Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 34.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 35–6.

he acknowledges distinct, occasionally contradictory truths in addition to validating each faith's witness and superiority in relation to others.¹³⁶ Although it seems relativistic, each religion may claim its absolute truth only if it likewise concedes other different, possibly contradictory sacred truths as universal.

From opposite positions, Heim and Hick extend the unity–particularity enigma to address unique versus universal truths. When addressing universality versus uniqueness issues in interreligious dialogue, Phan posits that the term “unique” has several meanings, such as being the only one of its sort, (the exclusivist position), or having no equivalent or equal (the inclusivist position), or having no[thing] like (the pluralist position).¹³⁷ He similarly distinguishes between the universality of a religious institution and its founder. For instance, pluralists reject but exclusivists support the preeminence of one tradition or founder; however, inclusivists affirm their founder's predominance while admitting various holy founders may have a role in salvation.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, claims about specific founders' salvific roles need not inhibit interreligious discourse. Phan warns against applying similar claims to various religious institutions. Different traditions occasionally interpret such declarations as empirical statements associated with colonialism or imperialism, as conditions for salvation, or as misrepresentations that associate these institutions with the reality of historically imperfect, human, sinful, social structures.¹³⁹ Generating assertions and employing terminology, especially religiously specific labels, erodes trust while simultaneously affecting religious identity.

¹³⁶ Heim, *The Depth of Riches*, 19–29.

¹³⁷ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 86.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 100–1.

Religious Identity

The struggle between unity and particularity misconstrues religious identity and creates a challenge of how to retain one's uniqueness in dialogue while remaining open to the religious other. Moyaert asserts that participants fear compromising their beliefs for the sake of harmony, thereby losing their sense of self, or they struggle with defending their faith to the point of not listening to or appreciating what people have to share.¹⁴⁰ Some terms in Swidler's seven stages of deep-dialogue such as transformation, crossing over, and "deep changes to all aspects of one's life"¹⁴¹ seem to reinforce notions of lost or at least modified identity. Additional threats to religious identity entail proselytizing. Attempts at conversion occasionally happen, however authentic interreligious dialogue discourages and avoids proselytization as a goal. In fact, Barnes believes conversion creates social and spiritual problems such as "cutting Hindus off from their communities and provoking something of an anti-Christian backlash; [resultantly,] Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims are wary of getting involved"¹⁴² in interreligious discourse. Joseph Devlin suggests disengaging faith and religious identity from belief to avoid fears of conversion or lost identity.¹⁴³ Minimizing these apprehensions during interreligious dialogue inspires openness to genuine understanding with the possibility of transforming one another's religious identity in positive ways.

¹⁴⁰ Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," 34. For more information on concerns about religious identity and dialogue, refer to Paul F. Knitter, "Catholics and Other Religions: Bridging the Gap between Dialogue and Theology," *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999): 330.

¹⁴¹ For more information about the seven stages of deep dialogue and critical thinking, refer to Swidler, "Part One: The Importance of Dialogue," 33–7.

¹⁴² Barnes, *Christian Identity*, 113.

¹⁴³ Joseph W. Devlin, "The Bridge of Partnership: Christians, Jews, and Muslims as Participants in the Struggle for World Transformation," in *Religions of the Book*, ed. Gerard S. Sloyan (New York, NY: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), 15.

Religious identity encompasses more than affiliation with a particular tradition. Panikkar defines identity as a changing, fluctuating confession of the self and concedes, “human identity is a thorny and thoroughly debated philosophical and theological problem”¹⁴⁴ for interreligious dialogue. Furthermore, Kwok extends religious identity to encompass a religion’s texts, practices, creeds, and rituals, as well as the experiences of “migration, exile, diaspora, and transnationalism”¹⁴⁵ that integrate and influence the composition of a person. Fletcher promotes the value of “exponential diversity”¹⁴⁶ among people or belief systems to encourage richer, unified sharing while appreciating particular differences during dialogic engagements. Otherwise, concentrating on one identify trait severely restricts dialogue to dualistic comparisons involving sameness or difference.

As one component of a person’s exponential diversity or multi-faceted identity, religious membership introduces the possibilities of multiple religious belonging and hybrid religious identity. Cornille suggests that belonging to multiple religions results from “the heightened and widespread consciousness of religious pluralism [which] has presently left the religious person with the choice not only of *which* religion, but also of *how many* religions she or he might belong to”¹⁴⁷ and observe. Though similar to and perhaps influenced by multi-cultural identity, multiple religious belonging is a form of

¹⁴⁴ Raimon Panikkar, “On Christian Identity: Who is a Christian?” in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 123.

¹⁴⁵ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 206.

¹⁴⁶ Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 94.

¹⁴⁷ Catherine Cornille, “Introduction: The Dynamics of Multiple Belonging,” in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 1, italics original. For more information on multiple religious belonging, refer to Harvey Cox, *Many Mansions: A Christian’s Encounter with Other Faiths* (London, England: Collins, 1989); Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 42; Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

intrapersonal exchange through which a person maintains and enhances one's primary identity while experiencing the lived reality of another tradition's texts and practices. Cobb wonders whether multiple religious belonging is meaningful, valid experimentation for interreligious dialogue. He commends people who join in discovering "new forms of self-identity appropriate to a pluralistic age,"¹⁴⁸ but he doubts whether people deeply committed to one tradition would participate in multiple spiritual experiences. Multiple religious belonging furthermore complicates the idea of religious identity. Though being knowledgeable through the practice of several religions facilitates communication, it creates confusion about which tradition each participant represents.

Hybridity, a more radical technique affecting religious identity, often occurs at the borders of marginalization. Rather than affirm or maintain detached identities of them and us, hybridity erases existing edges through syncretism by forming new, overlapping boundaries resulting in modified ideas of sameness and difference. Hybridity therefore intensifies the larger interreligious challenge between unity and particularity by creating new solidarity at the expense of previously existing uniqueness. Historically, Christian as well as additional religious identities evolved through hybrid practices between belief systems and among their diverse members. Hybridity later became "an act of resistance to colonial power and a strategy for the survival of one's identity,"¹⁴⁹ which Fletcher says remains a present reality in some parts of the world. Arjun Appadurai disagrees that hybridity destroys identity; instead, dangers from maintaining a powerful loyalty to a primary, singular identity include isolation and division, which generate suspicion then

¹⁴⁸ John B. Cobb Jr., "Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 24.

¹⁴⁹ Fletcher, "Religious Pluralism in an Era of Globalization," 406.

conflict in interreligious encounters.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, conflating several religious beliefs diminishes each tradition's uniqueness and integrity. Dialogic participants also have no frame of reference with which to approach those possessing hybrid religious identities.

In comparative theology, studying religious identity includes a tradition's unified wholeness and particularity. Clooney seeks to balance an appreciation for each faith's identity without compromising himself by encountering the other as a "true other who is neither too alien nor falsely similar, and from whom one can thus actually learn."¹⁵¹ Thus the comparator "must achieve a certain distance from his or her own [religion's] starting point, in order to be able to learn from another tradition by understanding it on its own terms,"¹⁵² which avoids preconceived ideas or prejudices about the other. Kiblinger questions if Clooney's objective of suspending one's religious identity is even possible or whether he recognizes that his efforts appear to be a form of inclusivism.¹⁵³ Since a person's evolving religious identity informs experience, the ability to suspend it in comparative or dialogic encounters with alterity is suspect.

Theologies of religions perceive identity in a variety of ways, which complicates how one approaches alterity in interreligious dialogue. Exclusivism establishes identity between believers and religious others through distinction that manifests in postmodern society as fundamentalism or as "ethnic or religious chauvinism."¹⁵⁴ With inclusivism,

¹⁵⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 155; Fletcher, "Shifting Identity," 14.

¹⁵¹ Francis X. Clooney, "Francis Xavier, and the World We (Don't Quite) Share," in *Jesuit Postmodern: Scholarship, Vocation, and Identity in the 21st Century*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 178.

¹⁵² Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 7.

¹⁵³ Kiblinger, "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," 32.

¹⁵⁴ Eck, "Is Our God Listening?" 27–30.

identity is a form of “adopting or co-opting, selected kinds of otherness,”¹⁵⁵ but this deprives religious others of their unique, diverse identities. Pluralism neither ignores nor assimilates spiritual identities. Each tradition outwardly embodies a unique identity either as a force for good to provide meaning, morals, and inspiration, or as a harmful force of social control, patriarchy, and division.¹⁵⁶ During interreligious dialogue, Pluralists stress each religion’s identity as homogenous by modulating differences within belief systems in order to accentuate the diversity or particularity between traditions.¹⁵⁷ Many theologies of religions approaches regarding identity stress organizational membership in religious traditions rather than stress distinct nuances of identity more conducive to dialogue.

Language Challenges

Closely connected to identity is language. The latter reinforces identity along with group belonging but poses numerous challenges for interreligious dialogue, especially in global, cross-cultural, multi-lingual situations. George Lindbeck describes religion as a cultural or linguistic framework that “shapes the entirety of life and thought”¹⁵⁸ through a particular vocabulary, internal coherence, along with the distinctive logic or grammar of a “language game.”¹⁵⁹ In Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic approach, each religious structure’s unique language, symbols, and paradigms establish unity even as differing frameworks create boundaries between faiths. He therefore questions whether interreligious dialogue

¹⁵⁵ Gerd Baumann, “Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach,” in *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, eds. Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2004), 25.

¹⁵⁶ John Hick, “The Next Step beyond Dialogue,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 4.

¹⁵⁷ Fletcher, “Shifting Identity,” 14.

¹⁵⁸ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 33.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. The term “language game” originates in philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s writing.

is effective at communicating theological understanding without significant distortions in presentation and interpretation. Knitter concurs that sharing precise vocabulary, grammar, and logic among various belief systems is “untranslatable” because no common linguistic framework exists. In order to comprehend a word or phrase such as “Buddha–nature,” or “salvation,” dialogic partners must be cognizant of each religion’s “language game” and particular linguistic and experiential contexts.¹⁶⁰ Meaning remains elusive, Fletcher says, unless one shares in communal, experiential memories and practices since sacred rituals “are not easily translated from one context to another.”¹⁶¹ Furthermore, navigating ethical situations and contexts complicate spiritual understanding because unlike with language, a strong association exists between religion and behavior.

For Hans–Georg Gadamer, meaning and the possibility of understanding occurs linguistically within conversation or dialogue involving at least two people. Language is much more than a set of propositions in the process; it is a hermeneutic medium for mediating understanding and agreement among participants.¹⁶² Authentic conversation assumes participants speak the same language. If a conversation involves various languages (or religions), it necessitates the interpretation then translation of alien ideas into familiar ones. To retain accuracy and validity, “a translator must translate the meaning to be understood into the context in which the other speaker lives.”¹⁶³ Reliance on interpretation coupled with translation creates communication complexity along with a

¹⁶⁰ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 181.

¹⁶¹ Fletcher, “As Long as We Wonder,” 547.

¹⁶² Hans–Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2004), 386.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

perpetual “gap between the spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction.”¹⁶⁴ This gap inhibits understanding and agreement among participants since any conversation effectively occurs between the interpreters who possess an understanding of the language because they intimately live it.¹⁶⁵ Yet interpreters must be cautious not to incorporate bias or personal preference for the language in which they live.

Gadamer contends that in addition to language, each person’s particular history, culture, religion, and differing worldviews influence interpretation. Acknowledging one’s historical consciousness entails thinking historically then mediating between past ideas and contemporary knowledge in order to develop a person’s hermeneutical horizon.¹⁶⁶ During conversation, the process of interpretation and subsequent understanding requires a fusion of participants’ horizons that “creates the hermeneutical horizon within which the meaning of a text [or discussion] comes into force.”¹⁶⁷ Rather than renounce or avoid existing preconceived horizons, each person’s interpretative influences contribute to meaning as well as understanding.

Language challenges also parallel the difficulties between unity and particularity. Since language is totally particular or other, its meaning and message cannot bridge the divide of difference. According to Lindbeck, language is prior to and therefore influences and expresses experience.¹⁶⁸ Religious language therefore contributes to one’s worldview through common narratives of shared experiences. Each belief system comprises its own unique definitions, tenets, stories, and experiences through some form of scriptures or

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 398.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 397.

¹⁶⁸ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 36.

sacred texts using an intra-textual method that affirms its particularity.¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, Lindbeck's postliberal cultural-linguistic approach often thwarts interreligious dialogue unless one comprehends "the language game of the scripture as it is lived out within the community"¹⁷⁰ thereby capturing a faith's experiential context. In other words, dialogue requires participants to be bilingual across each religion's language game.

Michael Barnes disagrees with Lindbeck. Barnes contends, "the very nature of language is that it can communicate with the outsider. Translation may be difficult but it is possible,"¹⁷¹ especially when one seeks understanding within a tradition's context and not just a word-for-word equivalence. Gadamer also counters Lindbeck's argument as specious by claiming that "reason rises above the limitations of any given language [so] the hermeneutical experience is the corrective by means of which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language, and it is itself verbally constituted."¹⁷² To emphasize that religious language is untranslatable fosters isolation and relativism. Lindbeck realizes his notion of "intratextuality [sic] seems wholly relativistic; it turns religions... into self-enclosed and incommensurable intellectual ghettos,"¹⁷³ therefore he proposes "universal norms of reasonableness"¹⁷⁴ even though he questions whether a neutral, religiously-independent language exists to support such standards. The inability to translate languages between traditions also leads to fideism. Theologians encounter difficulty

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 114-5.

¹⁷⁰ Fletcher, "As Long as We Wonder," 538.

¹⁷¹ Barnes, *Christian Identity*, 99, 119.

¹⁷² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 403.

¹⁷³ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 128.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 130.

explaining doctrines or tenets unless they employ their own specific, unique religious terminology.

Moreover, language inadequately articulates one's thoughts or feelings, especially when describing intangible aspects of art, music, or poetry that defy communal, unified interpretation. Gadamer says knowledge and explanation possess aspects of individuality in spite of "the social motivated tendency toward uniformity with which language forces understanding into particular schematic forms."¹⁷⁵ Because the individuality of thought emerges through language, Gadamer confirms the essential priority of language as the language of reason for "its universality keeps pace with the universality of reason."¹⁷⁶ The primacy of language also manifests in conversation, which establishes a diverse linguistic community with an objective toward understanding that eventually leads to consensus and agreement.

Language also promotes religious unity through sensitive listening and the careful translation of shared narratives. Although the potential for alienation exists among belief systems lacking common stories, Fletcher advocates utilizing several aspects of religious identity to facilitate a level of commonality that assists in understanding the particulars of unique traditions.¹⁷⁷ Commonly held symbolic aspects of language likewise span cultures and faiths even as sacred language unites a particular religion in interpreting its spiritual experiences. To combat the seemingly causal dualism between language and experience that Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model generates, Knitter explains that the "religious

¹⁷⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 402.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 110.

experience originates in religious language but always goes beyond it,”¹⁷⁸ so the resultant experiential surplus, defined by but not bounded by symbolic language, becomes a source for interpreting then comprehending other religious languages. The fact is that religious traditions possess unique symbols and language. Depending on one’s point of view, language either deters or assists interreligious dialogue. Therefore, emphasizing a language’s untranslatable particularity inhibits communication while utilizing the rich symbolic languages from multiple religious traditions offers a more complete understanding of partially mediated spiritual experiences.

Conclusion

Although interreligious dialogue has accomplished significant achievements for more than fifty years, current methods continue to introduce, perpetuate, or intensify challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Internal disagreement creates an uncooperative tension between the three approaches of interreligious dialogue, theologies of religions, and comparative theology. Another impediment to discussion involves a power disparity among traditions, especially Western religious privilege, which manifests as colonialism or imperialism. Hegemony encourages an imposition of beliefs along with representative elitism that marginalizes dialogic participants. A shift toward postmodern, postliberal worldviews generates disagreement regarding how to approach issues of particularity and unity in shared spiritual discourse. This unity–particularity conundrum creates problems for religious identity originating from a plurality of faiths, cultures, and languages, along with subsequent misunderstandings or misinterpretations during interreligious dialogue.

¹⁷⁸ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 228.

Many of these challenges may be the consequence of applying an inappropriate or ineffective philosophical ontology to dialogic endeavors. The current prominence of a traditional, essential, autonomous ontological approach emphasizes the individual nature of being instead of an interconnectivity and relationality between people or faiths. Even though the autonomous perspective recognizes each religion's particularity, it discounts unity or connectedness, which is advantageous in interreligious dialogue. Furthermore, a focus on substance and autonomy promotes conflict and confrontation between others resulting in hegemonic inequality. The resultant problems from power inequities and the unity-particularity conundrum inhibit mutual interaction as well as trust during discourse. These outdated substantive ontological approaches,¹⁷⁹ combined with changing contextual frameworks, necessitate novel, practical directions to unify and reconcile interreligious conflicts while valuing and preserving diversity. Perhaps solutions to several of the challenges confronting interreligious dialogue are not found among existing dialogic techniques but beyond religion itself and toward a notion of reality and being as one of relational interconnectedness. The next chapter explores the possibility of engaging in interreligious dialogue, not from a substantive philosophical mindset of ontological religious autonomy, but from a relational ontology of being as being-in-relation.

¹⁷⁹ Aristotle defines substance as the chief object of metaphysics. Substance is that (an entity, e.g., physical, psychic, abstract, etc.) which primarily, autonomously exists, all that belongs to being. Substantive, also referred to as substance or substantivist, ontology privileges substance over and against other Aristotelian ontological categories such as relation. For more detailed information, refer to Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.mb.txt>> (accessed January 7, 2017), especially Book VII. Chapter two of this dissertation analyzes substantive ontology and its effects on interreligious dialogue.

CHAPTER 2 – RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY: BEING AS BEING–IN–RELATION

Introduction

Having surveyed the state of interreligious dialogue and its challenges, it is evident the primary reasons for its ineffectiveness are methodological and originate from worldviews that promote autonomy along with philosophical notions of substantive ontology, which privilege individual entities as ontologically primary to their relations. This chapter analyzes how several aspects of substantive ontology¹ affect interrelatedness and autonomy before defining and justifying relational ontology from philosophical as well as epistemological perspectives. Next, the chapter describes various perspectives of relational ontology, followed by an assessment of their abilities to resolve interreligious dialogic issues. The evaluation concludes that relational ontology is a more effective ontological method for improving interreligious encounters.

The philosophical discipline of ontology addresses essential questions regarding existence. Specifically, ontology examines the “what” of something (substance) and “how” it exists (mode of being).² Various worldviews, particularly in the West, reflect the current primacy of individualist and substantive ontologies derived from modernism’s dualism, anthropocentrism, subjectivism, reductionism, and domination over nature in addition to postmodernity with its abstractions, distorted relationships, lost wholeness,

¹ Substantive ontology (also substance or substantivist ontology) focuses primarily on what exists (entities) rather than modes of existence (relations). Substantive as a grammatical term means noun, another reference to notions of entities or things.

² John Zizioulas, “Relational Ontology: Insights from Patristic Thought,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 149.

and feelings of fragmentation.³ Ironically, some scholars argue that the autonomous modern human seems to be “an illusion born of privilege... nothing apart from the relationships he [sic] relied upon but failed to see”⁴ as author of one’s own life stories. This perspective results from globalization, shifts from philosophical to scientific atomism, and the novelty of shared cultural experiences, which call into question Aristotelian metaphysical ideas of substance and the Enlightenment’s self-sufficient, independent, autonomous individual with a rational consciousness.⁵ Contemporary views, coupled with a reevaluation of long-held suppositions, advocate an ontological paradigm of interdependence, connectivity, mutuality, and relationality by postulating that one “cannot know the substance of anything, only the way it exists is accessible.”⁶ In other words, existence, or the mode of being, is being-in-relation.

Several factors elicit an interest in relationality despite the predominantly Western individualist paradigm in which social, economic, and political systems often privilege the self-made individual over the common good. New insights from globalization and its recognition of cultural and religious plurality initiate a reevaluation of classical ontology in light of issues with particularity and unity. Traditional substantive ontology highlights particularity by emphasizing the unique, discrete nature of, for example, each national, religious, or tribal entity. Relational ontology acknowledges a particular nation, religion, or tribe, but considers existence as “a constant movement of change and modification that

³ Connie Lasher, “Dialogue with Nature and Interreligious Encounter: Toward a Comparative Theology of the Sense of Wonder,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 21 (2011): 190.

⁴ Kirk Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God: Divine Relationality and Quantum Physics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 22.

⁵ Diarmuid O’Murchu, “How to Relate in a Quantum Universe!” in *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 138–9.

⁶ Zizioulas, “Relational Ontology,” 149, 151.

preserves (or rather brings about) unity and otherness at the same time.”⁷ Additionally, environmentalist movements and eco–theology advocate care and value for the earth’s diversity of life forms as one interrelated, interdependent ecosystem. The advent of liberation theologies, particularly feminist studies, stresses equality through cooperative, communal anthropologies, while a resurgence of Christian neo–Trinitarian theology introduces novel interpretations regarding divine relationality. Likewise, emerging process–relational theologies posit “all ‘things,’ including God, to be themselves primarily by virtue of their relations to other ‘things,’”⁸ thereby proposing new perspectives on problems of evil, immorality, and social issues. These reasons inspire scholars from diverse disciplines to reconsider the significance of relationships plus the implications of social, cosmic, and divine relationality.

Applying a relational approach to interreligious dialogue is not new or unique; many religious scholars utilize their tradition’s language, narratives, or beliefs in describing a fundamental mutuality within and between religions, though with mixed success. Native American liberation theology posits an intertwined, intimate, “balanced cohabitation between humans and all of creation”⁹ while to be awakened and enlightened in Buddhism means becoming aware that all beings and reality are essentially emptiness, a concept of intrinsic, total interconnectedness. Christian theologians frequently equate aspects of divine relationality, as described in the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, with models of human and interreligious relationality to promote distinction, unity, along with

⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁸ Wegter–McNelly, *The Entangled God*, 25.

⁹ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 49. For more information, refer to Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001), 56.

transcendent mystery. Conversely, postmodernists reject absolute truth claims, singular accounts of reality, and privileged perspectives that exclude other narratives. Douglas Pratt warns that applying relational schemas within interreligious contexts are “inherently suspect [unless] cosmological, ontological, and existential analysis basic to postmodern mentality are taken adequately into account.”¹⁰ Relational ontology is one alternative to traditional substantive ontology for interreligious dialogue since existing substantive approaches create or exacerbate challenges that perpetuate confrontation and conflict.

Analysis of Substantive Ontology

Western notions of ontology derive from classical Greek ideas of substance and substantive ontology in which being is necessary and prior to relating. In other words, a thing first exists then it relates. Plato’s notion of true being is that of an abstract form or idea known through the intellect. The ontological starting point for Aristotle is the sense experience of an individual thing, which “presupposes the observation of the concrete being as it presents itself”¹¹ in itself as the first substance whereas the second substance applies to more than one being. The idea of relation is only one of several categories pertaining to substance. For Plato and Aristotle, individual substances participate through relations in a well-ordered realm of transcendental goodness, truth, and beauty by virtue of their form.¹² Thus, substance determines being; relation defines a hierarchy of order.

¹⁰ Douglas Pratt, “Pluralism, Postmodernism, and Interreligious Dialogue,” *SOPHIA* 46 (2007): 254. This dissertation avoids Pratt’s concerns by discussing cosmological, ontological, and existential aspects of relational ontology then presenting it as an alternative method for interreligious dialogue rather than as a meta-narrative.

¹¹ Zizioulas, “Relational Ontology,” 146. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.mb.txt>> (accessed January 7, 2017), especially Book VII.

¹² Wesley J. Wildman, “An Introduction to Relational Ontology,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 64.

Influenced by Neoplatonist thinking, Augustine views the ontologically substantive hierarchy of reality as ordered according to perfection; consequently, the perfect, good God is at the top followed by things with similar natures or substances arranged in descending order of potential perfection. According to Augustine, human being is a living human substance comprised of a body, spirit, and soul.¹³ He affords the body higher value and esteem than Plato due to Christian beliefs in bodily resurrection, promises of eternal life, and a soul of rationality and reason residing in the body. As opposed to a human being, Augustine's idea of the self is a human individual possessing a soul, made in the image of God, which concurs with Aristotle's notion that "substantial individuality is never quite a 'self,' [the] soul in some mysterious sense still evades the category of substance."¹⁴ The soul is likewise a special condition for Thomas Aquinas. By integrating Neoplatonic and Aristotelian ideas within Christianity, Aquinas teaches that the soul is immortal but not eternal; God creates it for intimacy with God through participation in the divine life of love.¹⁵ He elaborates upon Boethius' definition of a person as an individual substance of a rational nature by associating a person with substance, individuality, action, then adding value.¹⁶ Though substantive ontology figures

¹³ Augustine of Hippo, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, trans. Roland J Teske (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), VII.27.38.

¹⁴ Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986), 163. For Augustine, substantive differences between the body and soul/spirit become problematic in his writings on the Christian Trinity, particularly its relationship with creation and its role in the economy of salvation.

¹⁵ Teasdale, *the Mystic Heart*, 62.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, <<http://www.basilica.org/pages/ebooks/St.%20Thomas%20Aquinas-Summa%20Theologica.pdf>> (accessed January 30, 2016), Q29, 1c, and 2, 3c. These definitions are crucial in debates about the Christian Trinity and its nature.

prominently in their writing, Aquinas and Augustine express relational ideas concerning the Trinity, unifying love, and humanity's social nature.

Stasis and Process of Becoming

One consequence of substance ontology is the idea that beings are static entities defined by attributes that do not change over time. Western philosophers prior to the Enlightenment viewed reality as a well-ordered machine whose discrete parts neatly linked together, not in harmonious relation, but in a mechanistic, functional coordination. Therefore, the physical world was stable and hierarchically ordered; any modifications to its integrity were prohibited, especially changes to the existing social order with its frequently oppressive class structures. When changes occurred, the medieval worldview equated them with corruption. To avoid associating the divine with any corruption, theologians emphasized God as eternal and unchanging. The philosophical notion of stasis translates theologically to the divine attributes of immutability and impassibility, meaning that God is unable to change or be emotionally influenced or affected. These qualities of stasis establish limits that conflict with ideas of an all-powerful, living, personal deity.

Patristic theological debates about the Holy Trinity introduced notions of change and personhood. The idea of *persona* along with its implied relationality calls into question the ontological primacy of substance, thus hypothesizing the possibility of a relational ontology.¹⁷ Augustine asserts that “the Three of the Trinity are neither

¹⁷ Zizioulas, “Relational Ontology,” 147. For more information on ontological contributions from Patristic Trinitarian debates, refer to Zizioulas' books: *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 36ff; *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London, England: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 55ff and 178ff.

substances nor accidents but relations, which have real subsistence,”¹⁸ though he considers the relations “subsisting within the divine substance”¹⁹ thereby retaining substance’s ontological priority. The Cappadocian Fathers posited a relational alternative to Greek substantive ontology. According to the Cappadocian theory, relations are constitutive of personhood; the person is ontologically integral but is not the relation itself nor is it derived from substance. Hence, substance “is not the primary ontological category. Threeness is just as primary as oneness; diversity is constitutive of unity.”²⁰ The Cappadocian Fathers also claimed that Trinitarian relations were causal, which presents dynamism, movement, plus change into ontology. Furthermore, they connected the ontological characteristic of love with being so that “to be is to exist for the other, not for the self [and] to let the other be and be other.”²¹ Maximus the Confessor integrated these ideas about being into his theology and cosmological ontology. He theorized everything that exists possesses a substance and a mode of being but with a capability for innovation, which constantly changes the mode of being without altering the substance.²² Even though the Trinitarian debates were of vital theological significance, they likewise addressed ontological questions of what exists (substance) and how (relation).

The notion of Cappadocian dynamism, coupled with dramatic changes such as the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, Darwin’s theory of evolution, Einstein’s adaptations to Newtonian physics, along with recent technological advancements and

¹⁸ Ibid. For more information on Augustine’s views, refer to Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), especially chapters 3, 5, and 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 148.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 150.

²² Ibid., 151.

progressive political perspectives, all entice philosophers to reevaluate the notions of stasis and substance ontology. Since change and development appear to describe the world more accurately, scholars speculate entities are “not in a state of being but in a process of becoming.”²³ Philosophers and theologians describe this relational process of becoming in various ways. Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne believe creativity is the impetus for change and development within a relationally complex context that Whitehead describes as an “extensive continuum.”²⁴ This continuum includes all entities besides encompassing the past, present, and future of the whole world. Interdisciplinary approaches associate becoming with evolution. Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme focus specifically on evolutionary ecology; Buddhists theorize a process of dependent co–origination, while Hindu and Christian theologians, Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, respectively envision the world’s evolution culminating toward divination or reaching the “Omega Point... the cosmic Christ at the eschaton.”²⁵ The process of becoming occurs through deeply, dynamic interrelating “to a point that what a ‘thing’ or ‘body’ is, is constituted by its relationships. We are our relationships.”²⁶ Profound interrelatedness is difficult to comprehend using Western language structures and worldviews entrenched in substantive ontology. Often misinterpreted as individuals

²³ Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 8.

²⁴ For more information, refer to Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1969), Part II, Chapter 2; Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948).

²⁵ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 9. For more information, refer to Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1992); Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1961); Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

who relate, relationality involves entities in the process of becoming by relating; the unique who and how aspects of a relationship comprises each individual.

Dualism and Sexual Difference

Substance ontology introduces the problem of dualism as a means for defining specific components of being. Dualisms are non-reducible, often oppositional, categorical pairings describing the fundamental essence of reality. The matter-spirit, body-soul, or male-female dichotomies are examples of dualism that philosophy, theology, and anthropology investigate. In addressing the matter-spirit opposition, René Descartes' Cartesian dualism concludes the mind, as a thinking, immaterial substance differs and thus is distinct from the body, which is a non-thinking, material substance.²⁷ Descartes' account of substance dualism supports both Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of dualism. In Plato's extreme dualism, the soul is primary and determines identity but is a prisoner in the dispensable body, while Aristotle's tempered dualism holds that the soul or *psyche* establishes identity and is the substantial form or actuality of the body since "matter is only potential until form actualizes it by giving it a certain order."²⁸ Because Greek philosophers and Cartesian dualism identify things as discrete entities, to unify multiple entities or nullify defined dualisms compromises the integrity of each substance. On the contrary, non-dualistic relational ontology posits that things exist in and through their interconnectedness.

²⁷ John Hawthorne, "Cartesian Dualism," in *Persons: Human and Divine*, eds. Peter van Inwagen and D. Zimmerman (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007), 90-4.

²⁸ Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*, 61. In particular, the matter/body-spirit/soul dualism introduces complications into the Creator/creation relationship, which the dissertation discusses in chapter 4.

Rosemary Radford Ruether reevaluates several predominant dualisms from a viewpoint of connectedness in conjunction with feminist theology. Dualisms differentiate between spirit and matter, subject and object, along with ethical distinctions of is and ought to, which require an unchanging moral good for comparison. Moreover, dualisms manifest in human traits such as gender, class, as well as race. In determining one's individual identity, a person associates oneself with these various collective aspects of humanity. Yet when cultures or theologies assert that ontological characteristics of gender, class, or race are mutually exclusive, it establishes tensions and dualistic comparisons implying human beings possess no common or collective nature.²⁹ This dichotomy fosters a natural hierarchy of being, which in turn leads to social domination when those in power ascribe their qualities and specific characteristics as superior to other traits. Ruether recommends dismantling ontological dualism by exchanging social patterns of hegemony and domination for models of "just relations [which] give to all people their human complexity."³⁰ A just paradigm of relationality recognizes humanity's common social, cultural, and religious components while honoring individual differences.

Nevertheless, a natural dualism does exist in that human bodies always and are already sexed. Gender expresses "the most basic, irreducible, non-reciprocal difference between the sexes."³¹ It is a constitutive, instead of a comparative, relation despite cultural or patriarchal attempts at reducing it to opposition, complementarity, or sameness. Luce Irigaray states, "sexual difference is one of the major philosophical

²⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5 (April 1992): 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

³¹ Elizabeth Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference: Irigaray and Darwin," *ANGELAKI: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 17, no. 2 (June 2012): 71–2.

issues, if not the issue, of our age,”³² though it is possibly humanity’s salvation. In reevaluating subjectivity, she and other feminist poststructuralists reject associating masculinity with universality and neutrality, because it propagates myths regarding gender. An androcentric society, for example, assigns to males the mind, rationality, logic, strength, and power while relegating females to the body, irrationality, emotions, weakness, and subordination; thereby perpetuating stereotypes of women as objectified, inferior others.³³ Yet creating a gender–neutral society is not the answer; it destroys identity, avoids a two–gendered reality, and denies cultures compatible with one’s nature, communication of information, and intersubjective exchanges.³⁴ Instead, males must renounce their subjective domination of existence so that women may gain perspective, identity, and control over their nature.³⁵ Sexism and patriarchy likewise hinder interrelatedness. To counteract entrenched dualistic antagonism requires new relational paradigms encouraging mutual respect with full realization of each gender’s uniqueness.

Personal and Relational Autonomy

A preference for self–sufficiency and independence represents a third problem within substance ontology that derives from the other two issues of stasis as a measure of perfection and dualism’s emphasis on contrasts. In ancient Greece, Plato believed an individual is an instance of a universal form while Aristotle thought of the individual as

³² Luce Irigaray, “Sexual Difference,” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

³³ Barbara Thayer–Bacon, “A Pragmatist and Feminist Relational (e)pistemology,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* II, no. 1 (2010): 4–5.

³⁴ Luce Irigaray, “Sexual Difference as Universal,” in *I Love To You: Sketch for a Felicity within History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 44–5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

an independent entity possessing unique qualities. Contemporary notions of autonomy derive from René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, and other philosophers who promote an ideal of personhood as a completely self-sufficient, reason-based, decision-maker who is unaffected by social relationships. The Enlightenment and modernity sustain notions of egocentric self-reliance that encourages estrangement or marginalization. Similarly, Post-modernism disassociates people from history, tradition, and interconnectedness by propagating radical individualism along with an increase in consumerism.³⁶ Feminists in particular, struggle against the Enlightenment's rational, individualized subject and postmodernity's neo-Romantic irrational, emotional subjectivity, since independence "with no ontological interconnectedness, risks co-optation [sic] by masculine models of separatism [as sexism, or an] ideology of self-identical unity"³⁷ void of differentiation. The resultant alienation accounts for increases in fundamentalism and secularism due to their efforts at restoring a sense of partnership and community in society.

Although social relationships and interconnectedness seem counterintuitive to personal autonomy, no one is wholly independent; no human being is absolutely self-made, self-sufficient, or isolated from the influences of others. An apparent tension therefore exists between a desire for self-determination and a longing for connection within the human person. The concept of relationality shifts the focus of autonomy from an individual's independence to one's interconnectedness with others. Hence, personal, social, religious, familial, as well as sexual relationships contribute to one's autonomy. Relational effects on personal autonomy originate from causal or constructive accounts.

³⁶ Joseph W. Devlin, "The Bridge of Partnership: Christians, Jews, and Muslims as Participants in the Struggle for World Transformation," in *Religions of the Book*, ed. Gerard S. Sloyan (New York, NY: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), 12.

³⁷ Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 209.

Causally relational autonomy posits that particular relationships and social environments are background conditions that affect or contribute to an individual notion of autonomy in a causal way. Constitutively relational autonomy insists that autonomy is at least partly comprised of and developed by a person's social environment, so relationships are required conditions for defining one's autonomy.³⁸ The question is whether social and relational effects actually constitute autonomy or merely contribute to its development. These distinctions are difficult because all relationships, even incidental, insignificant, or undesirable ones influence a person's identity and decisions; all relations affect people.

Relational Ontology

Associating the notion of relation with autonomy seems to be an oxymoron. The concept of relationality, though radical, is counter-cultural to modern and postmodern worldviews that embrace individualism, independence, and distinction. Critics argue that relational autonomy denies self-sufficiency and "the metaphysical notion of atomistic personhood [if] agents are socially and historically embedded"³⁹ and thus influenced by others. Furthermore, removing content-neutrality from the decision-making process worries some scholars because "it is one thing to say that models of autonomy must acknowledge how we are all deeply related; it is another to say that we are autonomous only if related in certain idealized ways."⁴⁰ Relational theorists do not oppose autonomy

³⁸ Holger Baumann, "Reconsidering Relational Autonomy. Personal Autonomy for Socially Embedded and Temporally Extended Selves," *Analyse & Kritik* 30 (2008): 445.

³⁹ Natalie Stoljar, "Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/feminism-autonomy/>> (accessed February 23, 2015).

⁴⁰ John Christman, "Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and the Social Constitution of Selves," *Philosophical Studies* (2004): 158. Content-neutrality refers to either lack of bias in making decisions or that laws are equally applicable regardless of the content or situation.

per se but rather its overemphasized, individualistic conceptualization. Instead, they propose a view of autonomy consisting of individual and relational aspects as well as internal accountability for external decisions and actions affecting others. This relational perspective grounds autonomy and provides a way of understanding self-responsibility by connecting one's motivating desires or values with an interpersonal or dialogical dimension of accountability. Relationality dispels fears that connectedness conflates diversity, because it values variety as necessary for relationships to exist and develop.

Definitions

The term, relation, encounters definitional challenges similar to ambiguous words such as religion and identity. Various efforts describe relational as either existential transactional connections, or dynamic functional interactions, or logical overlapping interconnections of concepts, meanings, or things that reference or affect each other.⁴¹ Because people experience diverse relationships, (e.g., political, familial, social, or sexual), arriving at an adequate, meaningful definition of relation then applying it to relational ontology is problematic. One reason involves the historically predominant notion of substance ontology that considers relation to be merely a category similar to quantity and quality; therefore, relation is a non-substance or only a property of a substance. To nominalists, relations are simply linguistic attributions; theists understand entities and relations with respect to God, while non-nominalists and idealists admit relations are real based on causation or reason as a fundamental reality, respectively.⁴² Another reason pertains to ontological priorities; relational ontology asserts, "relations

⁴¹ Thayer-Bacon, "A Pragmatist and Feminist Relational (e)pistemology," 16.

⁴² Wildman, "An Introduction to Relational Ontology," 58.

between entities are ontologically more fundamental than entities themselves”⁴³ whereas substance ontology reverses the primacy. Additional reasons include the primacy of relationships due to the values relations convey within personal, aesthetic, and moral contexts, the special theological issues that divine–human relationships introduce, as well as the way relationality associates scientific, philosophical, and religious understanding of the world through causal, value, conceptual, or logical relations.⁴⁴ Yet a relational theory mitigates cognitive extremes between “overactive pattern recognition”⁴⁵ that perceives only supernatural causes and reductive tendencies toward oversimplification, which relegates value, meaning, and responsibility to arbitrary social constructions. Relationality also describes humanity’s intimate, ethical connections with others and the world. Relational ontology thus defines actual relations as constituting being.

When discussing relationality, Catherine Keller differentiates between the terms plurality and multiplicity. The former implies discrete relationships between separate entities while the “pli” in multiplicity refers to an “enfolded and unfolding relationality”⁴⁶ involving tenuously entangled multiple events or different perspectives. In other words, “relationality is the connective tissue that makes multiplicity coherent”⁴⁷ since it adds depth, uncertainty, and an element of the unknowable to relationships, especially intimate, interpersonal experiences. Keller explains that connectedness is so crucial that “everyone participates, however vaguely, in some conceptual network that relates one

⁴³ Ibid., 55, 59.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 56–60.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁶ Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider, Eds. *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

experience to the next. It is precisely a matter of connection...the sense of a perspective that moves beyond any isolated being into its interlinkage with all others.”⁴⁸ By associating with each other, interconnected subjects establish new intersections extending throughout an all-encompassing relational network. Relationality is not a unidirectional, increasing connectedness but rather an exponentially complex matrix or web.

Philosophical Justification

In considering the ultimate questions about existence, Joseph Kaipayil presents a philosophically compelling argument for the notion of relationality. Since philosophy describes life and reality based on experience, Kaipayil equates critical ontology with the philosophical contemplation of being (metaphysics), knowing (epistemology), and doing (ethics). These components interconnect in the primary experience of conscious existence that requires values in order to “live in relationship with other humans and nature [since] we are relational beings.”⁴⁹ From a theological perspective, the conscious existence of relational beings also involves a relationship with the divine.

Kaipayil applies the notion of being to individual things that exist while reality refers to the total of all existing things. Furthermore, he claims, “being is the most obvious and yet the most obscure and puzzling of all philosophical concepts [because] we exist, we think, and we act on account of being.”⁵⁰ Humans experience the existence of physical or abstract entities, yet “being is not any particular entity... what is given to us

⁴⁸ Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 156.

⁴⁹ Joseph Kaipayil, *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay* (Bangalore, India: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy Publications, 2002), 11.

⁵⁰ Joseph Kaipayil, *Relationalism: A Theory of Being* (Bangalore, India: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy Publications, 2009), 55–6. Kaipayil describes four leading philosophical views on being as monism, dualism, pluralism, and processism. For more information, refer to Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 12ff.

in empirical experience is existent (entity) and not existence (being).”⁵¹ Kaipayil explains that properties provide identity to an entity thus making it a particular. Though the two types of properties, essential (nature) and differential (uniqueness) are real, properties are inseparable from their particulars because only propertied particulars exist.⁵² A substance view of a thing is equivalent to the particular as opposed to a view of its properties.

Furthermore, substance has being but no substance is being. For Kaipayil, being is the dynamic principle or cause of things, so he postulates the “Being–principle [is] the ultimate explanation of the world”⁵³ humans know and experience. Fundamental features of existence, order, and activity in the world act together in a unity that is the being–principle since unity itself is a being and “is the [organizing] principle (reason) behind other beings.”⁵⁴ Thus, the being–principle explains, “there exists a plurality of things [and] inter–relatedness, an underlying unity, among them.”⁵⁵ Due to its being–principle, the world possesses the two ontological features of plurality and unity. A similar logic also would be true for religious traditions.

Kaipayil cautions against quickly identifying the being–principle with God. The former is an ontological theory while the latter is the focus of theology, even though he admits both disciplines intersect and often inform one another regarding reality and meaning. Nevertheless, when asked if an association exists between the being–principle

⁵¹ Kaipayil, *Critical Ontology*, 40–1.

⁵² Ibid., 64–7. The essential property or essence gives the categorical identity to a particular; essence is the class identifier of an object. Difference gives each particular its uniqueness and ability to change without losing its essential identity. In short, “essence and difference together make the what–it–is (identity or nature) of a that–it–is and that–it–is and what–it–is together make a being” (67–8). For more information on particulars and properties, refer to Joseph Kaipayil, *An Essay on Ontology* (Kochi, India: Karunikan Books, 2008), 62ff; Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 56ff.

⁵³ Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 65.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

and the theological entity known as God or Ultimate Reality, Kaipayil responds with a “qualified yes, provided we understand God as the self–existent principle, [from which] the world’s existence, intelligence, and force derive.”⁵⁶ He immediately clarifies that while ontology does not necessarily prove the existence of God, it is philosophically possible for ontology to theorize God as the world’s source or explanation if God is “construed as the ground–being from which all beings take their origin and to which all return.”⁵⁷ Reaction to such a supposition varies among religious traditions based on their tenets and spiritual experiences.

To experience an entity means knowing its being–principle. Each being–principle identifies a thing’s universality, such as humanity; however, it also allows for some particularity and difference without being “exhausted by particulars and hence no particular expresses it fully.”⁵⁸ Sharing in the universality of the same being–principle enables particulars to “have the possibility of being ontologically open to other particulars, within and outside their own categories... They interconnect and make one world, orderly, and ordinarily harmonious.”⁵⁹ Kaipayil’s ontological concept of interconnection asserts, “particulars are relational by nature, because they always interact among themselves. It is through interaction with other particulars that a given particular keeps itself in existence”⁶⁰ or generates new particulars. Independent interactions do not exist; relations require at least two interacting particulars.

⁵⁶ Kaipayil, *An Essay on Ontology*, 73. Kaipayil offers Christian and Hindu trinities as examples of existence, intelligence, and force. For more information, refer to footnotes 46–8 on pages 83–4.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 71. For more information, refer to Kaipayil, *Critical Ontology*, 28–9.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 64. For more information, refer to Kaipayil, *An Essay on Ontology*, 60–1.

Consequently, what exists is interacting or relating particulars, which in turn constitute the world. Humans relate to the world through ontic (existence), epistemic (knowledge), and ethic (action) dimensions. Kaipayil asserts, “the being–principle of the human person is relationality [so] to be human is to be relational. We exist in our relationships, and, in fact, the human self is made up of these relations.”⁶¹ Moreover, meaning and fulfillment in life derive from human relatedness and sociability. Reality itself only consists of particulars in relation according to Kaipayil, who proposes an ontology of relationality or ontic relationalism, which is his “theory that reality is relational and for any ‘thing’ to exist and to be known is to exist and to be known in its relatedness. The real (the existent) is relational.”⁶² All inter–related things in the universe are an intra–related unity of objects, principles, elements, properties, and particulars in different combinations. Individual entities do not reduce to an undifferentiated wholeness because “relationality makes reality at once irreducibly plural and inescapably unitary. Each entity, while maintaining its own autonomy, transcends itself to the other in reciprocity...anything that is real has the power to affect (another) and to be affected (by another).”⁶³ Therefore, Kaipayil’s theory discusses the classic one–and–the–many issue that also exists in interreligious dialogue.

Kaipayil summarizes the key philosophical points of his relational ontology as follows:

⁶¹ Joseph Kaipayil, *Human as Relational: A Study in Critical Ontology* (Bangalore, India: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy Publications, 2003), 15.

⁶² Kaipayil, *An Essay on Ontology*, 59. Kaipayil claims relationalism is not anti–substantivism, processism, relationism, or relativism. For more information, refer to Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 8–9. For more information on ontic relationalism, refer to Kaipayil, *Human as Relational*, 26ff.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 62.

All particulars are relational, for they exist in their relatedness to the supreme particular, Being–principle, and other particulars. Since all particulars are relational, being is relational. All beings, owing to their relationality, together make an ontological (existential) structure... reality. Since all constitutive participants of reality are relational by nature, we also say reality is relational.⁶⁴

In describing his relational ontology based on the being–principle, Kaipayil addresses two predominant critiques against relational ontology; whether it contains no references to substances or relation is merely a category similar to quantity and quality and thus is a non–substance or only a property of a substance. Wesley Wildman approaches the latter issue by assigning ontological priority to causes thereby treating both relations and entities equally. Because his theory of causation supports logical, conceptual, and other metaphysical relations, it explains how causes mediate value, account for various relations occurring in physical reality, and address classic theological issues, including: the God–world relation, divine action, and spiritual experiences.⁶⁵ Kaipayil views causality as a relation; in fact “the cause and the effect are relational to each other in an antecedent–consequent [sequentially connected] relation.”⁶⁶ A relational theory of causation explicates physical interactions that provide predictability in the world. It also facilitates anticipation along with the organization of empirical experiences.

Keller concedes arguments that relationalism tends to communalize and that relationality’s emphasis on connections constituting the self poses problems for personal autonomy and essentialism. Yet, antiessentialism’s slippery slope into antirelationalism complicates issues, especially in feminist theology, when discussing gender difference or

⁶⁴ Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 72.

⁶⁵ Wildman, “An Introduction to Relational Ontology,” 62–3, 71.

⁶⁶ Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 63.

describing a person as a matrix of relations because it “obfuscates the difference between feminist relationalism and... traditional subjectivities, which undermine difference.”⁶⁷ She criticizes postmodern and poststructuralist feminist theology for rebuffing relationalism and social ontologies as regressive to femininity based on implications that “it is feminine to be concerned about relationality.”⁶⁸ Rejecting relationality forfeits viable ontological alternatives to individualism, novel epistemological insights, along with contributions to ethics and dialogue.

Epistemological Justification

Kaipayil follows Immanuel Kant’s philosophical epistemology that all knowledge results from an analysis and articulation of empirical experience. In doing so, Kaipayil claims “knowledge is relational because knowledge is the result of interaction between the knower and the known.”⁶⁹ Moreover, the origin of knowledge is relational in “three existential aspects, namely belief, consciousness, and truth,”⁷⁰ therefore; belief is relational because it is always faith or trust about or in something. Yet a belief is knowledge only when justified by the object; otherwise, belief is false knowledge. Consciousness also is relational since “when I know a thing I become conscious of that thing. This is not belief. Beliefs are thoughts about the object I am conscious of [sic].”⁷¹ Truth relates to belief in that the former is an acceptance of the latter regarding an object;

⁶⁷ Catherine Keller, “Seeking and Sucking: On Relation and Essence in Feminist Theology,” in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, eds. Rebecca S. Chopp and Shelia Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 61–2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁹ Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 43, 46. For more information on Kaipayil’s relational epistemology, refer to Kaipayil, *Human as Relational*, 16–24.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 43–4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 44–5.

but the challenge is determining whether a belief relates to a fact about the object to which it refers.⁷² Because perspective and interpretation about the truth of an object vary, Kaipayil acknowledges that reality is complex with its many descriptions or truths.

For Lynn Hankinson Nelson, experience, in conjunction with existing knowledge, constructs new knowledge. Despite individualistic interpretations of evidence and knowledge, she believes sense experience is “shaped and mediated by a larger system of historically and culturally specific theory and practice [which implies] experience is fundamentally social,”⁷³ so she assigns epistemological function to communities who judge claims and establish practices and standards. Keller agrees that knowledge is the act of knowing together; in fact without relationships, self-knowledge is limited since “unknowingness about oneself emerges in relations to others,”⁷⁴ including the divine. From shared knowledge, standards, and practices, epistemological communities obtain identity, recognition, cognitive authority, and they develop into a “larger world community of multiple and evolving subcommunities [sic]”⁷⁵ possessing dynamic boundaries with evolving standards and knowledge. Global communities reflect connectedness through interdependent social, political, economic, and religious relations.

After analyzing then deconstructing classical philosophy and transcendental epistemology, Barbara Thayer-Bacon develops a relational epistemology without mind-body or gender dualism. Succinctly, her standpoint epistemology hypothesizes “knowing

⁷² Ibid., 45.

⁷³ Lynn Hankinson Nelson, “Epistemological Communities,” in *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 138.

⁷⁴ Catherine Keller, “Tangles of Unknowing: Cosmology, Christianity, and Climate,” in *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 115. See also Keller, “Seeking and Sucking,” 74.

⁷⁵ Nelson, “Epistemological Communities,” 148–9.

as something that is socially constructed by embedded, embodied people who are in relation with each other.”⁷⁶ She redefines individual epistemic agents as communities of many agents that create a “cognitive democracy”⁷⁷ to negate and shift epistemic privilege and power related to determining knowledge. Nelson agrees that communities are dynamic, socially and historically contingent “collections of independently knowing individuals [who are] epistemologically prior to [and thus influencing] individuals who know.”⁷⁸ Consequently, no agent possesses a complete or privileged bird’s-eye view of reality. Thayer–Bacon also introduces radical notions of fallible knowers, corrigible criteria, and socially constructed standards so that knowing becomes open, self-conscious, reflective, adaptable, and inclusive.⁷⁹ The interconnection between various communities encourages continuous critique and correction of epistemological assumptions. Moreover, relational knowers “must be held [morally] accountable to their community as well as to the evidence.”⁸⁰ Relational epistemology promotes an awareness of diverse contexts, facts, values, and viewpoints leading to sensitive, cooperative problem solving during dialogue.

Ethical Implications

According to Kaipayil’s human being–principle, self–understanding and identity occur through relationships with others and with the world. To recognize and respect the other is an ethical imperative that establishes morality based upon the relational ontology

⁷⁶ Thayer–Bacon, “A Pragmatist and Feminist Relational (e)pistemology,” 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁷⁸ Nelson, “Epistemological Communities,” 124.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6, 9.

of the human person.⁸¹ Two classic ethical viewpoints emphasize emotional and rational views instead of relational perspectives. Human sentimentalism focuses on empathy so the “ability to sympathize with others, is the source of morality”⁸² whereas Kantian rationalism emphasizes knowing right from wrong. These subjective positions fail to acknowledge, “the reason for ethics is the other person in virtue of his or her being a human being.”⁸³ Hence, “ontology precedes ethics, both in theory and practice... all morality is founded on the ontology of the human person.”⁸⁴ When people interact to form societies, subsequent ethical systems that recognize and respect others become necessary. A healthy society achieves balance between two extreme conditions regarding connectedness. If individuals dismiss their relationality, then individual good triumphs over common good and libertarianism results; yet if communities ignore the individual’s primacy, then communitarianism forms a collective identity.⁸⁵ Consequently, the individual retains ontological priority over society or the state; political and social systems exist to ensure the individual’s wellbeing and flourishing.

Self–Other Relationship

The self–other relationship expresses one’s ethical values and ontological views when interacting with others, whether the other is another person or religious tradition. More specifically, it is a question about and a response to people who are similar or different, though not necessarily equivalent to the Platonic categories of sameness and

⁸¹ Kaipayil, *Critical Ontology*, 28.

⁸² Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 46.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸⁴ Kaipayil, *Critical Ontology*, 28.

⁸⁵ Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 50.

otherness, but instead reflect nuanced historical philosophical insights. Modern Western philosophy, for instance, considers the self to be an agent rather than a subject, so emphasis remains egocentrically on the agent as opposed to the other. For the self to be in relation implies connection with and therefore the existence of the other. These various viewpoints result from cultural conditioning and historical consciousness, because “we always view ‘the other’ from our own given perspective.”⁸⁶ Thus, how a person perceives of and interacts with others reflects one’s attitudes toward alterity. Martin Heidegger, with other adherents of Cartesian philosophy, accentuates individualism; Sartre claims relationships exist but are not ontologically essential; while Freud discounts relationships, he believes one’s thoughts about others, and not others, influence a person.⁸⁷ Conversely, Martin Buber explores I–Thou relationality. In an effort to deemphasize prevalent self-centered philosophies with their internal I–Self exchanges, Buber’s focus is not on the self (I) or the other (Thou) but where two subjects in dialogic mutuality meet, which he calls “the realm of between.”⁸⁸ According to Buber, the realm of between is a sacred, spiritual connection; humans are spiritual, thus they manifest their spirituality when they intimately relate in a mystical manner to the world (I–It), to each other (I–Thou), and by extension to the ultimate Thou, who is God.

As opposed to Buber’s I–Thou relationality, Emmanuel Lévinas concentrates on the responsibility of recognizing difference between I and the Other (Thou). Relationship between human beings, for Lévinas, is one of radical alterity or exteriority in which the

⁸⁶ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 87.

⁸⁷ Danah Zohar, *The Quantum Self: Human Nature and Consciousness Defined by the New Physics* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990), 130.

⁸⁸ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. R. G. Smith (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 242ff.

Other is existent to, yet apart from, the subjective I, in order to avoid power struggles that possess or reduce the Other to sameness, either ontological or otherwise.⁸⁹ Paul Ricoeur interprets the situation as an “irrelation [sic]”⁹⁰ because it defines exteriority or conditions of separation from the other. However, Lévinas argues that by retaining subjectivity, the I is actually free in ethically responding to and learning from the Other as other; each subjectivity achieves “the astonishing feat of containing more than it is possible to contain”⁹¹ so that subjectivity overflows, enabling each to fully contain the Other as radical alterity. Rather than impede relationships, Lévinas claims that embracing alterity enables other-directed ethical relationality.

Ricoeur recognizes that diverse forms of alterity, including religious otherness, are irreducible to one another. After establishing “otherness at the heart of selfhood,”⁹² he describes the same-other relationship in terms of identity. The *idem*-identity (sameness of self) refers to external, similar, enduring attributes regarding what constitutes the self so it differs from *ipse*-identity (developing otherness of self), which involves the unique, internal, development of who the self is.⁹³ Although “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other,”⁹⁴ no conflation occurs; without both an *ipse* and *idem* identity, no self exists. In attesting to otherness, Ricoeur employs the phenomenology of passivity in three modes. The first is

⁸⁹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 46–7. Note that in Lévinas’ writings, he capitalizes Other as a device for respecting difference rather than the feminist notion of othering with its connotations of alienation and dissociation.

⁹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 188–9.

⁹¹ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27.

⁹² Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 318.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

an internal passivity of conscience relating the self to itself in the form of self-awareness, the second involves the body or flesh mediating between the self and the world, while the third focuses on inter-subjectivity and the ethical relation of the self to another who is other or foreign to the self.⁹⁵ Attestation received from another, reveals the other in the self; it also elicits a response to the other while offering the assurance of being oneself in one's actions and suffering.⁹⁶ Ricoeur warns against reducing, substituting, or combining aspects of passivity or alterity, that doing so ignores their uniqueness and particular nuances.

The function of narrative illustrates Ricoeur's topics of attestation, identity, and alterity. As a story's plot unfolds, each character's narrative identity matures through choices, actions, and interactions with other emerging characters.⁹⁷ Even though every character is irreducibly different, they all possess a similar composition. As one storyline entangles with those of others, each narrative constitutes and enhances the characters' identities resulting in richer, more interesting narratives. The unified plot also provides opportunities for characters to be subjects of each other's narratives from their reactions along with their selfish or selfless responses toward others. In narratives, characters demonstrate ethics as privileging the other over the self in the hope of improving life for everyone.⁹⁸ Ethical decisions entail understanding the self as an agent responsible for one's actions that ultimately affect others' narrative identities.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 318.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 147–8.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 165–8.

Furthermore, Ricoeur extends Aristotle's ultimate ethical aim for a good life to include others as well as oneself. One's ethical actions, in conjunction with just political and social institutions, achieve their ends only through being in relationship with and for others.⁹⁹ Each person's ethical decisions and actions not only affect one's situations but also relationships with others. However, the ethical aim alone is insufficient to judge proper actions. Ricoeur perceives universal norms or laws to be abstract and ahistorical; situations frequently occur where actions that follow such rules inflict harm or violence upon another. In these circumstances, an act of solicitude with a focus on respecting the otherness of persons as well as resolving conflicts using a dialogic approach that avoids arbitrariness is "critical solicitude,"¹⁰⁰ practical wisdom for interpersonal relations. Thus, practical wisdom for the solicitude of the other is a beneficial method for interreligious dialogue and other relationships.

Considering the self–other relationship from two reference points restricts how relationality's complexity manifests in authentic life experiences. To be a relational self is "a process of coming into existence in the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community"¹⁰¹ by engaging with others plus committing to shared values, practices, and beliefs for the common good. Positive mutual solidarity highlights reciprocity as a crucial factor in realizing each person's full maturity because "only through healthy collectivity can creative individuality arrive at singular being, productive knowledge, and self–consciousness."¹⁰² Individual self–identity therefore develops from communal identity

⁹⁹ Ibid., 172, 180.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 273.

¹⁰¹ Hopkins, *Being Human*, 100.

¹⁰² Ibid., 82.

through generational surnames, mutual endeavors, and a shared future vision. Eventually, each identity displays self-reliance and the desire to create distinctiveness through ethical choices thereby implying intentionality in addition to responsibility.

Intersubjective Objectification

When the self realizes others, an intersubjective, psychological, or social relation develops between them. The experiences of friendship or love are examples of mutually positive inter-subjectivity, which involves at least two persons, frequently in reciprocal dialogue mediated by culture, language, and possibly religious backgrounds. Michael Welker describes love as a relation of mutual honoring; it honors “the beloved beyond one’s own relation of honor to him or her,”¹⁰³ it encourages the beloved’s growth and full potential, and it establishes an environment that creatively supports this development. One result of intersubjective relationships is an expanded moral awareness necessitating new judgements based on the alterity of the other in addition to one’s self interests. How a person perceives the other, either as wholly different, as sharing common values, or as a threat to one’s autonomy or freedom, predisposes intersubjective in addition to ethical consequences. Historically, a tendency exists among powerful people, societies, nations, and religious groups to dehumanize, marginalize, or objectivize others. So even during the best of circumstances, for instance family counseling, peace talks, or interreligious dialogue, the possibility exists to use others as an objective means toward achieving selfish goals or ends rather than respecting and treating others as equals.

¹⁰³ Michael Welker, “Relation: Human and Divine,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 163–4.

Augustine's theological ethics, for example, differentiates between objects to be used (*uti*) and objects to be enjoyed (*frui*). Hence, critics perceive his ethics to be a form of egocentrism in which an individual's self-love results in treating others as instruments, objects, or means for achieving one's own desire for happiness. Since Augustine's work integrates three models of ethical thought: eudemonism (virtuous actions), deontology (duty), and teleology (purposes), William O'Connor speculates that various combinations of these systems create apparent conflicts regarding notions about love and ethics.¹⁰⁴ In his early work, Augustine describes charity as good love, the desire to see the beatific vision of God. Cupidity is bad love directed away from God. The theological challenge is how to incorporate love of neighbor within the context of charity. Augustine eventually reconciles the issue by interpreting love your neighbor as yourself to mean desiring for the neighbor what a person desires for oneself, namely the beatific vision. According to Augustine, "the neighbor may be enjoyed, but only 'in God' so any love that occurs outside the context of the desire for God is an instance of cupidity."¹⁰⁵ Augustine explains how the desire for a *telos* of eternal goodness leads people to use others as objects of benevolence. He believes "a person can quite consciously manipulate others for their benefit or even for a mutual benefit"¹⁰⁶ providing the person who is being used is not solely a means but also shares in the ends. This shared love for God forms genuine community through which neighborly relationality motivates people to desire each other's welfare.

¹⁰⁴ William Riordan O'Connor, "The *Uti/Frui* Distinction in Augustine's Ethics," *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 46. For more information on the various types of ethical systems and resultant notions of love, refer to pages 45–8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

Moreover, Augustine employs the human will to differentiate between *uti* and *frui*. To satisfy the will's yearning through or beyond the object of its desire is to use something, but enjoyment occurs if the object itself satisfies the will's desires.¹⁰⁷ Critics claim this distinction implies that one enjoys or uses God in delight, so in *De Civitate Dei* Augustine clarifies that "it is temporal things that are to be used and eternal things that are to be enjoyed"¹⁰⁸ indicating that humans are only to be enjoyed eternally in God. Also, O'Connor notes Augustine's meaning of *usus* is not instrumentalist but rather "to take up something into the power of the will, i.e., to apply the will to something, consciously to allow the will be to become engaged with it,"¹⁰⁹ which Augustine then applies to the love, pleasure, and joy that each of the Trinitarian Persons experiences as divine unity. For Augustine, the Holy Trinity is the perfect relational model exemplifying all intersubjective unions, though it is difficult to achieve with temporal human relations. The idea of *usus* as joyful unity likewise coincides with Augustine's proper order of love.

Properly ordered love means loving God first and then loving one's neighbor as oneself. Eric Gregory interprets Augustine to mean the two loves are non-competitively interconnected yet distinct, for "creatures are to be loved according to their status as creatures, and God is to be loved according to God's status as God."¹¹⁰ Properly ordered love for one's neighbor seeks only the benevolent material and spiritual good of another without a personal agenda. Augustine writes that "men are not to be loved as things to be

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 55. See also Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 56. See also, Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York, NY: Random House, 1950), 369–70.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 57–8. See also Augustine, *De Trinitate* VI, 2.

¹¹⁰ Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 322. Augustine associates the two loves with his analogy of the two cities in *De Civitate Dei*, XVI, 28.

consumed, but in the manner of friendship and goodwill, leading us to do things for the benefit of those we love”¹¹¹ rather than use or abuse other human beings. Furthermore, Augustine explains, “the sin that corrupts love is the lie that God and God’s creation exist for one’s own private possession.”¹¹² True love expresses genuine concern for people plus it directs human agency toward human fulfillment rather than an ethics and autonomy based on one’s independent ability of choice. Even though Augustine’s comment “love, and do what you will”¹¹³ appears to encourage situational ethics, interiorization, coercion, along with lax moral values, Gregory understands it as emphasizing the primacy of love in ethics and anthropology. Consequently, love is more than a virtue; besides motivating all human agency and action, it defines existence as a unifying, adoring relation with God.

Depending on its ordering and intensity, love manifests positively or negatively. Excessive empathy hinders prudence and judgement, so love requires autonomy for the lover and the beloved along with humility in order to prevent a corrupt “‘holier than thou’ attitude that demeans the dignity of persons and reduces them to an object”¹¹⁴ of one’s compassionate, charitable service. Augustine recommends primarily assisting the most vulnerable people in need and loving others who are in close proximity or in special relationships with oneself; yet with motivations void of moral superiority, preferential treatment, or excuses to ignore strangers. Such criteria, combined with humility, curtail

¹¹¹ Ibid., 253. For more information, refer to Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. J. F. Shaw (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2009), 1.22.20, where he ponders, “whether man [sic] is to be loved by man for his own sake, or for the sake of something else.”

¹¹² Ibid., 286. See also Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1992), 12.25.34 and 7.17.23.

¹¹³ Ibid., 270.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 292.

the danger of loving others wrongly as objects due to corrupt incentives one perceives as ordered to another person's good.

Gregory extends Augustine's rightly ordered love into politics as another perspective on the question of otherness within authentic community. Augustine's ontology and ethics view relationality in the world as a remedy for alienation as well as a behavioral guide toward the other. In fact, Gregory suggests an emphasis on interiority enables people to contemplate "the effects of our actions on ourselves without neglecting their impact on others."¹¹⁵ Love of neighbor influences one's motivations; likewise, actions toward others reflect a person's character and motivations.

Charles Mathewes concurs with Gregory that interiority is a vital component of one's ethics toward others. In approaching the relation between selfhood and otherness, Mathewes infers from Augustine's anthropology that besides exterior realities, interior perceptions also are crucial for knowing oneself, God, and the world. Though valuing a subject's interiority, Augustine posits "self-knowledge is itself mediated by knowledge of God; thus, to realize objective truth one must turn inward to the subject and thereby outward to God."¹¹⁶ The self is present to itself through self-knowledge along with self-awareness, still Augustine believes "God is closer to me than myself (*interior intimo meo*) [suggesting an] ineradicable relation between the person and God."¹¹⁷ In fact, the rationale for his anthropology is the conviction that "at the core of the self is an other,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 317.

¹¹⁶ Charles Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology: *Interior Intimo Meo*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 195. Augustine argues both the internalist and externalist philosophical positions.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 200. See also Augustine, *Confessions*, 3 .6, 10.16, 10.27.

God.”¹¹⁸ The idea that otherness is a significant component of the self prevents reducing subjects to objects while affirming plurality and difference. Augustine’s anthropology also circumvents external (public) versus internal (private) dichotomies that embroil otherness; he posits that each agent is always internal and external to the community and oneself, which preserves communal authority while respecting the individual.¹¹⁹ Without this internal and external relationality, substantive ontology perseveres by maintaining that “priority in human existence rests with the subject – our believing and desiring are ultimately due to what we do, not what the world does to and through us.”¹²⁰ Such extreme self-determination alienates a person from God, others, and the world.

Though Augustine rejects absolute autonomy by placing humans in relation with God and the world, he sustains the individual subject’s significance and freedom. He describes a human as free and autonomous, yet Augustine associates both terms with an integrated, intelligible will. The will reflects an agent’s basic desires, which are part of the agent’s nature and include a good end, the beatific vision of God. For Mathewes, this implies “the self is most free when it is determined by God; so true freedom is found not only through but even in the divine imposition of prevenient grace.”¹²¹ Many scholars question whether Augustine’s notion of grace is compatible with true human freedom. Mathewes argues that Augustine does not sacrifice freedom in favor of grace but rather perceives grace as freedom.¹²² Augustine also refutes critics’ claims of heteronomy since he posits, “there is no self, strictly speaking, apart from, and primordially independent of,

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 195–6.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 203.

God.”¹²³ Likewise, he negates implications of an “otherworldly ethic [by positing] nature is a remainder concept; that there is no way in which this world is finally enclosed [so grace is] an integral part of the natural order.”¹²⁴ Augustine explains that free will enables the self to seek an integrated right relationship with God or a state of sinful disintegration in which the self retains a confused free will that chooses among competing desires.¹²⁵ A sinful state damages one’s relationship with God and the world thus preventing a person’s absolute freedom from clearly, confidently choosing the desired good end, God.

Unhealthy Relationships and Sin

While relationships imply some semblance of connection, not all associations are healthy or supportive for every participant. Certainly spousal and child abuse, incest, war, genocide, and oppression are obvious examples of unhealthy, negative relations, as is co-dependence, the antithesis of relational interdependence.¹²⁶ Dysfunctional, damaged, or strained relationships introduce disruptive aspects to an ontology that emphasizes being as being-in-relation. The cause of these disturbing situations is often pride, selfishness, or mental deficiencies. In some cases, the reason is a result of pseudospeciation, the

¹²³ Ibid., 211. See also Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, 8.26. For more information, refer to Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

¹²⁴ Ibid., 215.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 206. See also Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.9 and 1.1.

¹²⁶ In psychology, interdependence and co-dependence are not equivalent. The former is a healthy reliance on others that promotes understanding, support, and inner strength. Each person possesses a unique identity while remaining self-sufficient, self-determining, and resourceful. Co-dependence is controlling, dysfunctional, negative mutuality that distorts identities, inhibits development, and leaves people feeling unworthy, insecure, and alone. For more information, refer to James Andrew Hogg and Mary Lou Frank, “Toward an Interpersonal Model of Codependence and Contradependence,” *Journal of Counseling & Development* 70 (January/February 1992): 371–5; Harry T. Reis and Caryl E. Rusbult, Eds., *Close Relationships: Key Readings* (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2004), especially Section 5: Interdependence in Relationships.

process of dividing a single species (humanity) into multiple groups with each inventing a distinct, superior, good “we” versus an inferior, potentially dangerous enemy or evil “them.”¹²⁷ When increased stress and survival anxiety lead to acts of aggression, groups engage in “dehumanization, [which entails] unconscious denial and moral repression of truth, depersonalization, and compartmentalization of moral reasoning”¹²⁸ in order to justify and protect aggressors from guilt, shame, and culpability. Acts of hegemony and objectification dehumanize people and are examples of what Christians call sin.

The notion of sin separates people from God and each other, especially sins of pride, which foster individualistic autonomy and selfishness by rejecting the relation between selfhood and otherness. Sin is prideful “desire to be a solitary god rather than a relational creature dependent on the good.”¹²⁹ According to Ruether, sin or culpable evil is the misuse of human freedoms that eventually distort a community’s relationality.¹³⁰ Through antagonism and exploitation, tension develops within good, just, and loving relationships. As a result, sin distorts relationality on three levels. At the interpersonal level, sins of pride or egotistic selfishness objectify and dominate victims while victim acquiescence or passivity also contributes to damaged relationships. The level of social–historical sins, which are the equivalent of Christianity’s original sin, are collective historically socialized patterns of normal behaviors into which one is born or inherits within a societal context. At the ideological–cultural level, distorted social structures

¹²⁷ Joseph V. Montville, “Religion and Peacemaking,” in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, eds. Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), 99.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 101–2.

¹²⁹ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 244.

¹³⁰ Ruether, “Dualism and the Nature of Evil,” 36–7.

become so hegemonic that they turn into cultural norms; therefore, to rebel against them is equivalent to rebelling against nature and God.¹³¹ Instead of simply revising present dualistic ideas of good versus evil, Ruether proposes a revolutionary social order as well as the transformation of social relations that affirm oneself in community and others in mutuality.¹³² Positive relational systems, for instance, South African *ubuntu*, Catholic social teaching about solidarity, and *sangha* (the monastic–community paradigm of Buddhism) improve human life and dignity by fostering respect and connectedness. Interreligious dialogue is another relational situation with the potential to promote mutually beneficial relationships among religious traditions.

Interestingly, Piet Schoonenberg suggests that the Christian idea of original sin has communal or social aspects similar to the Buddhist notion of *karma*. Comparable to the karmic idea that one’s present habits affect the future of other sentient beings just as habits of past beings affect current beings, the interconnection of personal sins results from individuals freely acting in situations or contexts that present moral choices to others who then freely decide their acts, which affects the situation of others and so forth.¹³³ Consequently, “the historical community conditions a person’s existential situation [so that people] possess a situated freedom; every human choice is conditioned by past decisions and restricts future possibilities.”¹³⁴ This understanding of original sin does not contradict classical Christian notions of a fall from grace since it extends the situation of sin from Adam to all of humanity’s sinful deeds throughout history.

¹³¹ Ibid., 37–9.

¹³² Ibid., 39.

¹³³ Piet Schoonenberg, “Original Sin and Man’s Situation,” in *The Mystery of Sin and Forgiveness*, ed. Michael J. Taylor (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1971), 244–5.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 245–8.

Religious Models of Relational Ontology

Relational ontology paradigms exist among many religions prompting theologians to examine their tenets and practices for constructs that express or model relationality and its use in interreligious dialogue. Kathryn Tanner's work emphasizes Christology while Gavin D'Costa and Amos Yong use a pneumatological focus to support their respective inclusive and pluralist theologies of religions.¹³⁵ In one unique approach, S. Mark Heim proposes the possibility of multiple religious ends toward achieving ultimate salvific communion with the Christian Trinitarian God.¹³⁶ Other Christian relational models include the Church as Body of Christ, the Communion of Saints, the universality of divine grace, or God's ultimate reign at the eschaton. Additionally, Raimon Panikkar's theology describes an emerging religious consciousness between the universe, the divine, and humanity in what he calls cosmotheandric spirituality.¹³⁷ His mystical model reflects animistic relational cosmologies as well as Eastern religions' ideas of spiritual harmony.

Christian Trinitarian Models of Relationality

Christian theologians frequently employ the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity as a paradigm for human as well as interreligious relations because it supports notions of

¹³⁵ For more information, refer to Kathryn Tanner, "Social Trinitarianism and its Critics," in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, eds. Giulio Maspero and Robert J. Woźniak (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2012), 368–86; Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) and "Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 16–29; Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal–Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

¹³⁶ For more information, refer to S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

¹³⁷ For more information, refer to Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

unity and distinction within transcendent mystery. Neo-Trinitarian theologians apply a variety of relational models. Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Zizioulas, and Catherine Mowry LaCugna, for instance, characterize relationality by emphasizing various aspects of the Holy Trinity such as unity-in-plurality, persons in communion, and *perichoresis*, respectively.¹³⁸ Jacques Dupuis' Trinitarian model incorporates the Holy Spirit's universal presence as a hermeneutical key to understanding multiple religions, while Leonardo Boff's liberation theology employs the Trinity as a practical application for full human freedom and participation in community.¹³⁹ Additionally, Rosemary Radford Ruether presents the Trinitarian God as a "living matrix of matter/energy [that] holds the whole together in mutually interacting relationality."¹⁴⁰ Though no analogy does justice to the Trinity's deep mystery, these and other scholars extend their Christian-centric models to incorporate interreligious as well as social justice objectives.

As a particular example, John Zizioulas utilizes Patristic Trinitarian thought and his own relational ontology as starting points for his doctrine of God. In a reversal of Classical Greek philosophy that emphasizes human beings as individual entities, Zizioulas advocates for being as communion. Furthermore, he says "the being of God is a

¹³⁸ For more information, refer to Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988); Zizioulas' *Being as Communion* and "Relational Ontology," 146–56; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1993). Other examples of neo-Trinitarian work are Karl Barth's reconciling particularity and tri-unity, Karl Rahner's rule that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa" along with his emphasis on relationality within God as a key idea of divine oneness, and Jürgen Moltmann's focus on freedom and equality of persons.

¹³⁹ For more information, refer to Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005).

¹⁴⁰ Ruether, "Dualism and the Nature of Evil," 35.

relational being”¹⁴¹ so God is communion, designating the interconnected Trinity as a primordial ontological concept rather than relationality as only an aspect added to divine substance. According to his theory, nothing exists as an individual in itself or apart from communion, not even God; therefore, the Christian monotheistic God exists as a mutual communion or relationship of love between Trinitarian persons.¹⁴² Zizioulas describes communion as an ontological category, not a relationship *per se*, nor a substitute for nature or substance; Trinitarian communion exists as an existential structure because the person of God the Father causes it.¹⁴³ By introducing the notion of cause and a theology of personhood, the Patristic Fathers explain how God’s existence is “the consequence of a free person [so that] true being [is the result of a] person who loves freely... by means of an event of communion with other persons.”¹⁴⁴ The Father’s freedom as love becomes “the supreme ontological predicate”¹⁴⁵ of God’s Trinitarian being. One’s personal love in response to divine grace establishes communion with God through which a person experiences the being of God. Zizioulas systematically applies his ontology of being as communion to the theological concepts of personhood, the Holy Trinity, and the Church.

Likewise, beginning with Patristic thought and utilizing Zizioulas’ ontology of being as communion, Catherine Mowry LaCugna retrieves Christian Eastern Orthodox

¹⁴¹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 17. By identifying *hypostasis* with *prosopon*, the Cappadocian Fathers detached *hypostasis* from its dependence on the being of a pre-existing, unified substance and thus created a new expression to name the Trinitarian *hypostases* that avoided Sabellianism by retaining each person’s fullness and integrity.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 17–8. To avoid claims of subordinationism, the Cappadocian Fathers disassociate cause with time and apply cause only to the personhood of God, not God’s substance, which introduces otherness into the Trinity. For more information, refer to Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2006), 128.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 46.

perspectives on the Trinity, applies them to Western thinking, and then combines them with feminist relational theology to develop a unique yet broadly accepted doctrine of God. The rationale supporting her idea of Trinity, as being-in-relation, is *perichoresis*, which she describes as “being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion,”¹⁴⁶ a term she appropriates from Gregory of Nazianzus. Frequently translated as the dynamic, image of “the divine dance,”¹⁴⁷ *perichoresis* represents the communion of Trinitarian love without mixing or blending the individuality of each person while maintaining no separation. It emphasizes mutuality and interdependence by placing unity within diversity rather than in the divine substance of God, the Father. Though LaCugna utilizes the term of person, she shuns individualistic personhood, preferring instead the notion of a non-substantive, interdependent, dynamic agent.¹⁴⁸ Trinitarian *perichoresis*, she believes is an authentic relational model; it closely reflects biblical and liturgical ideas of Trinitarian relationality regarding salvation history.

LaCugna does not restrict her relational Trinitarian theology to God’s inner life of self-relatedness, also known as the immanent Trinity, but instead asserts God in Godself is fundamentally “God for us,”¹⁴⁹ for humanity to be in relationship by partaking in the life of God. The economic Trinity, by disclosing God’s salvific actions in human history, more accurately reveals divine ontology according to LaCugna. While acknowledging the necessity for an immanent-economic Trinitarian distinction to confirm divine freedom, uniqueness, and unknowability, she laments its subsequent confusion because “theories

¹⁴⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 271.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 288–92.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16. See also Chapter 9.

about what God is apart from God's self-communication in salvation history remain unverifiable and ultimately untheological."¹⁵⁰ To clarify her position, LaCugna develops a relational ontology by uniting *oikonomia* (the economy of salvation) and *theologia* (the eternal being of God), where *oikonomia* (soteriology) reveals *theologia* (theology), which in turn establishes *oikonomia*.¹⁵¹ Her goal is to reduce misunderstanding about the Trinity while encouraging personal, practical divine-human relationships directed toward genuine praise and adoration of God.

Conversely, Kathryn Tanner cautions her academic colleagues against inflated claims of using the Trinity's relational aspects as a contemporary social analogy. She argues that theologians tend to ignore the differences between divine and human ontology as well as theological issues associated with comparing or equating divine relationality with current, often sinful, social institutions or constructs. These correlations either "overestimate the progressive political potential of the Trinity,"¹⁵² deteriorate into simplistic contrasts, or overlook history. Tanner explains that early Christians actually employed Trinitarianism to support centralized Roman rule under Constantine thereby promoting relations of hierarchy and subordination along with issues of gender representation that reinforce stereotyping.¹⁵³ Theologians favoring reciprocal *perichoretic* indwelling as a paradigm of perfect social relations mistakenly think the Trinity models human diversity, equality, and community; yet divine persons are equal since they are the same substance so their interpersonal communion is total, which is an accomplishment

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 230.

¹⁵² Tanner, "Social Trinitarianism and its Critics," 371.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 371-2.

humanity is unable to achieve politically or physically.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, an overemphasis on Trinitarian persons either applies the term of person too literally or stresses distinction, often implying the unification of three gods as tri-theism.

Because human language cannot adequately convey incomprehensible divine mystery, Tanner questions whether the Trinitarian social model applies to or assists in understanding human relationships. In perfect equality, divine persons freely, lovingly, and completely give of themselves without loss, however, selfish mortal humans think of relationships in zero-sum terms; in other words, giving to or loving others brings loss to themselves.¹⁵⁵ Suggesting the Trinity as an ideal for human relations also fails to improve interpersonal relationships or social conditions; indeed, “the closer Trinitarian relations seem to human ones in the economy, the less the Trinity seems to offer advice about how to move beyond... human limits and failings.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, Trinitarian models do not address limitations from the unity-particularity dichotomy or problems resulting from hegemony within interreligious dialogue. Non-Christian participants perceive notions of the Trinity or other Christian symbols, terms, and language as Western imperialism or view them as attempts at proselytization or marginalization. As relational models, neither fourth-century Neoplatonic Trinitarian constructions, nor for example, the Trinitarian concept of *sat-cit-ananda* (being-consciousness-bliss) from Indian philosophy are effective at expressing deep meaning in interreligious dialogue for all participants without the proper context or experiences.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, an awareness that neither

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 372.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 380.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 382.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 49.

construct is universal along with remaining open to conversation provides opportunities for mutual insights and greater understanding.

Cosmotheandric Spirituality

Raimon Panikkar constructs the term cosmotheandric to describe his unified earth (*cosmos*), divine (*Theos*), and human (*aner*) consciousness of reality. His spiritual idea posits that the earth is a temporal, living organism with a soul that enjoys spontaneity, freedom, in addition to “the immediate cause of her own movements,”¹⁵⁸ comprised of predictability with some indeterminacy. The earth symbolizes receptivity as well as expansiveness, because as *terra firma*, it solidly grounds reality, manifests divine activity; in addition, it exhibits change that encourages people’s faith. Since human attraction and reaction to things is as personal as human-to-human relationships, the bond between humanity and the earth constitutes inseparable, non-dualistic, non-reducible ultimate I-It objective knowledge of world in which “individualistic souls do not exist; we are all interconnected.”¹⁵⁹ In cosmotheandric spirituality, salvation entails human incorporation within both the universe and the divine thereby overcoming material-spiritual, secular-sacred, inner-outer, and temporal-eternal dualisms by being sensitive to and “conscious of interdependencies and correlations”¹⁶⁰ rather than distorted differences. In this regard, cosmotheandric concepts resemble several animistic religions that believe in the all-encompassing wholeness of reality. Although Panikkar admits that humanity’s projections may anthropomorphize the earth, things, others, and even God, he

¹⁵⁸ Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, 139.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

cautions against idealistic solipsism because projecting traits is bi-directional; humans “are projecting creatures [and] projected beings.”¹⁶¹ Panikkar believes that the Christian doctrines of *vestigium trinitatis* (Trinitarian traces in creation) and *imago dei* (image of God) become “revealers of our own nature and constitutively relational character.”¹⁶² Therefore, relationships are personal as well as reciprocal. Whether with people, with objects having vestigial value through memory, or with the divine, relations reveal, shape, and condition an individual.

The subtleties of Panikkar’s method are difficult to discern particularly because they integrate theology, anthropology, cosmology, within an overarching system of mystical spirituality. Contention arises when engaging interreligious dialogue through a cosmotheandric lens since it introduces exponential complexity by incorporating multiple theologies of religions with various anthropological and cosmological approaches in addition to nebulous definitions of spirituality and mystical experience. Participants with differing perspectives from Panikkar’s mystical framework and mode of consciousness encounter confusion or marginalization comparable with their endeavors to comprehend diverse religious tenets. Ironically, amid acknowledging a plurality of mystical views, he claims cosmotheandric spirituality is true reality, thereby alluding to an all-encompassing cosmology or possible meta-religion. Panikkar’s cosmotheandric spirituality as a form of Trinitarian metaphysics nevertheless illustrates his concept of unity as a tension between differences rather than a reduction of religions to a common denominator. Yet questions linger as to whether Panikkar supports pluralism or is being inclusive by inviting other

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 145.

¹⁶² Ibid., 147.

religions to adopt cosmotheandric idealism while somehow retaining their uniqueness. Panikkar's mystical approach portrays relationality as utopian or at least eschatological in nature since it ignores historically conditioned differences related to language, ritual, gender, or ethnicity.

Buddhist Relational Ontology

Although Buddhism and many other Eastern worldviews emphasize relationality in addition to non-dualism, their philosophies and approaches vary. In the Buddhist Theravada tradition, individual or absolute universal selfhood is illusion, "a metaphysical blunder born from a failure to properly comprehend the nature of concrete experience."¹⁶³ Thus, true liberation transpires from "the abolition of all I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendencies to conceit."¹⁶⁴ Mahayana schools reject dualism; consequently, enlightenment is realizing that "the ultimate nature of all phenomena is emptiness, the lack of any substantial or intrinsic reality,"¹⁶⁵ in other words, the ontological nature of nature is emptiness or no-nature. Within Chinese Buddhism, the fundamental ontology is relational, not individual, for although individuals participate in vertical, hierarchical social relationships of higher-order systems, horizontally reciprocal relationality actually constitutes being.¹⁶⁶ The concept of personhood differs among the various schools; nevertheless, Buddhist traditions affirm the principles of emptiness (*sunyata*) and the subsequent non-existence of the self (*anatta*).

¹⁶³ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Dhamma and Non-Duality*, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_27.html> (accessed January 30, 2016).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Peter D. Herschok, "Person as Narration: The Dissolution of 'Self' and 'Other' in Ch'an Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 44, no. 4 (October 1994): 687.

Enlightenment entails awakening to the nature of reality as essential emptiness. The concept of emptiness is the intrinsic truth that beings are relative, impermanent, and “exist only in relationship with everyone and everything else.”¹⁶⁷ Buddhism “explicitly denies the existence of eternal selves, whether one or many,”¹⁶⁸ so when the self realizes its transient nature, it grasps at permanence and existence, which causes suffering. The idea of no-self prompts a person to relinquish cravings for eternalness, often over the course of many lifetimes, in order to attain nirvana and liberation. According to Zen Buddhism, enlightened awareness associates a nexus of infinite interconnectedness with a reciprocal awakening of all beings. In Mahayana Buddhism, enlightened beings, called Bodhisattvas, recognize the endless relation of all sentient beings and endeavor to awaken others from self-attachment and its cravings for permanence.

Furthermore, by teaching that all things are impermanent, the Buddha holds the notion of rebirth in tension with the non-existence of self. Because no inherent self exists, rebirth is a karmic continuation of aggregates that include feelings, disposition (mental capacities), sense perception, and consciousness (memories, ideas, and thoughts), which constitute an empirical self as a complex “series of continuous, transient, and causally connected states.”¹⁶⁹ Long-term actions and intentions overlap in consciousness then continue for the same subject as “the transient flow of interdependent selves-in-relation, process-selves, in ceaseless change and dynamic interplay.”¹⁷⁰ The self is not reborn; instead, a human being consists of these four aggregates and a fifth (the body)

¹⁶⁷ Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*, 56–7.

¹⁶⁸ Keith Ward, *Religion and Human Nature* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1998), 76–7.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

that form an illusory sense of self, interconnected by causal continuities and mental aggregates. Actions and intentions associated with a particular body have karmic consequences for some future sentient being just as actions and intentions of past beings influence the current being's circumstances.¹⁷¹ No part of the aggregate consciousness exists independently; karma entails an interdependent system. The amalgamation of beings as collections of causal relations along with intentions as mental acts of one's choosing also affirms the Buddhist concept of co-origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). Dependent or co-origination metaphysically explains that all phenomena exist together in a mutually interdependent web of cause and effect; hence, nothing exists independently, not even the self.

Animistic African and American Relationality

The notion of relationality is a central concept within the African worldview, especially regarding self-identity and personhood. Humanness (*ubuntu*) along with personal identity derives from one's relations with ancestors, relatives, tribal, and social groupings, summarized in the traditional statement "a person is a person through other persons."¹⁷² Far from a static concept, relatedness shapes a person's ontological identity through a long-term, ongoing, active, lived reality of constant multi-directional influence on and interaction with one another.¹⁷³ Africans perceive the self and other as unified; they interrelate and coexist, "each in the other in the sense of being identified with each other... All persons form a single person, not as parts for a whole, but as friends draw

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 80–2.

¹⁷² Dion A. Forster, "African Relational Ontology, Individual Identity, and Christian Theology," *Theology* 113, no. 874 (July/August 2010): 245.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 246.

their life and character from the spirit of a common friend”¹⁷⁴ with a common identity. Thus, being–in–relationship and participating in community essentially shape personhood as well as foster solidarity. Rather than destroying personal identity, interaction within the community reveals and enhances one’s actual identity. Similarly, animistic and indigenous American traditions combine a communitarian culture with kin relationships that relegate individual identity to the collective community.¹⁷⁵ Their cosmology encompasses an intertwined, intimate, “balanced cohabitation between humans and all of creation,”¹⁷⁶ which yields religious spirituality in daily life. The resultant worldview expresses as well as values notions of community and relationality across time and space.

Conclusion

Classical concepts of being as substance continue to retain their historically predominant ontological perspectives, especially in Western worldviews. These notions require substances to be static, which introduces dualisms for differentiation besides definition. Consequently, specificity along with uniqueness promotes individualism leading to a preference for personal human autonomy. Although substance ontology and individual autonomy are logical constructs with advantages pertaining to self–identity and self–determination, their primacy encourages conflict, isolation from others, and societal fragmentation. Rather than remain simply a category of substantive ontology, relational ontology connects the self with the other and both the self and the other to the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 247.

¹⁷⁵ Hopkins, *Being Human*, 50.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 49.

integrated whole of reality, either as individuals or corporate entities while retaining and respecting each entity's distinct identities.

Furthermore, relationality promotes cooperation, association, and social order. Whether through causal or constitutive relations, the emphasis is on mutuality that honors personal autonomy but grounds it in responsibility. Relational ontology holds promise for interpersonal relations as well as improving international, intercultural, and interreligious dialogue; yet Keller warns scholars to avoid “any naïve glorification of connection [that results in a] new relationolatry [sic].”¹⁷⁷ Hence, a realistic approach to relation is necessary. Relational ontology possesses the potential ethical drawback of objectifying the other as a means toward one's ends. Selfishness, inflated notions of superiority, along with other sins results in weakened or damaged relations. However, relationality also offers the possibility of cultivating right relationships, which Christian social teaching and many other religious ethical views equate with just relationships and integrity.

Joseph Kaipayil systematically develops a framework along with a philosophical rationale for relational ontology using his concept of a being–principle. Likewise, various epistemologists and ethicists provide reasoning plus validation to support being as being–in–relation. Religious scholars explain interconnectedness theologically by engaging their traditions' tenets and symbols. The next chapter continues this interdisciplinary approach to relationality and its implications for interreligious dialogue. It describes how relational ontology manifests in the physical sciences, particularly the new developments in physics involving quantum entanglement.

¹⁷⁷ Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 223.

CHAPTER 3 – QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT

Introduction

Through philosophical, epistemological, and theological reasoning, chapter two validates relational ontology as a practical method for increasing effectiveness during interreligious dialogue. The interdisciplinary field of science likewise offers insights into relational ontology and its use in resolving dialogic challenges among religious traditions. The rapidly developing field of quantum physics, especially the concept of entanglement, provides scientific viewpoints of a relational world from physical, natural perspectives. Classical physics describes a reliably predictable world based on a substantive ontology. While empirical data and experience support this view of physical reality at macroscopic levels, new evidence and experimentation reveal a world of quantum physics involving probability and relational entanglement at microscopic levels. Quantum entanglement, in particular, demonstrates a phenomenon in which multiple, independent particles behave interdependently within a wavefunction. Because their being is being-in-relation, this chapter explores how quantum entanglement manifests relational ontology at reality's most fundamental levels, and by analogy, is therefore intrinsic to all levels of physical reality, including human beings, who are social, interpersonal creatures. Next, the chapter establishes parallels and interrelatedness between the scientific and religious disciplines, and then employs relational aspects of quantum entanglement metaphorically to resolve interreligious dialogic challenges.

Quantum entanglement provides a framework of scientific concepts, processes, and language to improve communication and mutual understanding during interreligious dialogue. Since quantum entanglement validates relationality, its methodology alleviates

issues that proprietary religious models frequently introduce into conversation. Applying entanglement attributes to interreligious dialogue reduces marginalization by encouraging contributions from under-represented religious groups and by extending participation to scientific, political, and cultural entities who possess valuable ideological responses to humanity's ultimate questions, particularly those related to shared social and ecological problems. To exemplify quantum entanglement and its advantages for interreligious dialogue, scientists and theologians participate in interdisciplinary dialogue. Science-religion entanglement highlights the benefits as well as similar concerns confronting interreligious discourse. Historical hegemony and marginalization, the unity-particularity conundrum, along with language and epistemological issues occur within and between scientific and religious disciplines. Yet, interdisciplinary approaches enable interreligious dialogue participants to realize their mutual entanglement with each other, physical reality, ultimate reality, and with the ethical responsibilities that relationality requires.

Scientific Entanglement

The physical world provides evidence of relationality from various examples of interaction. Several relationships exist in nature, such as competition, predator-prey, and producer-consumer paradigms. Trees compete for space, nutrients, and sunlight, African lions hunt zebra prey, and rabbits are notorious consumers of a gardener's lettuce crop. Biological ecosystems likewise comprise numerous symbiotic connections. Sea corals and algae provide necessary nutrients to each other, bees fertilize flowers while gathering nectar, and birds feed on parasites harmful to hippopotami.

Higher-level animal species exhibit systemic along with social relationality. Sophisticated brain function demonstrates highly integrated biological and chemical

systems. The human brain, with its extremely complex grids and patterns of observation, “is far and away the most intricately interrelated entity”¹ scientists have ever studied. Brains rapidly correlate multiple multi-sensory experiences, stimuli, and events into memories. All learning is necessarily relational because knowledge is dependent on context. Research indicates that relational complexity appears to develop within the human brain’s prefrontal cortex.² As a gradual, relational understanding happens, each person discerns perceptions along with emotions from external and internal events, leading to complex self-relation and interpersonal associations.³ On a more abstract level, ideas themselves are relational.⁴ Actualizing then integrating these patterns of perception, imagination, and memory with self-identity facilitates internal continuity, which enables externally conscious subject-object and subject-subject encounters.

In addition to possessing complicated interconnected systemic functions, human beings are social creatures. Human identity and survival depends on a complex web of interpersonal relationships.⁵ Through many cultural norms, political views, and religious rituals, people develop then adopt communal values. Globalization extends the notion of community beyond local geography through migration, transportation, and advanced communication techniques. Computer technology facilitates social entanglement by

¹ John Polkinghorne, “The Demise of Democritus,” in *The Trinity and the Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 10.

² N. Robin and Keith J. Holyoak, “Relational Complexity and the Functions of Prefrontal Cortex,” in *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, ed. M. S. Gazzaniga (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 988.

³ Michael Welker, “Relation: Human and Divine,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 160.

⁴ K. Helmut Reich, *Developing the Horizons of the Mind: Relational and Contextual Reasoning and the Resolution of Cognitive Conflict* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 26.

⁵ Polkinghorne, “The Demise of Democritus,” 1.

connecting people and data via the internet's worldwide web.⁶ During interreligious dialogue, participants from various religions share the goal of mutual understanding.

Gaia Hypothesis

Examples of relationality extend throughout the universe. While studying whether life exists on other planets, James Lovelock ironically concluded that Earth itself acts like a living organism. Named after the Greek Earth goddess, the Gaia Hypothesis perceives Earth as a homeostasis of complex, interconnected processes including the “biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system, which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet.”⁷

Rosemary Radford Ruether extends Gaia's premise to encompass the universe and God. She envisions an interrelated cosmos, with God as “its living matrix of matter/energy... [that] holds the whole together in mutually interacting relationality.”⁸ Discerning the world as a biological framework or entity “not only assumes the existence of the world of being-in-itself that is made available through physics... it also derives the biological universe from the physical universe by a kind of re-styling, and it indirectly assumes the existence of the latter.”⁹ Interestingly, opposing perspectives on environmental issues both utilize the Gaia Hypothesis in their arguments. Scholars concerned about irreversible

⁶ Sociologists continue to research this phenomenon. For more information, refer to Rachel Grieve, et al., “Face-to-Face or Facebook: Can Social Connectedness Be Derived Online?” *Computers in Human Behavior* 29, no. 3 (May 2013): 604–9; Christian Licoppe, “‘Connected’ Presence: The Emergence of a New Repertoire for Managing Social Relationships in a Changing Communication Technoscape,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22, no. 1 (February 2004): 135–56.

⁷ James L. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10.

⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5 (April 1992): 35.

⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2004), 448.

damage to the planet emphasize interconnectedness and ethical responsibility of all living things to their mother, Earth.¹⁰ Other scholars promote Gaia Hypothesis concepts of self-regulation and renewal.¹¹ These global warming skeptics believe Earth eventually will heal itself without human intervention.

Classical Physics

Nature's interconnectedness is evident throughout the history of physics. Though employing a primarily metaphysical rationale, Democritus posits the existence of atoms, which are physically indivisible *per se* yet comprise the foundation of matter in the universe.¹² Isaac Newton develops physical laws of motion that associate properties of force with a system's state; they correlate bodies (matter) and forces (energy) to define spatial and temporal coordinates of an object.¹³ All tangible, observable objects therefore possess a current position and momentum upon which forces act. These values facilitate mathematical predictions of future positions and events. Newton's scientific method likewise interrelates the inductive reasoning of empiricism with deduction found in

¹⁰ For more information, refer to Thomas Berry, "The Gaia Theory: Its Religious Implications," *ARC: The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University* 22 (1994): 7–19; Douglas John Hall, "The Integrity of Creation: Biblical and Theological Background of the Term," in *Reintegrating God's Creation: A Paper for Discussion. Church and Society Documents* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, Program Unit on Faith and Witness, 1987): 25–36; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1992).

¹¹ For more information, refer to James E. Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1990); Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, "Gaia and Philosophy," in *On Nature*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 60–78; William Irwin Thompson, "Gaia: A Way of Knowing," in *The Age of Ecology: The Environment on CBC Radio's Ideas*, ed. David Cayley (Toronto, Canada: James Lorimer and Company, 1991), 168–82.

¹² E. U. Condon and Halis Odabasi, *Atomic Structure* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1. The atom's indivisibility is later proven incorrect with the discovery of subatomic particles.

¹³ Newton's laws – a body remains at rest/in motion unless force acts on it, bodies accelerate in the same direction and proportional to the amount of force, and forces cause equal and opposite reactions.

rationalism to express mathematically how the world works.¹⁴ Though Newton believed the force of gravity to be an absurdity or flaw, he employs gravitational attraction at a distance to describe the interrelated order of the solar system.¹⁵ Later, these seemingly absurd ideas about gravity inspire Einstein to develop his theory of general relativity.

Newtonian or classical physics involves specific, coordinated rules that follow particular patterns, which subsequently depict physical reality more accurately. By developing new theories and laws, classical physics reveals further relational aspects of the physical world. Michael Faraday's and James Maxwell's electromagnetic field theory associates electricity and magnetism in a single principle demonstrating that classical fields behave like particles; as local entities, they express a causal connection.¹⁶ In another example, a collection of electrons influences individual electron states: either each particle possesses a unique state of motion (Fermi statistics) or they aggregate into a similar state (Bose statistics).¹⁷ Albert Einstein's theories of special and general relativity identify a maximum velocity (speed limit) in the universe, which establishes relationships between space, time, and matter. Physicists continue to search for remaining associations between electromagnetism and weak nuclear interactions in order to define the elusive Grand Unified Theory (GUT) of all known fundamental properties of nature.

Classical mechanics systematically reveals the physics of being (objects) along with change (forces) as a deterministic, logical theory. These conclusions necessitate a

¹⁴ Peter. E. Hodgson, *Theology and Modern Physics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publications, 2005), 62–3.

¹⁵ Isaac Newton, "Original Letter from Isaac Newton to Richard Bentley," *The Newton Project*, <<http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/view/texts/normalized/THEM00258>> (accessed November 10, 2016).

¹⁶ Polkinghorne, "The Demise of Democritus," 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

detached observer for objective experiential observations and unbiased mathematical data models, especially when accounting for relativity. Pierre Simon Laplace theorizes such an intelligence, eventually known as Laplace's demon, who could calculate all forces on an object's position and momentum at a specific moment in time and analyze the data so "nothing would be uncertain, and the future, as the past, would be present to its eyes."¹⁸ An absolute, impartial, uninfluential observer of course is impossible to achieve, but significant evidence verifies classical physics, its theories, and "its basic correctness, its essential 'truth' about the world"¹⁹ at least at macroscopic levels. However, the advent of sophisticated experimentation combined with increasingly precise measuring equipment yields results that conflict with the fundamental predictions of classical physics. These results precipitate the development of quantum physics. At the microscopic level, quantum physics insinuates a counterintuitive world of indeterminism and uncertainty.

Quantum Physics

Quantum physics suggests the cosmos is radically different from the one classical physics depicts. Increasing amounts of empirical evidence identify profoundly different physical laws pertaining to subatomic particles, leading to new theories and predications. Unlike reasonably straightforward rules and intuitive explanations in classical physics, quantum mechanics is so counterintuitive that Nobel Laureate Richard Feynman quips, "I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics."²⁰ The ambiguity

¹⁸ Pierre Simon Laplace, *On Probabilities*, trans. Fredrick W Truscott and Frederick Emory (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1902), 4. Laplace's demon may serve as a secular equivalent for an omniscient God in some religions.

¹⁹ Jim Baggott, *The Meaning of Quantum Theory: A Guide for Students of Chemistry and Physics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1.

²⁰ Richard Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1965), 129.

results from measurement uncertainty, which is actually an intrinsic consequence of quantum theory. Observation only partially reveals what fundamentally exists, which forces the observer to make compromises about what pieces of information are obtained and to what precision. Due to problems with measurement and other paradoxes at the microscopic level, quantum mechanics remains difficult to comprehend and explain.

Wave–Particle Relational Dualism

At subatomic levels, quantum physics discloses information incongruent with classical theories. Observation and experiments, for example, determine that charged electrons maintain stable orbits around the nucleus of an atom without losing energy, a comparable idea to giving a toy truck an initial push down a hill and expecting the truck to continue traveling forever. Both ideas are unthinkable concepts according to the laws of friction, gravitation, and other classical systems forces. However, behaviors at quantum levels differ from macroscopic actions. Electrons and other subatomic particles exhibit a wave–particle duality relation. Early Greek mathematicians and philosophers noted wave–like properties of sound and theorized particles composed of light. When Max Planck encountered thermodynamic issues in applying only a wave theory of light, he posited that light contains particles whose energy (a quantum) is proportional to the wave’s frequency. His mathematical ratio, known as Planck’s constant, defines this proportional relationship.²¹ Utilizing Planck’s constant, Louis de Broglie associated a

²¹ The value of Planck’s constant (symbol h) is 6.63×10^{-34} Joule seconds in the equation: $h = (\text{particle energy}) / (\text{wave frequency})$. Note that Planck considered his term to be a math workaround and in a Letter to Robert Williams Wood, (1931) he called the constant an “act of desperation” in order to achieve a positive result. Moreover, Einstein was ridiculed for proposing Planck’s light particles as the explanation for the photoelectric effect, but ultimately Robert Millikan’s experiments proved Einstein correct, and though his goal was to disprove Einstein, Millikan eventually admitted Einstein was correct in the article “Albert Einstein on His Seventieth Birthday,” *Reviews of Modern Physics* 21, no. 3 (1949): 344.

particle's wavelength with its momentum.²² Within wave–particle duality, every particle has a related wave and every wave represents a particle's potential location.

Sophisticated experiments using double–slit mechanisms demonstrate the wave–particle relationship. Two distinct waves superimpose (interfere) either by reinforcing (combining) each other or by negating (canceling) each other. The result projects patterns of light and darkness on a screen, respectively. When sending particles through double–slits, one expects them to distribute according to their particular slot. However, resultant interference patterns illustrate that particles behave identically to waves. Particles arrive intact through the slits but their probable distributions experimentally and mathematically resemble the intensity of a wave. This counterintuitive weirdness of quantum physics more accurately describes the physical world, particularly at microscopic levels. Macroscopic objects do not manifest wave–particle duality; they entangle with their surroundings, which suppresses interference and localizes them in one place.

In fact, the suppression of quantum interference, known as decoherence, is so rapid and efficient that most measuring devices are unable to record the effects; a few photons, atmospheric particles, or a minute amount of friction is sufficient to cause spontaneous environmental interaction. Measurement with macroscopic instruments likewise introduces decoherence. When decoherence prevents quantum wave–particle interference, the particle is in a specific, observable, state; it conforms to the features of classical rather than quantum physics. By analogy, interreligious dialogue provides an opportunity for religions to interact and interrelate when discussing beliefs and practices. Sometimes the resultant relationship is a positive superposition of commonalities and at

²² The de Broglie wavelength relation is: $h / (\text{particle mass}) (\text{particle speed})$.

times differences encourage further discussion. Nevertheless, aspects of hegemony, bias, presumption, politics, hidden agendas, or misunderstanding cause decoherence, reflecting a broken relational state of interreligious dialogue at a particular moment in time.

Quantum States

While philosophy generally differentiates between epistemic and ontic categories of knowledge, quantum physics complicates that distinction. Of particular interest, is whether a quantum state refers to knowledge about the particle or is the actual particle. This epistemic–ontic argument manifests during quantum measurement because some interpretations require knowledge of quantum states along with system observations but other interpretations treat states and observables independently. Many issues similar to this one remain unresolved in quantum mechanics and the philosophy of physics.

According to classical mechanics, an object's position and motion determine its state, whether or not one knows those values. Hence, an object's uncertain state connotes lack of knowledge, measurement inaccuracy, ambiguity, or statistical imprecision in classical terms. In quantum physics, a state refers to the various probabilities that give a complete description of a quantum particle prior to observation; thus, its actualities are essentially random and imprecise. A quantum wavefunction is a mathematical tool that expresses the state of a system. Wavefunction amplitudes represent all probable values for particles, depicting their attributes (for example position or energy) as a superposition (sum) of all the available possibilities prior to measurement.²³ Quantum particles are not in multiple places or spinning various directions. Instead, the wavefunction offers a more

²³ Sean M. Carroll, "Quantum Time," *The Preposterous Universe* (Sean Carroll's website) <<http://www.preposterousuniverse.com/eternitytohere/quantum/>> (accessed May 12, 2015).

accurate description of the particle's reality prior to observation.²⁴ During measurement, the probability of a measurement outcome (such as position) becomes 100 percent while all alternative possibilities obtain a zero probability.

The scientific community disagrees as to whether measurement data and mathematical formulas epistemologically describe the quantum wavefunction or whether measurement ontologically reveals a portion of the quantum wavefunction. The latter argument claims that although the entire wavefunction exists, scientists are able to observe only part of it; “but that’s the true magic of quantum mechanics: What we see is not what there is. The wavefunction really exists, but we don’t see it when we look; we see things as if they were in particular ordinary classical configurations.”²⁵ The idea that observation or measurement influences quantum experiential results is disconcerting. For Einstein and other classical physicists, “that’s not how physics is supposed to work. The world is supposed to evolve according to the laws of nature, whether we are observing it or not.”²⁶ Unlike detached objective observers in classical mechanics, measurement affects a quantum wavefunction and its associated probable outcomes.

Probabilities and the statistical nature of quantum calculations essentially introduce some amount of uncertainty into quantum physics. Because subatomic particles exhibit wave–particle duality, many wave attributes and their related particle attributes are complementary; they mutually enhance or influence each other. Niels Bohr firmly believed this complementarity is essential to quantum physics even though it likewise

²⁴ The well-known quantum mechanics thought experiment, Schrödinger’s Cat, exemplifies this concept. An unobserved cat in a box with a canister of poisonous gas, which may or may not be released, is both alive and dead simultaneously until someone opens the box and observes the cat’s state.

²⁵ Carroll, “Quantum Time.”

²⁶ Ibid.

increases quantum uncertainty. Measuring a particle's attribute, such as its position, assigns the measurement outcome a non-zero probability and redistributes remaining probabilities across the amplitudes of its complementary attributes.²⁷ This scenario summarizes Werner Heisenberg's notion of indeterminacy relations, better known as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.²⁸ As specific values for attributes such as position or momentum gain more precision, their related complementary values are increasingly uncertain or indeterminate. Furthermore, the type of measuring instrument determines what kind of evaluation occurs along the wide spectrum between wave and particle properties; yet no instrument can possibly measure multiple properties or complementary values simultaneously.

Interreligious dialogue often discloses complementarity between diverse religious truths. During discourse (a parallel to measurement), some religious attributes are clearer while other tenets temporarily become uncertain until additional dialogue occurs. Within quantum physics, attributes are uncertain until measurement determines their values. By analogy, discussing diverse religious topics influences perceptions, understanding, and reactions to other religion's positions and viewpoints.

Multiple Interpretations of Quantum Theory

The reality of quantum physics defies common sense and intuition thereby portraying a different view of physical reality than classical mechanics. From religious

²⁷ Edward MacKinnon, "Complementarity," in *Religion & Science: History, Method, and Dialogue*, eds. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley L. Wildman (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 265. MacKinnon also explores theological and philosophical aspects of complementarity in his chapter.

²⁸ The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle describes the measurable uncertainty of quantum wave-particle duality within limits greater or equal to Planck's constant. For more information, refer to Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2000).

and philosophical perspectives, ultimate reality is not easily understood either. As a result, diverse religious viewpoints exist as well as a broad range of quantum mechanics interpretations. Although 44 percent of recently polled physicists claim no preferred interpretation of quantum mechanics, the answer “shut up and calculate”²⁹ had as many favorable responses as the next three most supported interpretations. Thus, physicists often utilize quantum theories but ignore their ambiguity and incongruity with classical concepts out of a practical need to accomplish their work. Other physicists continue seeking interpretations that provide enhanced explanations of quantum phenomena.

Initial attempts at interpreting quantum mechanics involved comprehending wave–particle theory from different scientific and philosophical perspectives. As a realist, Erwin Schrödinger thought his wave mechanics calculations described at least part of inherent reality while positivist Heisenberg claimed matrix mechanics only interrelated existing experiential data to enable future mathematical predictions.³⁰ Although Paul Dirac and Schrödinger mathematically proved both approaches were equivalent, debates about quantum theory highlight existing philosophical diversity among physicists regarding the functions of observation and measurement in interpreting reality.

The most widely used explanation of quantum mechanics is the Copenhagen interpretation. Its premise “is as easy to state as it is hard to swallow: when a quantum system is subjected to a measurement, its wavefunction *collapses*,”³¹ which produces definitive results. The Copenhagen interpretation is an indeterministic or necessarily

²⁹ Christoph Sommer, “Another Survey of Foundational Attitudes Towards Quantum Mechanics,” (arXiv:1301.1069) <<https://arxiv.org/abs/1303.2719>> *Quantum Physics* (March 11, 2013): 1–10. The other three highest supported interpretations were DeBoglie–Bohn, Copenhagen, and Objective Collapse.

³⁰ Baggott, *The Meaning of Quantum Theory*, 82. Physics professors continue to teach both the Schrödinger and Heisenberg methods so the debate persists about which is “better.”

³¹ Carroll, “Quantum Time,” italics original.

incomplete mathematical framework that entails wave–particle duality, the uncertainty principle, a probabilistic interpretation of the wavefunction, nonlocal nonseparable entanglement, complementarity, and some correspondence with macroscopic classical systems. Moreover, the interpretation treats the observer as a classical entity during experimentation, which introduces irreducible randomness that prevents the prediction of experimental outcomes with certainty.

In contrast to the Copenhagen interpretation, the Relative State Formation, better known as the Many Worlds interpretation, does not collapse the quantum wavefunction upon observation. Instead, measuring the universe causes it to branch into two separate, concurrent universes, one for each complementary value. The observer likewise exists in both universes but in different entangled states.³² This situation explains Schrödinger’s cat paradox; the cat simultaneously is dead and alive in different universes, not in the same one. A slight variation posits that each quantum transition apportions different superposition terms among a large, possibly infinite, number of concurrently existing parallel universes. Both Many Worlds and Parallel Worlds interpretations exhibit relationality through branching or interrelating universes, respectively.

Another quantum interpretation is called Consistent Histories. It correlates wavefunctions and probabilities by employing “a sequence of quantum events... at successive times.”³³ Due to its random probabilistic nature, quantum mechanics requires

³² Baggott, *The Meaning of Quantum Theory*, 197. For additional information on quantum theories involving multiple and parallel universes, refer to Hugh Everett, “‘Relative State’ Formulation of Quantum Mechanics,” *Reviews of Modern Physics* 29 (1957): 454–62; Hugh Everett, “The Theory of the Universal Wavefunction,” (Princeton Dissertation), in *The Many–Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics*, eds. B.S. DeWitt and R.N. Graham (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

³³ Robert B. Griffiths, *Consistent Quantum Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3. A quantum history is comparable to selecting a card or tossing a coin numerous times in succession.

a complete family of histories to represent all alternative, mutually exclusive event outcomes, even those results that ultimately are nonsensical.³⁴ Each consistent histories family maintains a relational framework of probabilities and the formal rules of Boolean logic. Though several families are logically consistent internally, they are not necessarily consistent with each other. Moreover, measurement is not a problem with consistent histories. Quantum time dependence is probabilistic, with probabilities assigned to histories after they achieve consistency.

Rather than focus on what systems are, the Relational interpretation of quantum physics expresses how systems interrelate and correlate. Similar to the theory of relativity, Relational interpretation examines “the way systems affect one another in the course of physical interactions [so that] state and physical quantities refer always to the interaction, or the relation, between two systems.”³⁵ Thus, a particle’s location or any other property “is only determined in relation to a certain observer, or to a certain quantum reference system, or similar.”³⁶ Quantum events manifest relationality among systems since measurement or interactions between systems create essential relations. This implies that self-measurement is not possible, which “forces all properties to be referred to another system”³⁷ and be in relation with it. Consequently, the Relational interpretation validates being as being-in-relation from a quantum mechanics viewpoint.

³⁴ Ronald Omnès, *Understanding Quantum Mechanics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 138.

³⁵ Federico Laudisa and Carlo Rovelli, “Relational Quantum Mechanics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Online (January 2, 2008), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qm-relational/>> (accessed July 1, 2016). For more information on the relational interpretation, refer to Carlo Rovelli, “Relational Quantum Mechanics,” *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* 35, no. 8 (1996): 1637–78.

³⁶ *Ibid.* The relationship between the observer and a quantum system is similar to the notion of special relativity.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Physicist Karen Barad employs relational ontologies and interpretations within her agential realist framework. The framework consists of intra–actions connoting “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies”³⁸ as opposed to individual agents who interact. Hence, intra–action recognizes distinct agencies “in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements.”³⁹ These relational interpretations quite possibly validate religious (cultural, racial, political, and national) pluralism as necessary in describing and connecting various traditions as an ensemble of events (truths) that not only define a specific belief system yet also identify religions in relation to each other.

Quantum Entanglement

Quantum physics possesses a unique physical resource known as entanglement that relates aspects of superposition and measurement across multiple particles. Though mysterious and difficult to understand, Schrödinger asserts entanglement is not just “one, but rather *the* specific characteristic trait of quantum mechanics”⁴⁰ directing natural science to investigate quantum phenomena. Entanglement occurs when direct interaction between two or more individual particles creates an interdependence. Their being is being–in–relation to each other, exemplifying relational ontology at subatomic levels. In nature, atomic electron shells always contain entangled electrons, while photon

³⁸ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 33.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Erwin Schrödinger, “Discussion of Probability Relations between Separated Systems,” *Mathematical Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society* 31, no. 4 (1935): 555, italics original. Schrödinger originated the term “entanglement” in the article and used it in correspondence with Einstein. Although many of quantum physics’ mysterious properties derive from notions in classical physics, the uniqueness of entanglement only manifests at subatomic levels.

entanglement happens in the chemistry of plant photosynthesis.⁴¹ To create entangled particles for experimentation, physicists induce collisions within superconducting super-colliders or split light particles from laser beams using crystals.⁴² Entanglement happens between indistinguishable (similar) particles as well as the more intriguing entanglement of dissimilar particles.⁴³ These contrasting forms of entanglement combined with swapping or transferring particles between systems illustrates an extended universal relationality more integrated than previously thought.⁴⁴ Both entanglement situations establish analogical parallels that encourage relationships through interreligious dialogue within and between religious traditions.

Entangled particles do not entail multiple wavefunctions; rather, they exhibit a single joint wavefunction with reciprocal correlations, which necessarily contributes in describing the entire relational system. Thus, an entangled system's "wavefunction is not simply a product of the wavefunctions or its components,"⁴⁵ but the sum of probability distributions for each possible measurement associated with the interrelated, holistic

⁴¹ For more information, refer to Frank Jensen, *Introduction to Computational Chemistry* (West Sussex, England: John Wiley and Sons, 2007); Mohan Sarovar, Akihito Ishizaki, Graham R. Fleming, and K. Birgitta Whaley, "Quantum Entanglement in Photosynthetic Light Harvesting Complexes," *Nature Physics* 6 (2010): 462–7.

⁴² Anton Zeilinger, "Why the Quantum? 'It' from 'Bit'? A Participatory Universe? Three Far-Reaching Challenges from John Archibald Wheeler and their Relation to Experiment," in *Science and Ultimate Reality: Quantum Theory, Cosmology, and Complexity*, eds. John D Barrow, Paul W. Davies, and Charles L. Harper, Jr. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 206.

⁴³ The definition of entanglement derives from the Pauli Exclusion Principle (entangled electrons possess symmetrical values; therefore they may not occupy the same quantum state simultaneously). For more information, refer to Wolfgang Pauli, *Writings on Physics and Philosophy*, eds. Charles Paul Enz and Karl von Meyenn, trans. Robert Schlapp (Cambridge, England: Springer-Verlag, 1994); Baggott, *The Meaning of Quantum Theory*, 55ff. A Bose-Einstein condensate (BEC) forms when particles cool to low enough temperatures that their quantum wavefunctions become entangled to form a single, macroscopic state.

⁴⁴ Matthäus Halder, et al. "Entangling Independent Photons by Time Measurement," *Nature Physics* 3 (2007): 692–5.

⁴⁵ Omnès, *Understanding Quantum Mechanics*, 274.

system, not for each particle. How this contribution occurs highlights a significant distinction between classical and quantum mechanics. In the former, the total value of a system equals the sum of subsystem values, but in quantum mechanics, the total system value is more complex than the relationships of its subsystem values. Quantum entanglement also increases particle indeterminacy and uncertainty. If one knows the state of the whole system, then in classical physics, one knows the state of its parts; however, with entangled correlated states, individual parts are unknown since “the pieces of the system need not be in a definite state.”⁴⁶ Interreligious dialogue offers the opportunity for individual religions to interrelate as a holistic system for the greater good. Although particularity is positive and enriching, when religious traditions work together their unified efforts are greater than individual results.

Nonlocality and Nonseparability Relational Traits

In classical physics, as the distance between individual objects increases they separate, become nonlocal, and act as independent systems. Yet whether local or nonlocal, entangled quantum particles behave as a single, nonseparable system, implying a counterintuitive “nonlocality [or] a ‘togetherness–in–separation.’”⁴⁷ Indeed, one of entanglement’s mysteries is that when measuring a characteristic of an entangled particle, scientists know the value of the other particle’s equivalent characteristic without observing it. Often misunderstood as relational action between entangled particles across great distances that exceeds the speed of light, nonlocality seems to contradict Einstein’s

⁴⁶ Seth Lloyd, *Programming the Universe: A Quantum Computer Scientist Takes on the Cosmos* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2006), 118.

⁴⁷ Polkinghorne, “The Demise of Democritus,” 6.

theory of relativity. Einstein was skeptical about quantum nonlocality, calling it “spooky actions at a distance.”⁴⁸ Nevertheless, nonlocality complies even though it “violates the spirit, but not the letter, of relativity theory.”⁴⁹ Communication or transfer of information does not occur at or faster than light-speed between entangled particles. When measuring two entangled particles, physicists can only compare the results retrospectively, thus preserving causality. Each particle’s actual value is random until measured, though a reciprocally correlated relation between entangled particles is defined and therefore predictable. Hence, by measuring one entangled particle, the physicist knows the other particle’s value without needing to measure it.

Within Einstein’s classical physics worldview, nonlocal objects are separate; they occupy independent locations within the space-time continuum. Separability represents the “being thus”⁵⁰ of independent objects in the real world; quantum entanglement exhibits nonseparability, which contradicts this substance notion of reality. Entangled particles remain interconnected within wavefunctions until an external influence, such as measurement, causes decoherence and disentangles them. Nonseparability authenticates being as being-in-relation and philosophical concepts of holism that “cast severe doubts on the common view of the world as consisting of concrete, unchangeable, self-contained individuals.”⁵¹ With holism “the properties of the parts of a holistic system are primarily

⁴⁸ Max Born, *The Born–Einstein Letters: Correspondence between Albert Einstein and Max and Hedwig Born from 1916 to 1955*, trans. Irene Born (New York, NY: Walker and Company, 1971), 158. Einstein borrowed this phrase from Leibniz who was complaining about Newton’s notions of gravity.

⁴⁹ Sandu Popescu and Daniel Rohrlich, “The Joy of Entanglement,” in *Introduction to Quantum Computation*, eds. K. Lo, S. Popescu, and T. P. Spiller (Singapore: World-Scientific, 1998), 9.

⁵⁰ Born, *The Born–Einstein Letters*, 170.

⁵¹ Vassilios Karakostas, “Atomism versus Holism in Science and Philosophy,” in *Science Education in Focus*, ed. Mary V. Thomase (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publications, 2008), 256.

relational”⁵² to the whole. Quantum entanglement emulates holism by exhibiting inherent relationality as an interconnected web of parts influencing and being influenced by the whole quantum system. Relationships between entangled particles are more essential than the individual particles themselves, a relevant fact for religious traditions to contemplate when becoming relationally entangled during interreligious dialogue. Furthermore, the quantum entanglement characteristics of nonlocality and nonseparability specify relationality applicable to interreligious dialogue. Strong relationships develop with face-to-face interactions but the results of dialogue and continuous prayerful encouragement often occur when dialogic participants return to their communities and share their new insights. Furthermore, respect and understanding evolve as religious traditions retain their diversity yet recognize the greater reality of their relational nonseparability.

Einstein–Podolsky–Rosen (EPR) Argument

Einstein and his colleagues Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen addressed their concerns about quantum mechanics, particularly entanglement, in a 1935 paper known as the Einstein–Podolsky–Rosen (EPR) Argument. The paper questions several aspects of quantum mechanics, including whether it is a complete theory. To be complete, “every element of the physical reality must have a counterpart in the physical theory.”⁵³ This definition assumes entangled quantum particles must be separate and local. Hence, the EPR paper establishes the following paradox: either each entangled quantum particle possesses local, separate, realities or the entangled wavefunction is not complete.

⁵² Ibid., 257.

⁵³ Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsky, and Nathan Rosen, “Can Quantum–Mechanical Description of Physical Reality Be Considered Complete?” *Physical Review* 47 (March 25, 1935): 777.

The authors also asked how an apparent instantaneous information transfer occurs between entangled particles when their wavefunction collapses. To affirm his theory of special relativity, Einstein argued that each particle's state contains hidden local variables so "their local interaction with a measuring device determines the measurement result."⁵⁴ Schrödinger rebutted that since the order of measurement is unknown, entangled particles possess information about all the probabilities of the wavefunction. Upon observing one particle, other entangled particles yield their appropriately correlated reciprocal values.⁵⁵ Since each particle controls the measurement outcome, no spooky action or transmission faster than the speed of light is necessary.

John Stewart Bell's work tests the notion of local hidden variables as well as information transmission over great distances at the speed of light. He starts with the assumption that if local variables exist then they must be separate; so he designs an experiment "where the difference between the assumptions of separable realism and quantum mechanics result in opposite conclusions."⁵⁶ As a result, Bell's Inequality Theorem mathematically predicts behavioral limits on the correlations between entangled particles, which local variables (hidden or not) can predict or reproduce. According to Bell, if a hidden variable "is local it will not agree with quantum mechanics, and if it agrees with quantum mechanics it will not be local. This is what the theorem says."⁵⁷ Many physicists have employed Bell's Theorem over the years to affirm that quantum entanglement exists. In 2015, Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands reported

⁵⁴ Popescu, "The Joy of Entanglement," 6.

⁵⁵ Schrödinger, "Discussion of Probability Relations," 559.

⁵⁶ Omnès, *Understanding Quantum Mechanics*, 66.

⁵⁷ John S. Bell, *Speakable and Unsayable in Quantum Mechanics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 65.

a loophole-free experiment that concurs with predictions of quantum theory and of Bell's Theorem.⁵⁸ Furthermore, because entanglement contains elements of nonlocality without common causality, Bell's Theorem also demonstrates the world is not locally realistic. Local realism assumes the values of physical properties are independent of observation (realism) and that one measurement does not affect the values of others (locality).⁵⁹ In negating one condition of the EPR paradox, the EPR argument concludes that a quantum wavefunction describes an incomplete theory.

Entanglement as Relational

Rational scientific conditioning generally tends to ignore relational patterns in nature. Yet cooperation along with collaboration are prevalent in biological evolution while the ordered structures of chemistry and physics exhibit traits of interconnectivity that imply "relating is the universal blueprint"⁶⁰ of existence. Classical physics supports the "essential interconnectedness of all things [by suggesting] the universe is a single system that possesses an internal order."⁶¹ Empirical evidence of quantum entanglement "undeniably shows that what there is in the world is more tightly intertwined than just by [Newtonian] spatiotemporal relations among separately existing entities."⁶² In other

⁵⁸ The Delft experiment removes two key loopholes skeptics think biases results. For a detailed, technical explanation, refer to Ben Hensen, et al., "Loophole-Free Bell Inequality Violation Using Electron Spins Separated by 1.3 Kilometres," *Nature* 526 (October 29, 2015): 682–6.

⁵⁹ Michael A. Nielsen and Isaac L. Chuang, *Quantum Computation and Quantum Information* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117. For more information on hidden variables, realism, and causality, refer to James T. Cushing, *Quantum Mechanics: Historical Contingency and the Copenhagen Hegemony* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 124ff.

⁶⁰ Diarmuid O'Murchu, "How to Relate in a Quantum Universe!" in *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellechambers (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 144.

⁶¹ Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001), 72.

⁶² Karakostas, "Atomism versus Holism," 270.

words, entanglement is not a causal relation nor a combination of two or more particles but rather multiple particle states representing a single entity. Because entanglement involves multiple particles, the possibility exists that “to some degree, everything in the universe is entangled.”⁶³ Likewise, Heisenberg posits that the world is “a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole.”⁶⁴ Relationships thus constitute reality; interconnectedness extends from subatomic particles to delicate ecosystems to human societies, which implies that diverse religions are also ontologically relational. Such intimate associations between religious traditions promote inter–relationality to alleviate challenges diversity introduces during interreligious dialogue.

Science–Religion Entanglement

Science and religion have an extensive history of entanglement. Although their interdisciplinary relationship has not always been beneficial or benevolent, it provides insights and lessons learned for interreligious dialogue. Many scientific discoverers, such as Galileo, Newton, or Einstein were influenced by deep religious convictions. They reconciled potential conflicts by admitting, as Einstein did, that “science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind [since] science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion.”⁶⁵ Vocal atheistic or agnostic scientists including Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, are openly

⁶³ Devin Powell, “Entanglement: The ‘Spooky Action’ Really Exists,” *Discover* 37, no. 6 (July/August 2016): 59.

⁶⁴ Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, 65.

⁶⁵ Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 1954), 46.

critical of religion; they claim that God is a delusion, religion is poisonous, and that reason eventually will replace religion. Harris specifically criticizes the Abrahamic religions yet is open to Eastern views such as *Advaita Vedanta* and *Dzogchen* that expand spirituality and consciousness.

Nevertheless, a 2015 Rice University worldwide survey of scientists challenges longstanding assumptions about tensions between science and religion. Perceptions perpetuate “a war of words fueled by scientists, religious people and those in between”⁶⁶ since the study finds that a majority of scientists self-identify as religious. The percentages and religious convictions vary by country; however “science is a global endeavor and as long as science is global, then we need to recognize that the borders between science and religion are more permeable than most people think.”⁶⁷ Hence, contemporary scientists and theologians acknowledge a need for rapprochement. Recent ecumenical and interreligious dialogue inspires collaboration between the distinct disciplines. The goal is to admit that science best describes the physical world but it must interrelate with metaphysics and religion for a complete account of total reality.

Through respectful relationships and defined subject matter boundaries, scientists and religious scholars both benefit from interdisciplinary dialogue. The scientific method and physical evidence prevents religion from spiraling into superstition while religion evaluates the effect of science on society and suggests moral and ethical boundaries for scientific and technological advances. Furthermore, scientific theories stimulate novel

⁶⁶ Amy McCaig, “First Worldwide Survey of Religion and Science: No, Not All Scientists Are Atheists,” *Current News* (December 3, 2015) <<http://news.rice.edu/2015/12/03/first-worldwide-survey-of-religion-and-science-no-not-all-scientists-are-atheists/#sthash.T51C35vv.dpuf>> (accessed November 12, 2016).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

theological discussions leading to new religious affirmations or interpretations imparting “credibility and the effectiveness of its [religious] apologetic function with regard to contemporary science in the modern world.”⁶⁸ Religion also reminds science that interconnectedness, whether cosmic or quantum, transcends beyond physical reality to encompass spiritual plus teleological goals so that science does not reduce or limit reality to only empirical results. Constructive interreligious dialogue offers comparable benefits between various yet entangled religious traditions.

Similarities and Differences

Examining the relationship between science and religion reveals many similarities as well as some differences. Scientists and religious scholars each utilize the scientific method to some extent, albeit from different perspectives. Each group logically deduces explanations about reality using diverse sources; “science takes in reality through methodical observation. Theology takes in reality through faith,”⁶⁹ Both disciplines leverage valuable research and insight from previous experts. New scientific discoveries often result in discarding previous ones but religion necessarily integrates new concepts or corrects distortions within its tenets. Scientists initiate new ideas about reality through observation and experimentation; many religions believe creation discloses aspects of its Creator or the Creator reveals hints of divine mystery through direct religious encounters.

In most scientific disciplines, repeatable verifiable methods complete with corresponding experimental data establish general agreement, whereas interreligious

⁶⁸ Mark William Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 210.

⁶⁹ Javier Leach, *Mathematics and Religion: Our Languages of Sign and Symbol* (West Conshohocken, PA, Templeton Press, 2010), 123.

consensus proves more difficult due to diverse cultural, metaphysical, and social perspectives, in addition to lingering historically adversarial relationships among faith traditions. The level of belief in each discipline's verities varies to a large degree. Faith in scientific theories fulfills one's intellectual curiosity but religious faith has personal and social ramifications beyond mere understanding. Religious conviction reaffirms authentic humanness; therefore, it is more demanding because "existential factors play a significant role in the way in which people approach the possibility of religious belief."⁷⁰ Within believing communities, people flourish both individually and in ethical relation to others, particularly toward disadvantaged or marginalized people.

Despite dissimilarity between science and religion, both disciplines search for truth about reality. John Polkinghorne envisions "a cousinly relationship between the ways in which science and theology each pursue truth within the proper domains of their interpreted experience"⁷¹ that is reminiscent of the scientific method. Scientists start with observation and questions current logical or mathematical models fail to explain. Next, they analyze the models to evaluate what the models predict (hypothesize) and what issues remain unanswered. Scientists then design and perform experiments to test their hypothesis and explore the remaining questions. They update the models accordingly with experimental results and repeat the process if necessary. In interreligious dialogue, participants discuss tenets that challenge presuppositions about other faiths and notions of truth. Religious scholars analyze doctrines and scripture using historical-critical methods that engage scientific perspectives from anthropology, geology, archeology, and other

⁷⁰ John Polkinghorne, *Quantum Physics and Theology: An Unexpected Kinship* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 14.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15. For more information on Polkinghorne's cousinly relationship, refer to pp. 15-22.

sciences in order to discover new insights, resolve unanswered questions, and achieve greater understanding about their own and other religion's truths. If necessary, they also repeat the process.

Science and Religion in Dialogue

Although a longstanding dialogic history exists between science and philosophy, with the advent of quantum physics and its revelations about a probabilistic rather than a deterministic reality, scientists increasingly explore different aspects of philosophy for direction and insight. Philosophical deliberations by scientists about the meaning of measurable outcomes from wavefunction observations overlap traditionally metaphysical and religious questions regarding the nature of reality, the existence of God, as well as the origin and purpose of the universe. These topics establish common ground and shared interest for interdisciplinary dialogue. Interestingly, science–religion dialogue compels theologians to reassess and reaffirm long–held beliefs, such as ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments about God's existence and active relationship with the world. Scientific observation, empirical methods, and logic introduce new discoveries along with perspectives that challenge theologians either to “emphasize the transcendence of God with renewed vigor and clarity or to abandon the doctrine altogether.”⁷² One result of science–religion dialogue is a resurgence in natural theology that argues God's existence from reason and experience intermingled with faith.

Science–religion dialogue results in mutual independence, ideological conflict, or sometimes understanding and respect. As a dialogic method, creative common interaction

⁷² Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics*, 202.

encourages science and religion to inform each other, reciprocally as well as heuristically. Scientific theories provide support, constraint, or queries for developing theological ideas while theology offers suggestions and selection criteria for evaluating scientific theories. Each discipline also benefits from philosophical assumptions, interpretation, and opinion. Interreligious dialogue likewise benefits since an essential component for effectiveness is mutual bidirectional interaction and contribution to avoid hegemony and marginalization.

Nevertheless, Neil Ormerod cautions scientific and theological scholars against conflating aspects of physics and metaphysics, especially in dialogue. He believes that as “fascinating as quantum mechanics is, the claims that insights into its account of physical phenomena give rise to a privileged metaphysical stance betrays an implicit metaphysical reductionism.”⁷³ To understand quantum physics and enter the conversation requires an extensive mathematical background that most philosophers or theologians do not possess. Empirical data, which is fundamental to science, perpetuates “what [Bernard] Lonergan calls the myth that reality is somehow ‘already–out–there–now’ waiting to be seen.”⁷⁴ This notion limits physics and other sciences to recognizing only visible or experiential aspects of the physical world. Because metaphysics pertains to being as being, it encompasses larger realities, which provides a space for dialogue. By analogy, larger realities also expand dialogic interreligious encounters that generate new levels of understanding between religious traditions.

⁷³ Neil Ormerod, “Bernard Lonergan and the Recovery of a Metaphysical Frame,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 962.

⁷⁴ Ibid. For more information, refer to Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 276–7.

Theological Entanglement

Due to a reliance on empirical data for certitude, some scientists have difficulty acknowledging the existence of transcendent ultimate reality. Yet, the indeterministic nature of quantum physics provides “material evidence of a universe so mysteriously entangled as to escape the rival classicisms that pit science and theology against each other in the first place.”⁷⁵ Science–religion dialogue questions whether connections such as quantum entanglement or the God–world relationship are relationally ontological or analogical. Polkinghorne asserts quantum entanglement is ontological; it defines reality or the actual being of particles. Entanglement is a “subtle form of inter–relationality”⁷⁶ that he uses to describe the God–world relationship, divine action, and causality. Though not scientifically evident, “relational ontology contains in its very nature a dimension of transcendence, an openness of being, a pointing to a beyond the self, to seeking communion with the Other.”⁷⁷ Scientific, metaphysical, or quantum claims to know being–in–itself, existentially cannot entail all of existence; a wavefunction describing the universe requires measurement from an outside observer.⁷⁸ Some Hindu philosophies and the Abrahamic faiths, for example, believe a transcendent God is the outside observer.

Kirk Wegter–McNelly and other Christian theologians see quantum entanglement as an analogy for the God–world relationship and a theological framework describing the Holy Trinity. In Trinitarian theology, three distinct persons are one God; their divinity is

⁷⁵ Catherine Keller, “The Entangled Cosmos: An Experiment in Physical Theopoetics,” *Journal of Cosmology* (September 2012): 2.

⁷⁶ Polkinghorne, “The Demise of Democritus,” 7.

⁷⁷ John D. Zizioulas, “Relational Ontology: Insights from Patristic Thought,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 155.

⁷⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 448. In some interpretations of quantum mechanics, the observer actually is part of the measurement. For more information, refer to Everett, “Relative State,” 454–62.

in relation through mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*), while quantum entangled systems “carry their states not as individuals but together in their relations among their parts.”⁷⁹ From Karl Rahner’s rule that the economic Trinity (relational state) is the immanent Trinity (relational identity) and vice versa, theologically, “entanglement is the relational seat of divinity within the Trinitarian God [which expresses being and] the fundamentally active nature of divine relationality.”⁸⁰ Yet, quantum entanglement is not a philosophical monism nor physical modalism; it refers to discrete particles exhibiting individual behaviors in relational holism that parallels God’s own relationality of differentiation among parts and of communion with the whole.

God maintains an entangled presence with the world to transform it according to God’s ultimate purpose. Since some scientists are atheistic or agnostic, this implication of divine action is a mutual concern for scientists as well as theologians. If given a choice, scientists would prefer the idea of a deistic Creator establishing universal laws (general providence) to a God who directly causes specific events in world history (special providence). Quantum physics theorizes the universe is a system of possibilities; the cosmos not as predictable as previously thought. This unpredictability enables human freedom to influence aspects of creation while facilitating God’s special providence. Within quantum potentiality, divine causality entangles with human causality even though God’s primary causality radically differs from humanity’s secondary causality.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Kirk Wegter–McNelly, *The Entangled God: Divine Relationality and Quantum Physics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 128.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 128–9. For more information on “Rahner’s Rule,” refer to Karl Rahner, *The Trinity (Milestones in Catholic Theology)* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2001); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1993).

⁸¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, <<http://www.basilica.org/pages/ebooks/St.%20Thomas%20Aquinas–Summa%20Theologica.pdf>> (accessed January 30, 2016), IA 2.3.

God's presence does not direct or steer events, rather its entangled character "grants the world its own causal integrity"⁸² to evolve under its own power, even if it leads to suffering. According to the Buddhist doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent co-origination), every relation is a cause for suffering or enlightenment depending on one's engagement with others.⁸³ A meaningful theory of causation for all reality must account for relations at quantum levels as well as causal social and religious interactions at macroscopic levels.

Causal theories of relationality account for human and quantum entanglement at macroscopic and microscopic levels, respectively. On one hand, causal "understanding of relations suggests that we are intimately connected with aspects of the world we normally think have no claim upon us,"⁸⁴ which may evoke compassion and responsibility toward eliminating domination, prejudice, and injustice. According to Thomas Aquinas, the Creator's relationship as the ultimate cause of all creation, grants it cause and effect according to its purpose or operation in the world.⁸⁵ God does not withdraw from creation to give it freedom; rather, God's presence and creative causality assure creation's proper autonomy and integrity.⁸⁶ Tension about this topic during science-religion dialogue occurs from evolving notions about divine and agential causality. From notions of an ontological force that affects the universe, causality becomes an epistemological way of thinking about the world in terms of naturally occurring relations. In other words,

⁸² Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God*, 141.

⁸³ Wesley J. Wildman, "An Introduction to Relational Ontology," in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 57.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 105, a. 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

causality is an “epistemological category of predictability rather than the ontological category of dependence”⁸⁷ at metaphysical levels. Consequently, interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogue focuses on how God’s causality interacts within nature. Some scientists suggest indeterminacy within quantum physics is one causal point-of-entry but the ultimate or first cause does not conflict with other causes.⁸⁸ The Creator’s interaction with creation does not require humanly contrived explanation.

Ethical Entanglement

Contemporary ethical issues entangle science and religion in dialogue, especially scientific advances in medicine and ecological concerns. From the starting point that human life has value, medical ethics oscillates between doing everything possible to preserve life and stopping treatments that no longer contribute to the quality of life. New medical breakthroughs and technological advances extend how society defines human life from conception to death. Religion’s role is to introduce tension into healthcare’s ethical decision-making process; the focus is on fairness, justice, and what is best for the patient and society’s common good. Many new costly techniques utilize scarce resources and often are dehumanizing to the patient’s body and spirit. Religious bioethics advocates medicine that cares for the integrated, holistic human being.

Moreover, ethical decisions must account for social, historical, cultural, and religious contexts that influence a person’s motivations and decisions. These relational

⁸⁷ Michael J. Dodds, “The Doctrine of Causality in Aquinas and the Book of Causes: One Key to Understanding the Nature of Divine Action,” Presentation at the Thomistic Institute, University of Notre Dame, July 2000.

⁸⁸ For more information, refer to Robert J. Russell, Nancey C. Murphy, and Chris J. Isham, eds., *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1993); Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 1, ad 1.

values determine ethical actions such as whether donating human organs is morally right. Judaism “sanctions and encourages organ donation in order to save lives”⁸⁹ while Islam considers donation “an act of merit and in certain circumstances ... an obligation.”⁹⁰ Catholicism regards organ donation as a voluntary heroic expression of self-sacrifice, genuine charity, and fraternal love for others.⁹¹ Since two important tenets of Buddhism are to relieve suffering and perform charity, Buddhists may donate their organs. No religious law prevents Hindus from donating organs; in fact, “Hindu mythology includes stories in which parts of the human body are used for the benefit of other humans and society.”⁹² This brief comparison regarding organ donation exemplifies how religious views interrelate with other social values in determining bioethical ethics.

Most humans are conscious of their ethical and social relationality with others due to their interdependence with nature, the earth, and the universe. Animistic people, for example, believe harmony with nature is primary; all life forces are interrelated as relatives, including animals, plants, and rocks, nothing is inanimate.⁹³ These perceptions influence community justice, economy, politics, and culture. Because one’s values and spirituality manifest in thought and action, respect for all beings yields justice and peace.

Eastern religions emphasize an integral, spiritual relationship among all living things, especially sentient beings. The Jains, for example, revere life so much they use

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Donate the Gift of Life,” <<http://www.organdonor.gov/index.html>> (accessed March 30, 2012).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, (March 25, 1995): para. 86, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html> (accessed April 4, 2012).

⁹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

⁹³ George E. Tinker, “The Integrity of Creation: Restoring Trinitarian Balance,” *The Ecumenical Review* 41, no. 4 (April 2010): 528.

brooms or whisks to sweep insects from their path to avoid stepping on them.⁹⁴ However, people in developed westernized societies tend to lose a sense of connection with nature and do not value it for its own fundamental worth. The term environment “is originally a social concept that tries to express the individual’s dependence on society—i.e., it is related only to man.”⁹⁵ As a result, notions of anthropomorphic, anthropocentric superiority cloud humanity’s judgement; humans fail to recognize “a web of relatedness that makes the dynamic, diverse, and complex cosmos a ‘universe’ [in which] nothing is complete itself without everything else.”⁹⁶ Historically, humans dominate the world selfishly exploiting natural resources for money or power without considering or deluding themselves about the ramifications to other creatures or themselves.

Ecofeminist and liberation theologians link ecology with justice. Hegemony or domination of any form “demands a social reordering to bring about just and loving interrelationships”⁹⁷ that eventually heal the earth. Right relationships pertaining to environmental ethics foster genuine, altruistic concern for nature itself. Nevertheless, humanity’s population growth and development indiscriminately destroy precious habitats, which hasten species extinction and handicap the earth’s capability to sustain life. When food and natural resources become scarce, the world’s poor and most vulnerable people are more likely to suffer as a result.⁹⁸ According to the Gaia Hypothesis, humanity is part of multiple, interrelated ecosystems, and therefore depends

⁹⁴ Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 157, 161.

⁹⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 441.

⁹⁶ Johnathan Hart, *What Are They Saying about Environmental Theology?* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2004): 77.

⁹⁷ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 2–3.

⁹⁸ For specific examples and more information, refer to Hart, *What Are They Saying*, 72–5.

upon but also compromises the health of the earth. Appropriating quantum physics terminology, Thomas Berry states, “every reality of the universe is intimately present to every other reality of the universe and finds its fulfillment in this mutual presence,”⁹⁹ therefore, “nothing in the universe could be itself apart from every other being in the universe.”¹⁰⁰ Quantum entanglement offers an apropos metaphor for environmental ethics since it overcomes dualisms and models relationality, which are vital components for resolving ecological as well as interreligious issues.

The experience of suffering and concern for the future are frequent discussion topics during interreligious dialogue. In fact, interreligious work focuses on mutual issue-oriented activities and agendas dealing with conflict resolution as well as socio-economic and environmental problems.¹⁰¹ These problems ignore religious and national boundaries since they represent some common dilemmas affecting all people across all cultures and all generations. Like-minded people reach out to those from other faiths in a dialogue of life and action aimed at battling these mutual concerns. Developing a global ethic may facilitate the integration of diverse worldviews. In the meantime, interreligious dialogue explores mutual aspects of justice, human rights, and issues that harm the planet.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin extends present ecological concerns to include cosmic evolution and the eschaton. His notion of a divine milieu provides an understanding of environmental changes and species extinction within a larger framework of evolutionary

⁹⁹ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 106.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York, NY: Bell Tower, 1999), 33.

¹⁰¹ Kusumita P. Pedersen, “The Interfaith Movement: An Incomplete Assessment,” in *State of the Interreligious Movement Report, June 2008*, Council for the Parliament of the World’s Religions, 228–57. <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/_includes/FCKcontent/File/State_of_the_Interreligious_Movement_Report_June_2008.pdf> (accessed August 9, 2013).

or geographical time.¹⁰² From Aristotelian–Thomistic metaphysics and the Cosmic Christ from the Pauline epistles (Eph. 1, 3–10; Col. 1, 15–20), Teilhard develops the “vision of the Cosmic Christ as the goal of the cosmic process on this earth and with respect to the salvation of the human race.”¹⁰³ He describes evolution as increasingly complex growth and overall direction toward an Omega Point, but “increasing complexity in one direction decreases flexibility in another”¹⁰⁴ such as the slow evolution of complex human beings versus rapid responses of viruses to environmental conditions. For Teilhard, current suffering, struggling, and sin are part of an unfinished creation. Although no scientific evidence supports an entangled Omega Point of genealogy, paleontology, and theology, many Christians believe in an eschatological union with the Cosmic Christ.

Implications for Interreligious Dialogue

Relational aspects of quantum entanglement disclose a model of connectedness for overcoming adversarial conditions in interreligious dialogue. On the one hand, entanglement represents a paradigm of unity that also maintains subatomic particularity. The observer’s critical role in quantum measurement suggests the advantages of a similar function during interreligious dialogue to validate, interpret, and document what is said and understood between the participants. Witnesses promote credibility and respect for the contributors, their religious beliefs, and the actual dialogic process. Moreover, formal

¹⁰² Mary Evelyn Tucker, “Teilhard’s Ecological Spirituality,” in *Rediscovering Teilhard’s Fire*, ed. Kathleen Duffy (Philadelphia, PA: St. Joseph’s University Press, 2010) 33.

¹⁰³ Joseph A. Bracken, “Panentheism in the Context of the Theology and Science Dialogue,” *Open Theology* 1 (2014): 6.

¹⁰⁴ Ruth Page, “Panentheism and Pansyntheism: God in Relation,” in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*, eds. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 223. For more information on Teilhard’s concept of an Omega Point, refer to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1959), 26–63, 297–8.

documentation facilitates continuity for future discourse and identifies who is responsible for any resultant outcomes or actions. On the other hand, unpredictability introduces elements of mystery within quantum physics similar to many beliefs taken on faith in various religious traditions. Quantum superimposed states also reflect “a phenomenon, which is impossible, absolutely impossible to explain in any classical way.”¹⁰⁵ However, theologians are adept at discussing mystery and difficult to explain phenomena such as miracles and transcendent reality.

Entanglement’s inherent co-determinism and probability generate a variety of scientific interpretations about quantum reality that parallel the plurality of religious traditions. Dialogue among scientists or between science and religion contends with hegemonic, linguistic, and epistemological challenges familiar to interreligious dialogue. Scientific concepts, for example, serve as frameworks while technical terms and language act as interfaces for improving communication, translation, and mutual understanding during interreligious dialogue. Additionally, a relational solution that stands outside religious traditions extends and encourages dialogue and participation from under-represented religious groups and from scientific, political, and cultural entities. Such dialogic interconnection also promotes a variety of valuable ideological responses to humanity’s ultimate questions.

Hegemony

Scientific discoveries reveal naturally occurring hierarchical characteristics found in the universe. Research confirms that Earth and its creatures are small components

¹⁰⁵ Keller, “The Entangled Cosmos,” 6.

within a vast cosmos. Quantum mechanics explains how subatomic particles constitute atoms, which organize inanimate and animate objects in nature. As relational beings, humans form societies comprising various interrelated, hierarchical levels of constituents. Physical processes and personal relationships “connect us to our universe, to other creatures and to one another. We share the same origin and, in one sense, we share the same fate.”¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, science–religion dialogue as well as interreligious dialogue historically exemplifies humanity’s hegemonic tendencies.

Considered the queen of sciences during medieval times, theology dictated the topics along with the course of scientific studies at universities. In a reversal of sorts, the physical sciences now appear to determine the focus and direction of several academic disciplines. Quantum physics theories that question metaphysical assumptions about reality particularly influence philosophical and theological studies. Whether among religious traditions or between academic disciplines, “dialogue must be mutual. Neither [party] can dominate the other, claiming sole right to set the agenda or have the final word.”¹⁰⁷ Power imbalances inhibit conversation and contribution or worse since intellectual representatives and those in powerful positions tend to marginalize others then disregard or dismiss what they have to say.

Still, the development of scientific theory is a dialogic process of persuasion. Using mathematical models and experimental evidence, scientists attempt to convince each other that their theoretical concepts are correct. The scientific community accepts a new theory only after a majority of scientists agrees with numerous proofs. Although the

¹⁰⁶ William Stoeger, “Key Developments in Physics Challenging Philosophy and Theology,” in *Religion and Science: History, Method, Dialogue*, eds. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 187.

¹⁰⁷ Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics*, 206.

approach possesses democratic aspects, it is time consuming since “scientists need a good deal of persuading before they will invest belief in a new theory.”¹⁰⁸ Interreligious dialogue also involves patience and persuasion. Presenting evidence that fosters respect and relationships is a more convincing and lasting technique than hegemonic persuasion.

The history of science is full of tyrants with Newton and Bohr being two rather notorious ones. Consequently, debate regarding emerging principles of quantum physics offers some hegemonic anecdotes along with examples of what to avoid in interreligious dialogue. During intense arguments about the uncertainty principle, for example, “Bohr put Heisenberg under intolerable pressure—so much so that at one point Heisenberg was reduced to tears.”¹⁰⁹ After reaching an impasse, Wolfgang Pauli acted as referee and eventually the physicists reached a compromise. Later Heisenberg recounted “discussions with Bohr, which went through many hours till very late at night and ended almost in despair; and when at the end of the discussion I went alone for a walk in the neighboring park I repeated to myself again and again the question: Can nature possibly be as absurd as it seemed?”¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, when presenting his findings, Heisenberg acknowledged being indebted to Bohr for providing such insightful input.

In November of 1925, Schrödinger presented de Broglie’s thesis work to a group of physicists at the University of Zurich. Seminar participant Peter Debye “thought this approach to wave–particle duality to be somewhat ‘childish’ [since] to deal properly with waves one had to have a wave equation.”¹¹¹ Debye’s remarks motivated Schrödinger to

¹⁰⁸ Baggott, *The Meaning of Quantum Theory*, 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 33. Bohr still casts a shadow over quantum mechanics regarding the Copenhagen Interpretation and Newton stifled innovation for a century after his death.

¹¹⁰ Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, 13.

¹¹¹ Baggott, *The Meaning of Quantum Theory*, 21.

derive his wave mechanics equations during vacation with a woman companion, not his wife. The next year, Bohr invited Schrödinger to join him and Heisenberg to discuss divergent perspectives on quantum wave–particle theory. Schrödinger was not persuaded by Bohr’s arguments. During a particularly tense moment, “an exasperated Schrödinger pleaded with an unyielding Bohr: ‘You surely must understand Bohr that the whole idea of quantum jumps necessarily leads to nonsense. . . If we are still going to have to put up with these damn quantum jumps, I am sorry that I ever had anything to do with quantum theory.’”¹¹² Einstein likewise contributed to the contentious dialogue regarding quantum physics. In a mail correspondence with Max Born, Einstein famously writes, “quantum mechanics is certainly imposing, but an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing. The theory says a lot, but does not really bring us any closer to the secret of the ‘old one.’ I, at any rate, am convinced that *He* [sic] is not playing at dice.”¹¹³ Einstein’s concerns about spooky action and God’s gambling instigated the EPR paper.

Einstein and Bohr also vehemently disagreed about quantum entanglement. At one point during the 1927 Solvay Conference, tempers flared and Bohr retorted “Einstein, stop telling God what to do with his [sic] dice.”¹¹⁴ Although expressed heatedly, such passionate convictions refined questions and provided direction in resolving quantum paradoxes, which inspired scientists to develop mathematical equations and perform experiments in search of scientific truths about quantum physics. During interreligious dialogue, religious truths often conflict and while developing theological proofs are often

¹¹² Werner Heisenberg, *The Part and the Whole* (Munich, Germany: Verlag, 1969), 55.

¹¹³ Born, *The Born–Einstein Letters*, 90, italics original.

¹¹⁴ Erwin Schrödinger, “The Present Situation in Quantum Mechanics,” in *Quantum Theory and Measurement*, eds. John Wheeler and W. H. Zurek (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983 [1935]), 188.

more difficult to achieve than scientific ones, congenial conversation establishes an openness and respect that promotes understanding and cooperation.

Representation and Marginalization

For interdisciplinary or interreligious dialogue to be fruitful, equally reciprocal relationships are essential. Proper representation avoids hegemony by extending the conversation into new areas of discovery. Scientists present fresh perspectives, novel methods, and unique ideas for approaching religious questions. These religion-neutral suggestions eliminate hegemonic, imperialistic baggage common in religious discussions. Including representatives, methodologies, and topics from the sciences expands the scope and validity of interreligious dialogue. Moreover, without adequate interdisciplinary or interreligious knowledge, dialogic contributions derive from either naïve, misinformed, or arrogant assumptions about the others' theories. Dialogue necessitates humility since no theologian or physicist has the necessary competence to pass judgement on other religious tenets about God or theories regarding quantum reality.

Yet selectively reading scientific or religious materials provides a false sense of understanding about the topic or it perpetuates existing preconceptions. Comparing and comprehending physics or religion in relation to the other is critical for interdisciplinary dialogue; otherwise, theologians apply scientific ideas inappropriately while physicists operate from outdated, inaccurate religious concepts. Interreligious dialogue suffers the same challenges. Effective dialogue requires participants to be open-minded and possess detailed knowledge of each other's religious tenets. Hence, increased theological specialization perpetuates two issues; dialogue occurs only among elite, highly educated representatives, which marginalizes participants who lack sufficient knowledge.

Marginalization likewise occurs due to religious or political ideologies. In Nazi Germany, scientists denounced Einstein's theory of relativity as fraudulent because he was a Jew and Communists rejected it as another bourgeois reactionary idea.¹¹⁵ Modern science often marginalizes God by emphasizing hypotheses derived from observation and experimentation then advancing scientific terms and discoveries as established, widely accepted responses to humanity's ultimate concerns. To avoid dismissing God along with other vital theological viewpoints during interdisciplinary dialogue, theologians describe the divine in terms that are congruent with scientific advancements.

Another example of marginalization happens when interdisciplinary dialogue among Christians and Christian scientists ignores other religious traditions and their contributions. Although scientists engage Jewish and Muslim scholars in occasional discourse, the Abrahamic religions reflect mostly Western worldviews, which excludes Eastern religions and their viewpoints from the conversation. Ironically, Eastern religions and philosophies embrace synergy with modern science. Dialogic participants from Eastern perspectives unify the particularities of quantum physics and religious beliefs rather than construct or maintain interdisciplinary boundaries. Lack of representation from Eastern religions and philosophies perpetuates Western imperialism in interreligious dialogue as well as concerns that quantum entanglement is another Western imposition.

To counteract Western imperialism and imposition regarding modern science, Eastern physicists, such as Frifjof Capra, are contributing to the science and religion dialogue. Capra describes several pertinent parallels between Hinduism, Buddhism,

¹¹⁵ Hodgson, *Theology and Modern Physics*, 107–8. The flight of Jews and other scientists from Europe during World War II is a main reason why the United States became a scientific powerhouse in the 20th century. For more information, refer to Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

Taoism, and quantum physics in his book, *The Tao of Physics*. His starting point clarifies that the “Eastern image of the Divine is not that of a ruler who directs the world from above, but of a principle that controls everything from within.”¹¹⁶ Consequently, the universe possesses a dynamic, unified, and interrelated nature similar to what quantum theory suggests. Throughout his book, Capra explains quantum physics concepts then relates them to Eastern mystical elements. The paradoxes of quantum physics he equates to truths hidden in the contradictory riddles of *Zen koans*. Cosmic interconnectedness analogous at a subatomic level through quantum entanglement “is called Brahman in Hinduism, Dharmakaya in Buddhism, [and] Tao in Taoism. Because it transcends all concepts and categories, Buddhists also call it Tathata, or Suchness,”¹¹⁷ referring to the total wholeness of everything. A common Eastern metaphor for such relationality is a cosmic web, a network of all things and activities connected in mutual relations of probability. Additionally, Bohr’s notion of quantum complementarity is similar to the polar opposites of *yin* and *yang* in Chinese philosophy. The Confucian notion of *ch’i* or life energy compares to a quantum field in which oscillating particles of energy interact in the world in a rhythmic, eternal cosmic dance of motion expressed as the Taoist dance of the warrior or the Dance of Shiva in Hinduism.¹¹⁸ Eastern philosophy and culture value harmony, which seeks relationality through the dissolution of science–religion or interreligious borders.

¹¹⁶ Frifjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (Boulder, CO: Random House, 1975), 4.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 75–9.

Unity and Particularity

Several concepts from physics illustrate diametric poles of unity and particularity. The theory of relativity describes the unifying features of reality while quantum theory explains how the pluralism of particular particles forms all existing matter and energy. Quantum entanglement illustrates unique particles behaving as one entity. Hence, unity and particularity are features of the cosmos, since “everything in nature interacts somehow with everything else and the physical world cannot exist except as a unity of interacting individuals,”¹¹⁹ whether these individuals are subatomic particles, human beings, or religious traditions. Isolating particles, people, or religions from their intrinsic unity provides a particular viewpoint, an idealization due to observation and analysis. By analogy, when religions only present their particular viewpoints during interreligious dialogue, they exhibit isolation from the larger, all-encompassing, transcendent relationality of ultimate reality. The unified world requires plurality but with some commonality or association to achieve relationality. During interreligious dialogue, participants concentrate initially on mutual characteristics among religions to establish comradery, trust, and respect before tackling doctrinal particularities.

Quantum physics and religion share a common trait of pluralistic interpretations leading to mutual issues of unity over and against particularity. Since multiple, often-incompatible interpretations of quantum theory persist, quantum physics significantly deviates from the unified theories of classical physics. These various interpretations exemplify diversity, rather than unity, within quantum mechanics. Although scientists like closure and clear interpretations, it is indeed possible that there is no single, correct

¹¹⁹ Joseph Kaipayil, *Relationalism: A Theory of Being* (Bangalore, India: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy Publications, 2009), 42.

interpretation of quantum mechanics, which is similar to no existing single correct truth among religious traditions. Perhaps the resolution is an ontology that is concurrently relational yet unknowable for both quantum mechanics and theology. As supporting evidence, quantum interpretations remain particular because they cannot be combined; but “in order to avoid the mistake of supposing that incompatible descriptions are mutually exclusive, it is helpful to think of them as referring to different aspects of a quantum system.”¹²⁰ Likewise, interreligious dialogue encounters diverse interpretations of ultimate reality as well as issues of exclusivity, inclusivity, and pluralism. An alternative theological method is to respect and value various religious perspectives as related aspects of a larger reality or truth.

From outside the scientific community, science and its theories give the impression of unity, solidarity, or general agreement. However, “contrary to popular belief, science is a very untidy discipline,”¹²¹ especially during the development of new theories or complex, mysterious ones like quantum physics. Analogous to several initial discussions about theologies of religions, early effort toward a comprehensive quantum framework “was considered if not blasphemous, at least ‘unprofessional.’”¹²² Even though science and its theories appear monolithic, the discipline actually encourages diverse approaches in order to develop emerging possibilities. Competing theories generate dialogue and debate that challenge scientists and religious scholars to justify

¹²⁰ Griffiths, *Consistent Quantum Theory*, 365.

¹²¹ Baggott, *The Meaning of Quantum Theory*, 42.

¹²² GianCarlo Ghirardi, *Sneaking a Look at God's Cards: Unraveling the Mysteries of Quantum Mechanics*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 121.

their viewpoints. By holding various preliminary concepts in creative tension with shared methods, the ultimate result is a more complete, well-conceived scientific theory.

Language and Epistemology

Multiple interpretations of quantum theory derive from a plurality of scientific communities espousing their opinions through particular terminology. While various scientific cultures share common empirical methods and formal logic, their applications and explanations of nature utilize fundamentally different language systems. Humans express their experience of the world with language, which “transcends all the relative ways being is posited because it embraces all being-in-itself, in whatever relationships (relativities) it appears.”¹²³ Yet, the world is not an object of language though “the world of objects that science knows... is one of the relativities embraced by language’s relation to the world.”¹²⁴ Bohr understood the value and role of dialogue along with language in scientific work. He insisted a scientist’s “task is to communicate experience and ideas to others...but in such a way that our messages do not thereby lose their objective or unambiguous character.”¹²⁵ As with diverse religious languages and symbols, multiple scientific languages create challenges to communication that question the objectivity and the universality of theoretical truths. Mathematics endures as a unifying, relational scientific language; still tension exists between its formal logic and empirical systems.¹²⁶ Scientific and interreligious dialogues share this dichotomy of language and experience.

¹²³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 446–7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 447.

¹²⁵ Baggott, *The Meaning of Quantum Theory*, 83.

¹²⁶ Leach, *Mathematics and Religion*, 123. Note that math is relational; much of it was developed expressly to solve scientific problems, calculus being a prime example.

Both disciplines use reason and language to produce their respective scientific or theological theories, yet the characteristics of scientific and religious language differ. Mathematical language possesses simplicity and intrinsic universalism that promotes communication and understanding. Religious language possesses symbolic layers of meaning that complicates interreligious dialogue and enriches it. The logic of scientific language has an additional advantage of being transcultural; equations ($2 + 2 = 4$) are true in any dialect, while “the idea of God may be expressed within the context of a culture, but in principle, that culture cannot limit such ideas to exclude other human beings who intuit the same higher reality.”¹²⁷ Modernization and globalization foster encounters with different religious traditions and a variety of evolving physical and technological sciences. These opportunities encourage religious traditions “to understand each other and to adapt themselves as metaphysical options to a scientific age. A primary way to do this is for the great religions to stay conversant with scientific language, which helps them share scientific culture as well.”¹²⁸ The use of scientific language facilitates science–religion and interreligious dialogue. The richness of dissimilar perspectives, sources, and objectives yields very different answers to humanity’s ultimate questions.

Science and religion disciplines also benefit from well–defined epistemological approaches and a universal language to discuss mathematical proofs or nuances among religious truths. Scientists encounter challenges integrating quantum probability with classical determinism similar to various religious traditions reconciling new theological insights with existing scriptural interpretations and doctrine. Quantum physics, especially

¹²⁷ Ibid., 127.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 128.

entanglement, must resolve contradictions between micro and macro levels of reality (e.g., Schrödinger's cat problem) while interreligious dialogue endeavors to explain the power of faith, miracles, and other indescribable transcendent encounters with the divine.

Due to multiple epistemological concerns, theology and quantum physics form a metaphoric "revelatory tangle of unknowing,"¹²⁹ which implies that humans possess limited notions of physical and ultimate reality. Gathering additional knowledge through facts, figures, and experimentation does not resolve epistemological limits completely. Such limitations are a "condition of a post-modern [sic] collectivity"¹³⁰ in which scientific objective facts change to entangled concerns encompassing a network of infinite relations with one's self, others, and the world. Similar to how social context informs religious traditions, scientific ideas "only occur within a context of social relations and practices [that have] a direct bearing on what constitutes evidence for current knowledge."¹³¹ This interdependence between evidence and knowing implies strong communal influences on subsequent scientific theories. Lacking relationships with others and the divine also limits self-knowledge. Theologians employ negative theology to overcome linguistic and epistemological challenges that inhibit comprehending divine-human relationships.

Quantum physics exhibits additional postmodern epistemological traits with its many possible theories and narratives. Diverse quantum interpretations of physical reality parallel the pluralism of religious truths that attempt to define ultimate reality. From the

¹²⁹ Catherine Keller, "Tangles of Unknowing: Cosmology, Christianity, and Climate," in *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellechambers (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 118.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³¹ Lynn Hankinson Nelson, "Epistemological Communities," in *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 136–7.

starting point of spiritual or experimental experiences, scholars correlate data to explain or provide meaning about reality. Utilizing various methods, frameworks, and reference points yield unique but partial answers. Conflict often develops if new models challenge long-held, scientific, cultural, or religious perceptions, making reconciliation difficult. Each religion professes its beliefs of absolute truth; perhaps like quantum mechanics, the larger truth involves many entangled versions of veracity.

Conclusion

Quantum physics' purview no longer stops at attempts to describe physical reality; instead, it delves into philosophical concerns along with epistemological and ontological questions. At subatomic levels, the classical physics world of determinism and predictable certainty shifts to one of indeterminism and uncertain probability. The observer's role affects measurement while arguments ensue over whether a quantum state reflects ontic or phenomenal particle existence. Moreover, the existence of entangled particles appears to defy classical theories of relativity. Such particles possess individual, yet reciprocal, attributes that behave in unison over great distances. Entangled particles express relational ontology at subatomic levels; their being is being-in-relation. As a metaphor, entangled relational ontology pervades macroscopic reality, as atoms comprise objects, which in turn are entangled in nature. By extension, human beings are relational creatures, expressing their social nature through political, cultural, and religious relationships in order to survive and thrive. These relationships form organizations that also are relational in historically positive and negative ways. Interreligious dialogue promotes healthy relational entanglement among religious traditions.

The relationality of quantum entanglement models effective approaches to interreligious dialogue. Concepts from quantum physics enable religious traditions to realize their tenets interrelate with each other to express ultimate truths. Similarly, theologians and philosophers offer insights to physicists pondering ontological issues. While engaging in science and religion dialogue initially produces disparate, evolving answers to life's ultimate questions about existence and purpose, the discourse eventually develops a continuum of insights between opposing perspectives of objectivity and subjectivity. The ambiguity and paradox of quantum physics encourages discussions about ultimate reality (God) entangling with physical reality. During science and religion dialogue, theologians strive to reestablish a viable relationship between God and the cosmos congruent with scientific advancements without either discipline having to validate God's existence or defend divine action in the universe.

Consequently, theologically extrapolating the relational aspects of quantum entanglement implies that the physical world and all that exists is entangled. All beings are beings-in-relation with nature, with each other, with the universe, and with their Creator. The next chapter, Creator/Creation Relationship, examines the theological perspectives of relationality. Many religions affirm the importance of such a relationship, however, Christianity's notions of the Creator/creation relationship is an effective test case in demonstrating how to apply relational ontology from within a particular religion and then between religions. In Christianity, the transcendent Creator is totally other yet also is immanent (present) to creation. A Christian Creator/creation relationship confirms but presents challenges to the notion that being is being-in-relation.

CHAPTER 4 – CREATOR/CREATION RELATIONSHIP

Introduction

After investigating relational ontology from scientific and specifically quantum entanglement perspectives, this chapter returns to the theological discipline by exploring the Creator/creation relationship, principally from the Christian tradition, before applying subsequent insights to interreligious dialogue and its challenges. The origin and creation of the universe is an ultimate question that intrigues the academic disciplines of science, philosophy, and theology. Scientists theorize that a big bang sets in motion a chain of reactions that form the universe while philosophers contemplate an uncaused First Cause of creation. Yet neither scientific nor philosophical logic provides satisfactory answers to the cause of and what transpires just prior to the actual beginning of the cosmos.

The Abrahamic religions, along with Sikhism, and Bhakti forms of Hinduism all worship God as Creator of heaven and earth. Each tradition's scriptures imaginatively narrate the activities of one, merciful, gracious, loving divine source and sovereign of all creation.¹ Orthodox Hinduism and other Eastern religions also recount diverse creation stories and myths. In early Vedic Hinduism, the gods sacrifice *Purusha*'s cosmic body to bring the world into being and then sustain it.² The *Upanishads* describe Brahman as ultimate reality, a Trimurti of three gods, with Brahma as the creator god and source of the cosmos.³ Some religions perceive time as cyclic, positing that the world has been

¹ Judaism and Christianity, for example, share two different creation narratives found in the Book of *Genesis* (1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24).

² *Rig Veda*, <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv10090.htm>> (accessed January 19, 2016).

³ *Creation narratives and poems exist throughout the Upanishads. For some examples, refer to the Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads.*

created and destroyed repeatedly or that multiple universes coexist. Consequently, how religious traditions comprehend or refute a Creator/creation relationship influences their views on relationality and interreligious relations during dialogic exchanges.

This chapter evaluates the Creator/creation relationship primarily from Christian theology. After describing many Creator/creation perspectives and theological notions of creation, the chapter examines the attributes of transcendence and immanence ascribed to the Creator. Next, the chapter analyzes how these characteristics affirm yet complicate the ontological notion of being as being-in-relation. The chapter then assesses how the Creator/creation relationship edifies interreligious dialogue challenges.

Creator/Creation Relationship

According to the Abrahamic religions, distinction predicates the Creator/creation relationship. All three traditions believe in one “God as the origin of all-that-is”⁴ who creates, not from necessity but from a spontaneous originating freedom as the essence of being or existence. Furthermore, the Christian Doctrine of God specifically affirms an ineffable relationship among Creator and creation yet maintains an explicit ontological distinction between them.⁵ These notions of relation and wholly otherness parallel the theological terms of divine immanence and transcendence, respectively.

God’s free act of creating initiates a unique Creator/creation relationship. Creation therefore is an intentional activity of relation; it is a gratuitous gift of existence as well as

⁴ David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 196–7.

⁵ Robert Sokolowski, “Creation and Christian Understanding,” in *God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium*, eds. David B. Burrell and Bernard McGinn (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 179.

an invitation to participate in divine being.⁶ Even though the Creator/creation relation is necessary, it is not reciprocal. Creation depends upon the Creator's influence for its very existence, yet being the Creator does not affect God's existence.⁷ Moreover, God "is not part of the world, and yet the world has its being and definitive sense from him [sic]."⁸ The being of the world therefore is contingent on God's intentional act of creating, which exemplifies how unique the Creator/creation relationship is.

Thomas Aquinas describes the Creator/creation relationship by utilizing specific philosophical and ontological terminology. According to Aquinas, "God is not related by a real relation to the world."⁹ Instead, real relation indicates how God exists ontologically in Trinitarian self-relation. Real subsistent relation connotes unity or no differentiation; therefore, to retain a Creator/creation distinction, Aquinas classifies its relation as logical and non-subsistent.¹⁰ Through this distinction between real and logical relations, he confirms divine freedom as "the freedom only for God to be related to what is other than God."¹¹ The Creator/creation relationship is different from other relationships; dependent creatures relate in limited, imperfect ways, while God is perfect, infinite relationality.

Although Creator and creation are logically related, they are essentially dissimilar. Christian distinction thus establishes a "special sense of otherness between God and the

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, <<http://www.basilica.org/pages/ebooks/St.%20Thomas%20Aquinas-Summa%20Theologica.pdf>> (accessed January 30, 2016), I Q45.

⁷ Ibid., I Q13.7.4.

⁸ Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 1.

⁹ Ibid., 34. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q13.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "The Relational God: Aquinas and Beyond," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 661.

world”¹² that qualifies the relation as well as clarifies assertions about the Creator and creation. Theologically, distinction preserves divine free will along with the gratuity of grace and the meaning of salvation. Without distinction, God’s salvific acts unnecessarily include saving Godself. Emphasizing dissimilarity also avoids inaccurate views of Creator/creation relations and misleading perceptions of evil as God’s ontological equal.

Many divine attributes, such as simplicity and eternity, differentiate the Creator from creation. What makes God necessary or simple is that “God’s nature is nothing other than its own existence: to be divine is (simply) to-be... without needing a cause for its existing.”¹³ If God is “the One who begins and is the end of all things but is not one of those things,”¹⁴ then distinctions occur between necessary (God’s essence) and possible things (creation). Thus, necessary, simple things are not composed and possible things are composed. Divine simplicity also infers an unlimited or infinite essence unbounded by embodiment, classification, or temporality, so the Creator is unchanging and eternal.

At first glance, divine simplicity seems to contradict relationality and Christian tenets regarding the Trinity. Aquinas resolves any discrepancies by arguing that divine simplicity is a relational simplicity; an ontology of simplicity thereby enables an ontology of relationality since “to be God means necessarily to-be-related. To be God is to be to-be-rationally.”¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards reevaluates traditional philosophical theology about

¹² Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, 33.

¹³ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 7–8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 652. For Aquinas, relations within the Trinity are relative, not essential, distinctions. Real relations are based on the nature of a thing versus relations of reason that logically associate things. For example, Father–Son relations are real because they are identical to divine essence rather than accidents inherent in its nature. For more information, refer to Thomas Aquinas, *De potential Dei*, trans. The English Dominicans (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), <<http://dhspriority.org/thomas/QDdePotentia.htm>> (accessed January 10, 2017), questions 2–11, 27–8.

the absolute unity and simplicity of God by favoring divine excellency as a measure of perfection. He argues that God's excellency requires plurality; therefore, he redefines ontological perfection in terms of God's internal plurality since God is original being.¹⁶ As the First Cause of being and the unconditioned condition of existence, the act of creation involves ontological distinction and an asymmetrical relation of dependence. The Creator depends on nothing yet creation is completely contingent upon its Creator.

The divine attributes of simplicity and perfection indicate the Creator is wholly other and thus unknowable by creation. To preserve differentiation in the Creator/creation relationship, Edwards rejects substance ontology in favor of the "relentlessly relational"¹⁷ ontology of Trinitarian love. Moreover, Edwards' concept of being involves elements of disposition and habit that emphasize repetition and development for both creation and the Creator. God's being is love, which remains perfect as well as dispositional; therefore, "God's own inner being can only be thought of as inherently relational or as going out of oneself to the other."¹⁸ Since love is action that necessitates a beloved, Edwards reaffirms the Trinitarian nature of God. In addition, "God's self-knowledge of God's own [loving] essence as the to-be [sic] in which things can participate in being... becomes a practical action of creation."¹⁹ The Creator/creation relationship occurs from God's free choice to act.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "The Miscellanies: a-500," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 13, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 284, 363. For more information on Edward's concept of "excellency," refer to Jonathan Edwards, "The Mind," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 6, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 332-8.

¹⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," in *Inquiring About God*, Vol. 1, ed. Terence Cuneo (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 107.

¹⁸ Sang Hyun Lee, "Jonathan Edwards's Dispositional Conception of the Trinity: A Resource for Contemporary Reformed Theology," in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, eds. David Willis and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 452.

¹⁹ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 16.

Jean–Luc Marion also emphasizes God is love as a theological alternative to the metaphysical notions of being and ontological difference, which he claims limit or reduce the understanding of God. As a phenomenologist, Marion interprets the being of God and God as *causa sui* (cause of itself) to be idolatry because, like a mirror, these ideas reflect or assign human ontological concepts onto the divine. In contrast, an icon “attempts to render visible the invisible as such, hence to allow that the visible not cease to refer to an other [sic] than itself.”²⁰ The otherness of Gxd²¹ is distinct and unknowable. To articulate the unthinkable is beyond any conceptual frameworks of metaphysics or ontology.

Thinking about God without being or other conditions of ontological difference does not imply nonexistence. Instead of ontological schemes, Marion references Christian scriptures that reveal God is love (Jn 4:8). As unconditional love (*agapè*), God enters the Creator/creation relationship “in and as a gift for the gift does not have first to be, but to pour out in an abandon that, alone, causes it to be; God saves the gift in giving it before being.”²² The phenomenology of love “gives itself only in abandoning itself, ceaselessly transgressing the limits of its own gift, so as to be transplanted outside of itself. The consequence is that this transference of love outside of itself, without end or limit”²³ prevents God from becoming an idol. The act of giving both unifies and distinguishes

²⁰ Jean–Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 46. Marion replaces the idolatrous quotes for “God” with a cross in Gxd to indicate Gxd is unthinkable and beyond ontological difference. Instead, Gxd’s presence is an incomplete trace of the *agapè* gift Gxd freely gives but humanity does not possess nor fully comprehend.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 48. Interestingly Marion’s later treatment of transubstantiation and episcopal authority in chapter 6 implies the very idolatry he criticizes.

God as gift and giver.²⁴ Because love is not an object nor being, it acts as an icon by redirecting one's gaze toward the giver and subject of love.

Marion argues that God does not need to-be because God gives. By dismissing God as being and *causa sui*, Marion circumvents addressing any of the cause and effect implications of creation's existence and relationship with the Creator. He asserts God is love as ultimate gift, as icon, yet his writings are vague about the nature, experience, and reciprocal relationships of a love he claims does not need to-be.²⁵ Marion also minimizes various interrelated ways of knowing (e.g., theology (faith) and philosophy (reason)) and avoids discussing the possibility of love itself becoming a concept or idol.

Various Creator/Creation Perspectives

In asserting that the Creator is wholly other than creation, Christian distinction facilitates several frameworks describing Creator/creation relationality. When examined systematically, a possible continuum of relationships includes non-existent, impersonal, as well as personal associations. If no God exists as atheism asserts, then no God-world relationship occurs either. Likewise, only the possibility of a relationship is feasible for agnostics or apatheists who either doubt or do not know or care if a God exists. Deism exemplifies an impersonal Creator/creation relation. Influenced by the Enlightenment, deism acknowledges that God creates the world then permits it to operate according to natural laws without further interaction, direction, or influence in its destiny.

Pantheism represents the theological position that all-is-God. It views God and the cosmos as equivalent; in fact, so co-dependent that God is the universe. By conflating

²⁴ Ibid., 44, 104.

²⁵ Ibid., 138. Marion does not discuss God's Trinitarian nature or internal/external relationships.

distinctions between Creator and creation to ontological sameness, all reality, including God, becomes essentially impersonal and any evil in the world is self-inflicted. In subtler forms, pantheism posits “a (quasi) materialistic or (quasi) substantialistic understanding of God.”²⁶ The Creator is total wholeness; created entities share in the divine essence to varying degrees.

Similar to pantheism, panentheism asserts an intense association between Creator and creation, but reinforces some distinction between them. Panentheism translates to all-in-God, meaning God encompasses the world in a reciprocally influential, personal relationship, yet also transcends it. Theological debates focus on what the pivotal word “in” signifies for the Creator/creation relationship in retaining ontological differences and distancing God’s association with imperfection, evil, suffering, and physical limitations within the universe. Christianity espouses several models of panentheism. In expressivist panentheism, God is “a self-conscious subjectivity who creates the otherness of creation in order to bring it back into divine life.”²⁷ The scriptural passage “In him we live, move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) alludes to a panentheistic coexistence similar to the *perichoretic* relationship among persons of the Holy Trinity.²⁸ Orthodox Christian panentheism describes the Creator as “permeating the world, the divine energies are precisely the life and power of God, directly and immediately active throughout the

²⁶ David H. Nikkel, “Panentheism,” in *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, ed. J. Wentzel Vrede Van Huyssteen (New York, NY: MacMillan Reference USA, 2003), 3.

²⁷ Joseph A. Bracken, “Panentheism in the Context of the Theology and Science Dialogue,” *Open Theology* 1 (2014): 4.

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 307. *Perichoresis means rotation, a dynamic entanglement.*

natural order,”²⁹ however, God’s essence transcends creation as unknowable mystery. Soteriological viewpoints constrain panentheism to “those aspects of created reality that have become godlike, while they still remain a created reality”³⁰ until the eschaton. In Charles Hartshorne’s dipolar panentheism, God possesses seemingly contradictory traits; God is “both the universal cause and the all-inclusive reality.”³¹ The Creator/creation relationship requires “a supreme person must be inclusive of all reality... since relations contain their terms, persons must contain other persons and things.”³² Thus, the world is in God and vice versa.

Classical theism promotes a more discrete Creator/creation relationship than panentheism; the infinite Creator is present yet separate from and unaffected by finite creation. God is neither uninvolved, as in deism, nor completely equivalent as pantheism claims. Instead, God is absolute metaphysical being who freely creates then sustains the universe. The divine, perfect, good Creator possesses a rational will and self-awareness in addition to a relational, personal, nature, both internal and external to the Godhead. Although the number of divine attributes vary, most Christian theologians affirm that God is incorporeal (spiritual), omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), omnibenevolent (all-loving absolute goodness), omnipresent (exists everywhere), and

²⁹ Kallistos Ware, “God Immanent yet Transcendent: The Divine Energies according to Saint Gregory Palamas,” in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*, eds. P. Clayton and A. Peacocke (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 165–6.

³⁰ Niels Henrik Gregersen, “Three Varieties of Panentheism,” in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*, eds. P. Clayton and A. Peacocke (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³² Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948), 144; See also Owen C. Thomas, “Problems in Panentheism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 655.

immanent (present to creation) yet transcendent (completely other), while some theists debate divine unity, simplicity, eternity, immutability (unchangeable), and impassibility (unaffectedness).³³ Each attribute is subject to interpretation across time and between religions. Divine attributes constructively influence interreligious dialogue about the Creator/creation relationship or sometimes introduce obstacles to meaningful rapport.

Methods of Creation

Various perceptions of the Creator/creation relationship likewise offer insights into how God creates the universe. Logical possibilities include creation out of God (*ex Deo*), out of something (*ex materia*), or out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Pantheism and some versions of panentheism favor creation out of God; Catherine Keller proposes creation out of chaos (*creatio ex profundis*).³⁴ Although many classical theists advocate creation out of nothing, Kirk Wegter–McNelly entangles *creatio ex Deo* and *ex nihilo*. Edwards suggests the idea of continuous creation, which upholds divine transcendence in addition to incorporating notions of divine immanence.

Pantheism and some types of panentheism believe creation is an emanation from Godself (*creatio ex Deo*) that forms a relational and ontological interdependence between the Creator and creation. Raimon Panikkar describes his cosmotheandric experience as an interconnection of the world (*cosmos*), the divine (*Theos*), and the human (*aner*) into one reality; therefore, there is no world without God and vice versa. Although God is not the

³³ For a general overview of divine attributes, refer to William Wainwright, “Concepts of God,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/concepts-god/>> (accessed February 1, 2016).

³⁴ For more information, refer to Thomas Jay Oord, Ed., *Theologies of Creation: Creatio Ex Nihilo and its New Rivals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

universe, as the Creator, God creates it. To explain his cosmology, Panikkar employs the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in a panentheistic fashion as well as scriptures such as “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:6).”³⁵ Yet God, who is over or above all, is also beyond being since “the source of being is not being. If it were, how could it be its source?”³⁶ Panikkar carefully affirms the Father’s transcendence by emphasizing that God creates through the Son. Likewise, God is immanent in creation through the Incarnation and continuously through the Holy Spirit’s actions.

Utilizing the scientific concept of emergence, Philip Clayton explains creation is an emanation from Godself. From the potentiality of objects (God), properties emerge and develop into diverse, hierarchically complex levels of supervenient systems with higher levels exerting causal influence onto lower ones.³⁷ While these internally related systems corroborate Creator/creation relationality, they do not represent God’s totality.³⁸ Nevertheless, classical theists reject creation as an emanation from Godself in any form because it provides no ontological Creator/creation separation, it contradicts divine immutability along with impassability, and it associates evil with God.

Wegter–McNelly combines the ideas of *creatio ex Deo* and *ex nihilo* by placing a dialectical nothingness within God. From his creation out of divine relationality (*creatio ex relatione*), an outward turn through the Incarnation is a turn to nothingness, thereby extending Trinitarian inter–relationality beyond God so the universe comes into being in

³⁵ Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon–Person–Mystery* (London, England: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1973), 68.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁷ Philip Clayton, “Conceptual Foundations of Emergence Theory,” in *The Re–Emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion*, eds. Philip Clayton and Paul Davies (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2–4.

³⁸ Philip Clayton, “Kenotic Trinitarian Panentheism,” *Dialog* 44 (2005): 250–5.

relation to, but not within, God.³⁹ Creation becomes “entangled independence—through—relationship... a ‘relativerse [sic]’”⁴⁰ in which connection is the basis for distinction and distinction is the product of connection. An entangled Creator/creation relationship enables the other to be other but compels creation to act synchronously with God. Quantum entanglement exhibits similar actions; “each object is free to behave as if it were unentangled, but the entangled relationship causes the two objects to behave together differently than if there were no entangled relationship between them.”⁴¹ Entangled with the Creator for its actual existence, creation reflects God’s relationality of differentiation and communion.

As a variation of creation out of matter (*creatio ex materia*), Keller proposes creation out of chaos (*creatio ex profundis*). Her exegesis of creation stories emphasizes the *tehom* (Gen 1.2) as the ocean, deep, or abyss; in other words, the chaos from which God creates the world. Tehomic theology reevaluates God and creation as “a multiplicity of differences—in—relation, the multiple that as such is relation,”⁴² which introduces new interpretations, especially feminist views, of the Trinity and Incarnation. Her method associates Alfred North Whitehead’s notion of creativity from process theology with the ocean’s continuously churning chaotic depths, to represent “an active indeterminacy, a commingling of unpredictable, and yet recapitulatory [sic], self—organizing relations.”⁴³ However, Keller’s method does not delineate between God and the world or divine

³⁹ Kirk Wegter–McNelly, *The Entangled God: Divine Relationality and Quantum Physics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 132–3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 136. Wegter–McNelly bases his theory on the physics of quantum entanglement.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴² Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 177.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 218–9.

transcendence and immanence. Creation from chaos implies something exists prior to God's creative action and thus is co-equal with the eternal God. This approach also infers that creatures are independent of God while God has a dependent relation to creation.

Christian theologians initially favored *creatio ex materia* but eventually creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) became a foundational dogma of Christian tradition. In response to Greek and Gnostic worldviews, Tertullian deduces creation is not from the Godhead nor from existing matter, so God creates from nothing.⁴⁴ Theophilus of Antioch argues, "a human artisan makes from a given material whatever he [sic] wants, while God shows his [sic] power by starting from nothing."⁴⁵ For Aquinas, creation occurs when being (the Creator) confers existence onto beings (creation); thus, creation is transitioning from non-being (in the sense of absolute nothingness) to being *per se*.⁴⁶ Creation out of nothing illustrates the distinction between Creator and creation; only God, as being, is necessary yet extrinsic to the cosmos. Moreover, *creatio ex nihilo* "is the action of a transcendent *personal* agent, acting freely and intentionally, with a view toward the all-encompassing purposes of personal engagement."⁴⁷ In choosing to create all that exists from nothing, everything is within God's purview; the Creator is present at the most fundamental levels of created being. Combined with the doctrine of *imago Dei*, creation "is the setting for a *radically personal* drama, in which the triune Creator calls out of

⁴⁴ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, trans. Ernest Evans (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1972), 39–54.

⁴⁵ Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, trans. Marcus Dods, <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.htm>> (accessed January 30, 2016), II.4.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q104.1, I Q45.1.

⁴⁷ International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God* (2004), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html> (accessed March 13, 2015), para. 65, italics original.

nothingness those to whom He [sic] then calls out in love.”⁴⁸ Creation demonstrates the Creator’s transcendent power in balance with personal, relational immanence.

The *creatio ex nihilo* approach is not without controversy. No empirical evidence exists that the cosmos derived from nothing, nor does evolution support the notion of specific creatures coming into exist instantaneously. Critics say the method lacks strong scriptural support, yet Aquinas interprets the Book of Genesis as indicating an actual beginning to the universe as well as distinguishing between the principle originator and everything originated, without implying God is a demiurge.⁴⁹ The narratives extend language beyond comprehension because “the divine action portrayed narratively must nonetheless be understood as that of causing the very being of things and indeed of all that is.”⁵⁰ Theodicy is a logical concern when religions portray God as an all–powerful Creator. Critics argue, if God is omnipotent and “if God is able to create from nothing, then surely he [sic] would use such incredible power to prevent both natural evil and human evil.”⁵¹ Additionally, liberation and feminist theologians caution rulers and leaders to avoid misconstruing divine omnipotence and absolute transcendence as justification for power disparities, imperialism, or sinful social structures.

Edwards proposes a continuous approach to creation that avoids some of the conflicts with *creatio ex nihilo*. Although he claims “the universe is created out of

⁴⁸ Ibid., para. 66, italics original.

⁴⁹ David Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 24–5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁵¹ Oord, *Theologies of Creation*, 112. Two basic arguments against theodicy are that actions have consequences and that God respects each creature’s freedom of choice, since without it, moral responsibility is meaningless.

nothing every moment,' ... it is not a continual *creatio ex nihilo* in a simple sense"⁵² because divine laws and causes remain permanent. Sang Hyun Lee thinks this idea is qualified occasionalism since the world possesses a persistent reality in a virtual mode until God moves it to full actuality in each moment.⁵³ According to Edwards, "the created world is a network of divinely established habits and dispositions (or so-called laws of nature) whose ultimate telos is to know and to love God so as to repeat in time and space, God's own being."⁵⁴ While divine repetition of God's eternal, complete actuality occurs within the Trinity, Edwards asserts that creation "is meant to be the spatio-temporal repetition of the prior actuality of the divine being, an everlasting process of God's self-enlargement of what he [sic] already is."⁵⁵ When God directly exercises the disposition to repeat divine actuality, the world's history and nature become intrinsically tangible, dynamic, and intentional by functioning as the medium of God's life in time and space.⁵⁶ Since each moment in time is a repetition of God's eternal, albeit incomplete, glory, God is historically immanent yet maintains divine transcendence.

Apophatic and Kataphatic Theological Approaches

An important part of being in a relationship is getting to know one another. The Creator/creation relationship is no exception. As its Creator, God possesses complete, intimate knowledge of the cosmos. Christian scriptures offer many examples that God

⁵² Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 63.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 63. See also Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards' Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1981), 279–80, 307–8. Occasionalism posits that creation has no causality. God is the cause and that creation brings about the actions of divine activity.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

knows all things (1 Jn 3:19–20), such as the number and names of the stars (Ps 147:4, Isa 40:26) and the end times (Mt 24:36, Mk 13:32). No creature is hidden (Heb 4:13), not even in the womb (Jer 1:5), for God knows the number of hairs on each person’s head (Mt 10:30, Lk 12:7), the number and direction of each person’s steps (Job 31:4, 21), each person’s needs (Ex 3:7, Mt 6:31–32, Lk 12:29–30), as well as each person’s ways (Ps 139, Mt 6:4) and thoughts (Ps 94:9–11, Ps 139:1–2, Ez 11:5). Human creatures express their experiences and incomplete knowledge of the Creator by utilizing theological language that involve negative (apophatic) and positive (kataphatic) approaches.

Because the Creator so radically transcends creation, creatures are incapable of truly knowing God as God. Any attempts at a comprehensive, intelligible description of the infinite divine exceeds the finite limits of human language and reason; therefore, theologians employ negative or apophatic theology, also called *via negativa*. Apophatic theology acknowledges that the wholly other Creator is completely unfathomable to creation. Hence, this approach articulates only what cannot be attributed to an ineffable God, since as creatures “we cannot know what God truly is, but only what God is not.”⁵⁷ Tertullian explains, “that which is infinite is known only to itself... He [sic] is presented to our minds in His transcendent greatness, as at once known and unknown.”⁵⁸ In fact, the Creator’s transcendence is the only definitive knowledge creatures possess of the divine because God surpasses any humanly conceivable attributes. Though creatures experience

⁵⁷ Keith Ward, *God: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 46. See also Anselm of Canterbury, “Proslogion,” in *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Harmondsworth, England, Penguin Books, 1986), especially chapter 2. Within his ontological arguments for God’s the existence, Anselm claims that God is greater than anything humans can conceive.

⁵⁸ Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, trans. William Reeve, <http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm> (accessed January 30, 2016), 17.

God's goodness, fully comprehending and articulating divine goodness surpasses human understanding and is thus unknowable.⁵⁹ To avoid agnosticism or skepticism, Keller nuances apophasis as expressing theological uncertainty rather than a denial of faith.⁶⁰ Apophatic theology is also a corrective to anthropomorphizing God even as it reinforces divine mystery. A focus on divine mystery stimulates curiosity, which encourages further investigation, interreligious dialogue, and deeper reflection about God.

Whereas apophatic theology emphasizes God's transcendence, kataphatic (or cataphatic) theology positively expresses what the immanent Creator reveals about Godself to creation. Human reasoning often yields incomplete or incompatible notions about God since "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Isa 55:8). The character Job, in Jewish and Christian scriptures "failed to understand the mysterious, seemingly contradictory ways of God because God simply refused to be understood under logical absolutes."⁶¹ Yet when given a glimpse of divine immanence through revelation, kataphatic theology conveys humanity's limited knowledge about God with appropriate language grammars and theological analogies. Theologians who utilize kataphatic theology articulate the Creator's revealed attributes, such as goodness, justice, or love, in terms relative to divine perfection that surpasses creaturely understanding and capabilities. Otherwise, misuse of kataphatic theology arrogantly presumes complete knowledge of God, which results in anthropomorphizing God in humanity's image or other forms of idolatry. An appropriate balance of kataphatic

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q6.13.

⁶⁰ Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider, Eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 8.

⁶¹ Peter Feldmeier, "Is the Theology of Religions an Exhausted Project?" *Horizons* 35, no. 2 (2008): 270.

and apophatic theology is necessary to express what is known and mysterious about God in order to delineate as well as enhance the Creator/creation relationship.

As expressed by kataphatic theology, the Creator's revealed presence frequently manifests in humanity's history. Christian scriptures and tradition narrate how the Creator reveals Godself in creation, in salvation history, and specifically in the human creature as *imago Dei*. St. Bonaventure imagines "the created world is a kind of book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker"⁶² in three ways: as a vestige or footprint within every creature, as an image in creatures possessing rational intelligence, and as a likeness in creatures whose spirits ascend toward God. Each created thing conveys an appropriate perception of its Creator (Wis 13:5), therefore, from its beginning, the whole of creation manifests the divine nature, God's invisible qualities, power, and glory (Rom 1:20). King David contemplates how the wonders and marvels of creation exhibit the greatness of God and humanity's insignificance in comparison (Ps 8:3–4). Likewise, a humbled Job acknowledges God's powerful majesty in creating and sustaining the world (Job 42:2–5).

Creation is the constant process of revealing and glorifying God. Whether in the beauty of a magnificent yet fleeting sunset or the growing pains of evolution, all creation exhibits divine immanence, justice, and mercy. Moreover, Edwards "does not believe the presence of everlasting suffering in the creation undermines the beauty and excellency of what God has so arranged"⁶³ at the eschaton. Feminist theology affirms that as part of creation, the human body, in all genders and vulnerabilities, is good, sacred, and thereby

⁶² Bonaventure, *Breviloquium: Works of St. Bonaventure*, Vol. 9, ed. Robert J. Karris, trans. Dominic V. Monti (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005), 96.

⁶³ Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

capable of revealing God.⁶⁴ Because humans are finite physical creatures who experience the world through their senses, God engages the wonders of creation to reveal Godself. For Christians, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God that perfectly mediates the Creator/creation relationship.

The Holy Scriptures reveal the Creator through God's relationship with creation, particularly interactions with human beings. In the document *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council affirms that scriptures contain God's revelation; scriptures impart "the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God."⁶⁵ Sacred Scriptures also mediate God's presence, narrate divine interaction in salvation history, and reveal God's special love for Israel. Through theophany, God self-reveals God's name as "I am who I am" (Exo 3:14), that the Lord is One and One alone (Dt 6:4; Isa 45:5, Ps 18:31), that God is indeed the Creator (Gen 1:26; Isa 44:24) whose exalted thinking surpasses any creature's thoughts (Isa 55:8), and that God has a plan for the cosmos (Isa 46:9–10). The rich imagery and allegory of the Psalms and other Wisdom books poetically describe God and the divine attributes, while God conveys guidance and ethical directives to Israel through the Prophetic books. Ultimately, the gospels express God's authentic Word in the actions, teachings, and sacrifices of Jesus Christ.

Throughout Holy Scriptures, pacts of friendship or covenants represent binding relational agreements between the Creator and creation. Covenants develop when God unilaterally initiates them and humans respond with fidelity and commitment to God's

⁶⁴ Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1998), 35, 47.

⁶⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations), Vatican Web Site. November 21, 1964. <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html> (accessed March 13, 2013), para. 36.

gratuitous love.⁶⁶ Jacques Dupuis identifies four covenants between God and humanity. At the beginning of creation with Adam and Eve, then after the great flood with Noah, God establishes two universal covenants as salvific events for all people. The covenant with Moses signifies a special abiding relationship between God and Israel. Christians consider the Christ event to be an additional covenant that enhances the continuous, simultaneous, interrelated Trinitarian operative presence throughout salvation history with all people.⁶⁷ Moreover, the Scriptures profess how Jesus Christ is God's incarnate Word (John 1:14) who participates in creating the cosmos (John 1:1–3, Col 1:16) and who discloses the invisible divine (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). In action and deed, Christ reveals God's goodness. He accomplishes God's salvific plan for humanity in his life, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit likewise reveals the Creator via spiritual encounters that invite creatures to participate in creation according to the divine plan (Acts 17:26–28) and inspire ethical behaviors within human relationships.

One specific, significant way the Creator reveals Godself is by creating humans in the image of God (*imago Dei*). As the basis for a human person's dignity and rights, "the theme of the *imago Dei* is central to biblical revelation (Gen. 1:26f; 5:1–3; 9:6) [for] the mystery of man [sic] cannot be grasped apart from the mystery of God."⁶⁸ The *imago Dei* furthermore confirms each person's ontological structure as essentially relational, free, and responsible.⁶⁹ Being created in God's image, human creatures become stewards who

⁶⁶ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 103.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 110–2.

⁶⁸ International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship*, para. 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 10.

“enjoy the privilege of sharing in the divine governance of visible creation.”⁷⁰ Augustine conceptualizes a communal Trinitarian account of the *imago Dei* that associates human creatures with the Creator in invocation, knowledge, and love, while Aquinas believes the *imago Dei* encourages humanity’s participation in the divine life through intellectual contemplation.⁷¹ Since the Trinitarian God is eternally relational, self-giving, intrinsic interaction, humans created in the divine image emulate these characteristics as people entangled in mutual, loving relationships. Indeed, the *imago Dei* manifests within these intersubjective relationships. Imitation of Christ’s life and participation in the paschal mystery reconfigures humanity’s *imago Dei* into the image of Christ (*imago Christi*), whom Christians believe is the most perfect *imago Dei* for revealing God (Jn 14:9).

Transcendent Distinction

Christianity’s understanding of God and creation differ significantly from substance monism and ancient philosophical notions of divinity. Although Marion and other phenomenologists reject ontological categories as limiting and idolizing the divine, historically, Christians believe God is not a substance or a being, but is being. Within the ancient cosmic matrix, gods were distinct superlative beings. Because they were the most powerful, all-knowing, and unchanging according to their nature, gods logically became the world’s ruling substances.⁷² Nevertheless as substance, “the being of pagan gods is to be a part, though the most important part, of what is; no matter how independent they are,

⁷⁰ Ibid., para. 57.

⁷¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, I 1.1; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q93.4, 7.

⁷² Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, 15. See also Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (New York, NY: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1988), 39–40.

the pagan gods must be with things that are not divine.”⁷³ In the ancient world, distinctive features between divine and human beings were therefore a matter of degree.

Rather than profess that God is part of or dependent on the world, theological reflection on the gospel narratives about Jesus Christ’s life, words, and actions, discern a significantly radical concept of differentiating the Creator from creation. In what Robert Sokolowski calls the Christian distinction, “God is understood as ‘being’ God entirely apart from any relation of otherness to the world or to the whole. God could and would be God even if there were no world.”⁷⁴ As pure being, God goes beyond the very notions of substance used to contrast or determine created otherness.⁷⁵ God is prior to distinction *per se*; however, God permits distinction even though the world does not have to exist nor does God have to be distinguished from it.⁷⁶ Creation itself demonstrates the Christian distinction since God freely chooses whether or not to create the world. Either decision regarding creation does not diminish God’s goodness or perfection. Because God creates by bestowing the gift of being, the world might not have been except for God’s choosing it to be. In sum, Christian distinction describes God as totally dissimilar, unequalled, and thus completely other, the Creator who surpasses a radically contingent creation.

Divine transcendence refers to God’s wholly otherness, which is so radically different that the Creator’s glory, power, and freedom are incomprehensible to mere creatures. Asserting that God is wholly other ontologically differentiates the Creator from

⁷³ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 32–3.

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, <<http://www.basilica.ca/documents/2016/10/St.%20Thomas%20AquinasThe%20Summa%20Contra%20Gentiles.pdf>> (accessed January 30, 2016), 1, 25; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q13.3.

⁷⁶ Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, 33.

imperfection, evil, and suffering in creation along with other limitations associated with the physical universe. Consequently, transcendence provides an essential ontological distinction between the Creator and creation that determines as well as preserves unique identities. Separate identities construct otherness, a crucial component for relationships. However, an overemphasis on divine transcendence suggests dualism along with the aloofness of deism. Avoiding dualisms that equate goodness with spiritual matters and evil with material things necessitates divine immanence along with divine transcendence to maintain balance within the Creator/creation relationship.

When discussing divine transcendence in conjunction with the Creator/creation relationship, Kathryn Tanner recommends two linguistic rules. The first rule is to avoid comparing God's transcendence either as univocal or as a rudimentary contrast between divine and non-divine attributes similar to the ancient pagans; the second rule is to define God's creative agency as immediate and completely extensive rather than restrict or limit it.⁷⁷ Utilizing her rules, Tanner likewise appropriates Aquinas' metaphysics that describe God's nature as "*ipsum esse subsistens*"⁷⁸ (subsistent being itself). In other words, divine essence and existence are identical, which prevents onto-theology from considering the being of both the Creator and creation as equivalent. The Creator is actual existence but creation exists in particular ways, which limits relations with other creatures and with God. Constrained relations between human beings reveal otherness through experience. Within the Creator/creation relationship, humans respect and appreciate God's otherness rather than perceive or experience it; otherwise, divine otherness becomes "one of the

⁷⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 47.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 60. See also Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, 41–2.

differentiated kinds in the world, one of the beings that is distinguished from others as in pagan thought.”⁷⁹ Hence, Christian distinction imposes absolute ontological otherness to prevent relative contrasts or comparisons between the Creator and creation.

Contrastive and Non-Contrastive Transcendence

Human reason constructs distinction through contrasts, opposites, and negation partially to determine otherness. The ancient Greeks and Romans employed a contrastive transcendence when discussing divine attributes as opposed to what Tanner describes as non-contrastive or noncompetitive transcendence. The contrastive method compares and contrasts God as one being among others within a single order.⁸⁰ This type of assessment suggests that the divine and non-divine coexist side-by-side, also inferring that “God is as finite as the non-divine beings with which it [sic] is directly contrasted.”⁸¹ Contrastive transcendence ironically limits God to what is opposed to God. While too much contrast objectifies God as a created thing, emphasizing excessive similarities between God and the world nullifies the Christian distinction. Defining the Creator’s transcendence over and against the world often results in a complete disassociation with creation; as divine transcendence becomes more absolute, the less involved or present God can be with the non-divine cosmos. Absolute transcendence essentially means direct comparison through contrast is illogical if not impossible.

With non-contrastive transcendence, God and the world are not opposed to each other nor are they parallel to each other. The Creator is not equal with creation. Non-

⁷⁹ Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, 42.

⁸⁰ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 46.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

contrastive transcendence upholds the Christian distinction between the Creator and creation but not through their differences, because “God is neither like the world nor simply unlike it... God is beyond the difference between like and unlike, beyond simple identifications or simple contrasts. That is just what makes God different from anything else.”⁸² Contrastive transcendence is therefore an inadequate comparison since “a God who transcends the world must also... transcend the distinctions by contrast appropriate there.”⁸³ Conversely, a radical non-contrastive approach respects God as wholly other, yet permits God’s immanent creative activity and involvement with the cosmos without placing both in competition.

Divine Action and Human Free Will

Divine transcendence introduces questions about divine causality and providence as well as their effects on creaturely free will. Christianity’s ideas regarding divine action evolve from Aristotle’s substance ontology and causality. Aristotle’s causality requires an initial or First Cause of all other causes. Also known as the Prime Mover, the First Cause is self-caused, eternal, a pure form, and necessary being.⁸⁴ For Aquinas, the First Cause is God, whose continual, active causality creates being from non-being, sustains created existence, while retaining wholly otherness. In granting existence to creation, the Creator “communicates to all finite beings a share in the divine being proportionate to their finite

⁸² Kathryn Tanner, “Creation *ex Nihilo* as Mixed Metaphor,” *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013): 148.

⁸³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 46–7.

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.mb.txt>> (accessed January 7, 2017), especially Book II parts 2 and 11, Book IV part 3.

essence. Their act of existence, accordingly, is their own,”⁸⁵ which includes responsibility for their autonomous choices and actions. A creature’s autonomy exists by participating in divine being. With increased participation, “nearness to God and genuine creaturely autonomy grow in direct rather than inverse proportion.”⁸⁶ The Creator directs creatures who lack rational capabilities, but “for rational agents, God draws their will closer to Godself”⁸⁷ so every creature’s fundamental inclination is toward good. By approaching humans in the ontological depth of their being, “God operates from within created causes, in the very place from which their operations arise”⁸⁸ to preserve human freedom. Some philosophers and theologians question, however, whether the human will is actually free.

If God possesses no causal influence on the world, then the Creator is merely an observer while creatures freely dictate the world’s resultant development. Conversely, total divine control implies responsibility for evil even as it nullifies human free will. These two options assume that creaturely free will requires absolute autonomy from the Creator. Yet to perceive Creator and creature freedom as a zero–sum game implies the Creator’s primary causality is equivalent to the secondary causality of creatures. Within Creator/creation relations, “creatures need not be ‘prime movers’ when it comes to their free acts, ... Nor does the creator’s activity stand over against that of the creature... for the creator is not so related to creatures.”⁸⁹ Rather than directly contrasting freedoms,

⁸⁵ Joseph A. Bracken, *The Divine Matrix: Creativity as Link between East and West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 27. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q44.1; Burrell, *Freedom and Creation*, 82; Tanner, *God and Creation*, 92.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1996): 11–2.

⁸⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q60.5.

⁸⁸ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 95.

⁸⁹ David B. Burrell, “Creator / Creatures Relation: ‘The Distinction’ Vs. ‘Onto–Theology,’” *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (April 2008): 184.

non-contrastive transcendence enables both divine and human free will to operate in tandem to effect creation, albeit in completely distinct but related ways.

Through divine action, the Creator establishes universal laws (general providence) for creation. Additionally, as First Cause, God makes possible, but does not necessarily cause, secondary causes.⁹⁰ If God employs secondary causes or intermediaries for divine providence, it is God's choice out of divine goodness rather than necessity or inability.⁹¹ Even for divine acts perceived as extraordinary experiences (miracles), God "wills to activate and to sustain in act all those secondary causes whose activity contributes to the unfolding of the natural order, which he [sic] intends to produce."⁹² As a result, God's actions do not necessarily challenge physical laws or correct creaturely free will.

According to Edwards, decisions resulting from free will causally develop lasting creaturely habits and dispositions. He replaces the ontological concepts of substance and form with "a dynamic network of dispositional forces and habits... conceived as active and ontologically abiding principles."⁹³ Since a habit is a tendency to do something, it is "a law like relation between events or actions."⁹⁴ Exercising one habit influences the exercise of another with causal results. Entities also are mutually relational, essentially active, and actualized from their dispositional state by exercising their associated habits or dispositions. Edwards asserts that divine causality initiates these relational activities.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship*, para. 68.

⁹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q22.3.

⁹² International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship*, para. 68. See also Wesley J. Wildman, "An Introduction to Relational Ontology," in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 70.

⁹³ Lee, *The Philosophical Theology*, 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39. See also pp. 34–46, 76–82.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

Furthermore, he extends the interconnectedness of all things to one another and to the whole, especially regarding beauty. He contends that being “if we examine it narrowly, is nothing else but proportion.”⁹⁶ Thus in his writings on beauty, Edwards reinforces the notion that being is being-in-relation.

Explaining evil in relation to good is a challenge for Christianity and other ethical, monotheistic religions believing in an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing Creator. Aquinas provides three reasons why evil exists based on the first principle of good. Evil’s subject is good, so evil cannot be essential, it cannot be a First Cause only an (accidental) indirect cause, and it cannot destroy good since evil also would be destroyed.⁹⁷ Christian distinction prevents good and evil from sharing equal ontological status. For Augustine and Aquinas, evil has no ontological basis; it is a privation of good, not a thing in itself.⁹⁸ Since evil is not a thing, it has no existence *per se*; thus God does not create (bestow) evil with being. Aquinas concedes evil is found in created things, since varying degrees of goodness are necessary for the perfection of a finite universe, which is not as good as its infinite Creator.⁹⁹ The world’s imperfections inevitably allow for sinful actions and evil that is detrimental to the Creator/creation relationship.

Transcendence and Relationality

Although causal associations exist, divine transcendence infers a relational chasm between Creator and creation. To rectify this perception, late second-century theologians

⁹⁶ Edwards, “The Mind,” 336. In sum, being is inherently dynamic, relational beauty. See also Lee, *The Philosophical Theology*, 7 and chapter 4.

⁹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q49.3.

⁹⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei*, XII 6, 22; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q48.1, Q12.6–7.

⁹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q47.1–2, Q48.2.

adopted the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in which the Creator immediately and directly acts in creation. However, an emphasis on the impassible, immutable, omniscient divine attributes, along with Gnostic assertions of mediation between the God and the world, complicated the possibility of a Creator/creation relationship. Irenaeus and Tertullian argued the need for a mediating agency, but such a mediator places limits on divinity and implies the Creator is powerless to enter “into relation with the creature under all possible circumstances without danger of compromising the divine nature.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the Creator’s “transcendence exceeds all oppositional contrasts characteristic of the relations among finite beings [yet it] does not exclude but rather allows for the immanent presence to creatures of God in his [sic] otherness.”¹⁰¹ The issue lies with created beings who retain their identity over and against each other, risking “the distinctness of their own natures by entering into intimate relations with another.”¹⁰² By refusing to acknowledge their complete dependence on the Creator, creatures misinterpret divine transcendence, omnipotence, and benevolent immanence.

Mayra Rivera believes divine transcendence is relational. Her goal is to express “that God is irreducibly Other, always beyond our grasp. But not beyond our touch”¹⁰³ metaphorically speaking. By theorizing that an inseparable, theological, and “structural relation exists between imagining our relation to the human Other [sic] and to God as wholly Other: God can be perceived as an extreme instance of interhuman [sic]

¹⁰⁰ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 56–7.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 79. See also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 311–3.

¹⁰³ Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 3.

difference.”¹⁰⁴ Rivera seems to conflate divine transcendence and immanence in associating distinction with human otherness in Creator/creation and creature/creature relations, but she retains God’s actual transcendence by attributing it to divine mystery. According to Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “to speak of God as mystery is another way of saying that God is ‘personal.’”¹⁰⁵ Human beings seek knowledge and a deeper personal relationship with their Creator as well as other humans. The Creator/creation relationship exists, but due to divine mystery, the Creator remains transcendent and thus incomprehensible to creation. Interreligious dialogue increases awareness concerning creaturely mysteries of alterity while appreciation for other religions as participants develops mutual understanding and beneficial relationships.

Immanent Relation

God’s inconceivable transcendence, in some respects, enhances an understanding of divine immanence. Transcendence is a hiddenness or absence by which “God shows himself [sic] not to be among the things of our world. He is disclosed in his absence,”¹⁰⁶ paradoxically, as a unique type of close presence or divine immanence. From a non-contrastive viewpoint, God is “necessarily hidden and yet somehow pervasive in the world,”¹⁰⁷ not in spatial terms but as a theological sense of the Creator’s existence.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. 1, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John Galvin (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 156.

¹⁰⁶ Allen Vigneron, “The Christian Mystery and the Presence and Absence of God,” in *The Truthful and the Good: In Honor of Robert Sokolowski*, eds. John J. Drummond and James G. Hart (Boston MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 186. See also Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 195.

¹⁰⁷ Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, 2.

Within Christianity, transcendence and immanence are in tension, therefore, “an extreme of divine involvement requires, one could say, an extreme of divine transcendence.”¹⁰⁸ Karl Barth concurs, “God has the freedom to be present with that which is not God, to communicate Himself [sic] and unite Himself with the other and the other with Himself, in a way which utterly surpasses all that can be effected in regard to reciprocal presence, communion, and fellowship between other beings.”¹⁰⁹ Anything less would limit divine transcendence.

The Creator/creation relationship therefore involves transcendence, absence or hiddenness, as well as divine immanence, presence, and self-revelation. Transcendence facilitates creation’s unique being and freedom, but it also exposes the world’s fragility and total dependence on God. The Creator’s presence within creation sustains all being and guides it toward its ultimate purpose. In choosing to create, God is in relation to the world as its originator, preserver, and telos/end. Nevertheless, creation is incapable of comprehending transcendent reality *per se*, so the immanent Creator reveals, through intuition and religious experience, understanding about divine immanence in the world.

Creaturely Dependence

For Augustine and Aquinas, God’s immanence expresses an intimate relationality between Creator and creation. Augustine identifies God’s relation to the world as both Creator and Redeemer who is “more intimately present to me than my innermost being, and higher than the highest peak of my spirit.”¹¹⁰ While the Creator/creation relationship

¹⁰⁸ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 46–7.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 313.

¹¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, III 6.11. See also Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI 8.

exists, it is not comparable. To achieve the equivalence of divine immanence and mutual love exemplified by Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross is beyond humanity's current capabilities.¹¹¹ Augustine captures creation's spiritual longing and dependence by writing, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."¹¹² Aquinas likewise describes God's immanence as intimate, innermost in all things. The Creator is unceasingly close to creation, which is utterly dependent upon its Creator in numerous ways. Creation is subject to God's power, participates in God's presence, and exists through God's essence as the source of being.¹¹³ Although God is immediately present everywhere to all things, Aquinas maintains the Creator's distinction from creation.¹¹⁴ God is transcendent and wholly other to creation, yet through divine causality, God is immanent, loving and sustaining it.

God grants existence to creatures through divine love and free choice. Thus, the reason for creation "does not lie in the creature, or in some claim the creature has on God... This is absurd, since God and the creature simply would have switched places."¹¹⁵ The Creator is not dependent on creation; however, creation is completely and absolutely contingent on its Creator and source of being for its initial and continued existence as well as its intrinsic value.¹¹⁶ Christian distinction coupled with the doctrine of *creatio ex*

¹¹¹ Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 326.

¹¹² Augustine, *Confessions*, I 1.1.

¹¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q8.2, I Q93.3. See also Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI 8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I Q8.1, 2; I Q4.3, 4.

¹¹⁵ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 355. See also, Elizabeth T. Groppe, "Creatio Ex Nihilo and Ex Amore: Ontological Freedom in the Theologies of John Zizioulas and Catherine Mowry LaCugna," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 3 (2005): 469–73.

¹¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q.104.1, Q8.1. See also, Keith Ward, *Religion and Creation* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996), 289–91; Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), 36.

nihilo portend that at any moment, creation would cease to exist if God were to stop creating it. It is possible “that God could, in principle, ‘blink’ the universe away in one millisecond and then ‘blink’ it all back in the next”¹¹⁷ or, even more alarmingly, might choose to cease creating it. However, such divine power does not preclude the immanent, close Creator/creation relationship. The Creator maintains creation out of perfect love and faithfulness, not from divine necessity. Still, this existential reassurance articulates and reinforces creation’s total dependence on its Creator.

Contemporary notions of human autonomy equated with free choice challenge the Christian understanding that creatures are completely dependent on their Creator. Within the Creator/creation relationship, humans often deny their total dependence as creatures. They fail to realize that autonomy is not over-against God but rather in direct proportion to creaturely dependence upon the Creator.¹¹⁸ Rather than attempting to be the Creator, “the perfection of the creature, in its difference from God, increases with the perfection of relationship with God: the closer the better.”¹¹⁹ To acknowledge creaturely dependence and then internalize it actually liberates human beings to be in right relationship with God. As creatures, humans likewise are in relation with all other creatures in the created order. Because God is in right relationship with the world, God grants rational creatures the freedom to participate, to make decisions, and to form associations that promote development, provide meaning, and foster creation’s flourishing. Such freedom is necessary for human beings to be in relationship with God on a personal level.

¹¹⁷ Michael Lodahl, “*Creatio ex Amore!*” in *Theologies of Creation: Creatio Ex Nihilo and its New Rivals*, ed. Thomas Jay Oord (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 102.

¹¹⁸ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 3. See also Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 2006), 79.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Grace

God initiates the Creator/creation relationship through the gratuitous gift of grace. At the heart of human existence is the “free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God,”¹²⁰ known as grace. Grace is a universal and historical condition that humans experience by genuine self-transcendence, or as some theologians claim, through every day Christian experience.¹²¹ It connects the distant transcendent presence of divine mystery by offering God’s own being, in a personal, close immanence to humanity. The immediacy of God’s presence occurs as a gratuitous offer, a call from God; it is a condition of possibility for its acceptance as well as a human’s free response of rejection or complete, unconditional acceptance of grace as an event of grace itself.¹²² Karl Rahner believes God’s self-communication is inherent to human beings; it is part of humanity’s supernatural existential, as a characteristic of every person’s transcendental experience toward God.¹²³ When contemplated through the theological interpretation of revelation history, a person recognizes one’s transcendental experiences of God’s self-communication as both distant and close immediate divine mystery.¹²⁴ In sum, grace is an experience with the divine, a relationship God chooses to establish with humanity.

In Christianity, faith is the result of a profound encounter with God and a positive response to divine grace. Found in most religious traditions, faith is the “fundamental acknowledgement of creatureliness [sic] in the face of whatever one takes to be the

¹²⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

¹²¹ Roger Haight, “Sin and Grace,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. II, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 110.

¹²² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 118, 128.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 126–7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

transcendent.”¹²⁵ The religious experience of divine immanence establishes and cultivates the Creator/creation relationship, while the transcendent aspect of God retains a sense of wonder or awe. The manner in which each religious tradition apportions significance to these two divine attributes influences its spiritual experiences with God.

Spiritual experiences with the divine tend to be either personal, non–personal, or mystical relationality. In Christianity, an encounter with God is usually personal; the tradition stresses immanence along with transcendence. According to Aquinas’ theology of divine relationality, “God is personal because God is relational, not vice versa.”¹²⁶ For religions that view God as non–personal, transcendent attributes are primary, with little emphasis on immanence. The mystical experience is neither a personal nor an impersonal relationship. Unitive mysticism involves indescribable religious encounters in which “the experiencing self is temporarily absorbed into the divine reality, becoming one with the One.”¹²⁷ Diverse types of religious experience exemplify a “range of divine phenomena witnessed to by the religious history of mankind.”¹²⁸ Thus, understanding and expressing the Creator/creation relationship during interreligious dialogue depends on culturally conditioned, finite human discernment about divine mystery.

Incarnation and Trinity

For Christians, an important manifestation of God’s grace and immanence in the world occurs with the Incarnation. God freely chooses to create then enter the world by

¹²⁵ Michael Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 127.

¹²⁶ LaCugna, “The Relational God,” 650.

¹²⁷ John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1982), 93.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

becoming incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. Sokolowski posits the dichotomy of absence and presence establishes the conditions for the possibility of divine Incarnation; it destroys neither the divinity nor humanity of Jesus Christ. As a finite creature, the infinite Creator is actually present “yet his [sic] presence can go undetected since, despite his proximity, his divinity is hidden, veiled, absent.”¹²⁹ The Incarnation provides the appropriate immanence necessary for humanity to experience and respond to divine transcendence. The event also places God and humanity in solidarity, in an inseparable, affective unity of love along with an ethical and ontological relation.¹³⁰ Through this asymmetrical, but real and loving relation, the Creator relates to creatures in communion with Christ and the Holy Spirit, with the Spirit providing context and sensitivity that preserves each human being’s unique identity, history, and future.¹³¹ Consequently, a personal encounter with God through the Incarnation exemplifies the unique relational nature of the Creator/creation relationship.

The Creator/creation relationship additionally emphasizes redemption, which enables creatures to participate in Trinitarian excellence and beauty. According to Edwards, the Trinity exemplifies “the supreme harmony of all,”¹³² which comprises eternal unity within God, between Creator and creation, as well as relationality among creatures. Edwards employs several Trinitarian models in his work, such as Augustine’s notions of the Father’s overflowing abundance of love and the social model of three

¹²⁹ Vigneron, “The Christian Mystery,” 186–7. See also Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason*, especially chapter 4.

¹³⁰ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 323–8.

¹³¹ Michael Welker, “Relation: Human and Divine,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 165.

¹³² Edwards, “The Miscellanies: a–500,” 82, 13:329.

loving persons from Richard of St. Victor. Using both models, Edwards connects the ideas of creaturely dependence on God's goodness with God's soteriological vision, which consists of an eternal desire to communicate with creation, become incarnate, and ultimately to gather all elect creatures (through Christ) into personal Trinitarian union.¹³³ Yet the Triune Creator's eternal identity remains wholly other to creation since God's perfect excellence and beauty within Godself requires infinite, complex, relations of harmonious consent and agreement "distinguished into a plurality some way or other."¹³⁴ Such divine perfection is not found in relationships among creatures.

The Greek Orthodox tradition likewise describes God's Trinitarian existence as eternal mutual relations between three divine persons. Relationality establishes being plus identity within the Trinity. In other words, God's being or existence is relational; it is being as being-in-relation. God creates the world *ex nihilo* in freedom and love to reveal Trinitarian internal relationality.¹³⁵ Creation then participates in the Trinity according to its various capabilities. Additionally, the Trinitarian formula in sacraments, liturgical blessings, and the Eucharistic invocation (*epiclesis*) illustrates the Creator/creation relationship. During personal prayer, one participates in mutual interpersonal love that is "a paradigm for all human relationships... so far as this is possible for us"¹³⁶ as imperfect, sinful creatures. Human beings created in God's image become "living icons

¹³³ Jonathan Edwards, "The Miscellanies: 501–832," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 18, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 744, 18:389.

¹³⁴ Edwards, "The Mind," 6:337, 6:364–5. See also Edwards, "The Miscellanies: a–500," 96, 13:263; 117, 13:283.

¹³⁵ Kallistos Ware, "The Holy Trinity: Model for Personhood-in-Relation," in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 123–4. Ware's work reflects how St. Basil and the Cappadocian Fathers express the Trinity in personalist terms as communion (*koinonia*) and distinction (*diakrisis*).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 112–3.

of the Trinity”¹³⁷ by participation in the Trinity, not through identity with it. Trinitarian relationality serves as an ideal Christian model for human relations and specifically for people engaged in interreligious dialogue.

Implications for Interreligious Dialogue

The Creator/creation relationship proposes mixed implications for interreligious dialogue. On the one hand, the Creator is immanent; God is present to creation as a loving source and sustainer of all being. On the other hand, divine transcendence defines the Creator’s unique ontology along with a non–reciprocal relationship in which creation is completely dependent upon the Creator for its initial and continued existence. During interreligious dialogue, participants from a variety of religions are present to each other; this facilitates theological discussion and respectful relationships. As they share beliefs about a Creator/creation relationship, if any indeed exist, declarations of faith along with persuasive arguments are crucial for serious discourse. Genuine dialogue reveals similar as well as particular thinking about many theological topics, such as creation. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim representatives, for instance, agree about God’s transcendence but differ on the implications of divine immanence and Creator/creation relations, while Buddhists and Christians debate whether personal identity and relationships prevail after samsara or resurrection from the dead, respectively. ¹³⁸ Yet dialogue fails when religions misappropriate their differences as a form of transcendence over other traditions, which results in hegemony and discord.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 125.

¹³⁸ J.A. DiNola, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 147.

Hegemony

Various metaphors describing the Creator/creation relationship either perpetuate issues of hegemony or encourage increased interreligious dialogue. Christianity's Kingdom of God allegory and Sallie McFague's world as God's body are two examples. Each concept envisages divergent Creator/creation relationships; one emphasizes transcendence and distance, the other is immanent, close, and inherently related. Neither metaphor is perfect. God as King utilizes hegemonic, patriarchal, imperialistic ideas that promote hierarchical language, oppression, and dualism.¹³⁹ Critics view McFague's model as pantheistic and reductionist, but the metaphor provides equitable, inclusive, non-dualistic, body-spirit language indicating an immediate, intimate relationship with creation. The world as God's body implies the dependence and vulnerability of creation, without limiting God's power or independence. It also affirms goodness and value in the physical cosmos, which includes members of diverse religious traditions.

Christian distinction maintains the Creator is wholly other from a creation that relies upon God for its existence. Such inherent dependence, coupled with the belief that the Creator does not need to create, establishes a natural power differential within the Creator/creation relationship. In Christian scriptures, the Creator bestows humanity with dominion over (Gen. 1:24-30) and stewardship of (Gen 2:15), all creation. Nevertheless, human beings (or religious traditions) may not claim transcendence over another created thing because humanity shares the ontology of being created. Even though creatures possess varying degrees of physical agility or intellectual acuity, all are ontologically interconnected; their created being is being-in-relation. Hence, correctly articulating and

¹³⁹ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 63-9.

actualizing Creator/creation ontology in interreligious dialogue undermines hegemonic tendencies and reduces marginalization among and within religious traditions.

Although religious traditions are indeed unique, they are not transcendent to each other. When religions assume their own transcendence or hegemonic advantages during dialogue, contrastive comparisons over and against one another naturally occur, resulting in marginalization. Interreligious dialogue falters when otherness or difference relegates participants to the weaker boundaries away from the centers of power. Marginalizing subaltern people effectively removes their authority and dignity, which renders them silent, invisible, and thus ineffective during discourse. These situations of marginalization between human beings or religious traditions are not ontologically based; they result from hegemonic imperialism, suspicion, prejudice, and other sinful explanations.

Most religious traditions marginalized others or they were victims at some point in their history. Christianity is no exception. Early Christian communities distinguished themselves from Judaism by developing new scriptures and reinterpreting Christ as the fulfillment of Hebrew messianic texts. Theologies of exclusivism and supersessionism resulted. Though persecuted under the Roman Empire, Christianity eventually became a powerful state religion and extended its faith through war, imperialism, and imposition. Some of its harshest hegemonic and marginalizing acts are associated with the Crusades and Inquisition, while many historians consider Christian anti-Judaism a contributing factor to the Shoah.¹⁴⁰ Mitigating systemic exclusivism and hegemonic marginalization requires religions recognize and accept ontological similarities that restore as well as strengthen relationships across the borders of alterity. Moreover, using non-contrastive

¹⁴⁰ John B. Cobb and Ward M. McAfee, Eds., *The Dialogue Comes of Age: Christian Encounters with Other Traditions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 44 and chapter 2.

approaches to respect diversity during interreligious dialogue avoids unhealthy and harmful comparisons when discussing theological differences.

For Christianity, Jesus Christ is humanity's model for reversing marginalization by reuniting people with God as well as with each other. From the borders of religion and society, Christ's life, death, and resurrection exhibits humility, sacrifice, and salvific love for God and neighbor, especially toward the poor, sick, or other marginalized members of society. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Creator, demonstrates God's love and validates that a human creature's intrinsic value and dignity derives from being made in the image of God. The Creator bestows human creatures with various talents and gifts to share among their numerous entangled relationships. By extension, human beings comprise various religions, which benefit from relationships with other religious traditions. Interreligious dialogue provides the opportunity for participants to share their time, talent, and religious viewpoints, which lead to genuinely respecting each other's worth.

Unity–Particularity Conundrum

As being *per se*, the Creator demonstrates ontological distinction by bestowing being or existence onto creation. Although human creatures participate in perfecting creation, God alone maintains divine transcendence. In acknowledging a person is a creature, “one assumes a bond with one's fellow human beings or divinely graced creatures, because of a sense of shared origins, destiny, and responsibility before the transcendent source of life.”¹⁴¹ The ontological unity of human creatures is therefore a given reality. During interreligious dialogue, similar theological concepts, social action

¹⁴¹ Paul Mendes–Flohr, “The Promises and Limitations of Interfaith Dialogue,” *Criterion* 50, no. 1 (2013): 8.

imperatives, and common interests promote additional connections or associations between representatives from various religions. Unfortunately, fears about lost religious identity or concerns about consolidating particular tenets or values thwart efforts toward peaceful, effective dialogue.

The Creator/creation relationship encompasses all creatures, individually and as the entire created reality. Consequently, through divine immanence, God maintains a unique relationship with each creature as well as with the unified cosmos. Religious traditions offer diverse explanations for relationality that associates creatures sharing common and different natures.¹⁴² Christianity offers the Trinity as the premier relational model of unity and particularity. The Holy Trinity expresses only one God, a *perichoretic* union of three divine persons, whose relations (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) define their uniqueness. A Christian image from feminist theology depicts the total unity of being as an energy field or “living matrix of matter/energy...beyond and within the whole cosmic process... [that] holds the whole together in mutually interacting relationality.”¹⁴³ Process theologians concur with scientists who theorize the cosmos is a living, evolving, adaptive continual progression of interdependent relations. Furthermore, pluralist John Hick posits that although “God transcends comprehension, God is one, and there is an absolute unity

¹⁴² In Native American theology, for example, creaturely unity manifests within a communitarian culture and kin relationships that relegate individual identity to the collective community. Since creation is sacred; all creatures, including human beings, relate to God, to each other, and to the cosmos. Some Eastern religions believe creation is an illusion; creatures are always and already part of a greater transcendent wholeness, but they suffer as particular entities in the cosmos until regaining previously known insights about unified reality. For additional examples, refer to Cobb, *The Dialogue Comes of Age*, 28–36.

¹⁴³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5 (April 1992): 35. See also Bracken, *The Divine Matrix*, 140.

underlying all reality.”¹⁴⁴ Ironically, agreeing that the Creator and the act of creation are beyond understanding actually unites diverse religious traditions during discourse.

Another Christian example entangles philosophical ideas and mystical spirituality in a unity that respects diversity. According to Panikkar, the cosmotheandric experience provides a spiritual encounter of integration between creation, the Creator, and humanity. Panikkar claims that various religions share this experience as an “unfolding of history and the continuation of creation,”¹⁴⁵ therefore, he suggests utilizing it as a method for interreligious dialogue. The basis for his model is “the fundamental religious fact,”¹⁴⁶ a mystery, which is referred to by many names; it is accessible to all religions, not through doctrine, but present and experienced everywhere as transcendent yet immanent mystery. Mystics describe these encounters with mystery as a sense of unity brought about through reconciliation or atonement with God, humanity, and the world. Instead of reductionism, the cosmotheandric experience highlights interrelatedness between God, the world, and humanity. Panikkar does not advocate unity at the expense of religious diversity nor is mere coexistence adequate. Through interreligious dialogue, he envisions a mutually beneficial connectedness that enhances yet retains each religion’s identity.

As religions evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different Creator/creation relationship models, interreligious dialogue facilitates relational unity among contributors in addition to greater understanding and shared respect. In the early twentieth century, a German journal entitled *Creature (Die Kreatur)* presented interreligious perspectives about the Creator and creation, with particular emphasis on the idea that human beings

¹⁴⁴ Feldmeier, “Is the Theology of Religions,” 259–60.

¹⁴⁵ Panikkar, *The Trinity*, 74–5.

¹⁴⁶ Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1981), 23.

are creatures. Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic editors instituted a forum through which “men and women of theistic faith are to be cognizant of themselves as created beings and thus co–responsible for the care of the created order, which includes at its center one’s fellow human beings.”¹⁴⁷ Instead of focusing only on theological exchange, the inaugural editorial mandated “the opening or emerging of one’s self out of the severity and clarity of one’s self–enclosedness [sic], a dialogue (*Gespräch*) prompted by a common concern for created being.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, this was a dialogue ahead of its time about the created environment as well as the roles and responsibilities human creatures have at sustaining and improving the communal existence of creation. This dialogue of social action calls members from diverse religions to unite in common goals benefiting all creation.

Though creation expresses one ontologically interconnected reality, the Christian story of creation also emphasizes particularity and plurality. In the Book of Genesis, God separates heaven from earth, light from darkness, and waters from land, in addition to creating various stars, birds, plants, sea monsters, and crawling creatures.¹⁴⁹ The Creator calls into existence different, particular aspects of a unified creation; the one God is the source of all variation as well as all that exists. Diverse people and particular religions likewise exist and possess many theological perspectives. In interreligious dialogue, participants learn from creation narratives “to see things differently, [which] does not

¹⁴⁷ Mendes–Flohr, “The Promises,” 8.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. More recently, Paul Knitter advocates along similar lines with his Correlational and Globally Responsible Model for Dialogue. For more information, refer to Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

¹⁴⁹ Genesis 1:1–31; cf Sirach 33:10–11. The sacred scriptures of Judaism and Christianity both contain Genesis 1:1–31. The intent is not to establish dualisms in creation but to emphasize otherness and diversity in unity.

mean that one does not see the same things . . . To speak of God differently is not to speak of another God.”¹⁵⁰ To speak of creation’s goodness, affirms its unity and differentiation.

Comprehending the Creator/creation relationship from interreligious perspectives reinforces the notion that human and religious otherness is intrinsically valuable. Though the Creator’s wholly otherness is incomprehensible, some aspects of divine mystery are assessable in creation. On the one hand, mutually beneficial interpersonal relationships disclose God’s abundant love and concern for others. For example, when interreligious dialogue results in relationships based upon mutual understanding and respect, “God is being other in the otherness of the religions.”¹⁵¹ On the other hand, through expected, normally occurring dialogic tensions and conflicts, “the mysterious otherness of God is revealed more clearly, perhaps, in what is unclear and disagreeable than in what we can understand and affirm.”¹⁵² The thought of consolidating diverse religious traditions into one common faith community idolatrously limits God’s otherness. Particularity provides various insights into divine mystery along with the impetus for achieving mutual goals in interreligious dialogue. Because all religious traditions are different, they possess varying worldviews that promote the common goals of interreligious dialogue. Being present to other religious traditions provides opportunities for shared spiritual experiences as well as time to listen, learn, and understand each other. Interreligious dialogue inspires a balance of intimacy to appreciate otherness.

¹⁵⁰ Bruno Chenu, “Do Our Difficulties Have a Sense of a Communion?” in *Frontier Violations: the Beginnings of New Identities*, eds. Felix Wilfred and Oscar Beozzo (London, England: SCM Press (Concilium), 1999), 127.

¹⁵¹ Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 221.

¹⁵² Ibid. See also David Tracy, “Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity,” *Theology Today* 51 no. 1 (April 1994): 108.

While particularity is crucial in dialogic encounters, participants should avoid over-emphasizing individualism with its effects of fragmentation and disconnection. These attitudes promote marginalization from the Creator, creation, and other human creatures. Maintaining a healthy identity along with otherness is important for dignity, development, and participation in relationships established during interreligious dialogue. When taken to the extreme, particularity results in a loss of human relationality and wholeness, which are components of human nature.

Epistemology and Language

Interreligious dialogue functions as a starting point for assessing theological and epistemological facets of the Creator/creation relationship. Christians believe the Creator freely, lovingly creates a good world. God invests in it, cares for it, and then guides it as creation naturally progresses towards its ultimate perfection. Therefore, creation is to some extent sacramental since it manifests God's presence and grace. By appreciating the glory of God's handiwork and respecting creation, humanity demonstrates respect for its Creator. Moreover, faith in God translates to faith in God's creation, which encompasses all creatures, including human beings and their associated national, cultural, and religious affiliations. Joint efforts at caring for and preserving creation's relational nature provide better rationale than selfish concerns for power or profit during interreligious dialogues of social action or theological exchange.

Epistemologically, God being distinct from the world implies that the Creator is unknowable to creation. Aristotle's idea that "in the act of knowing, the knower and the

object known are one”¹⁵³ suggests otherwise. As source of all being, the First Cause of all that exists, the Creator knows all of creation. Divine omniscience of creation establishes creation’s ability to know God for “we can know God only because God concomitantly knows us”¹⁵⁴ but within limits. Aquinas points out that “the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower,”¹⁵⁵ but finite humans cannot know the infinite God as God knows Godself. Furthermore, the imperfect language of creatures falls short of conveying the Creator’s perfection. Apophatic theology recognizes humanity’s reasoning and language limits in the struggle to articulate divine incomprehensibility. However, the Creator’s transcendence exceeds creaturely knowledge and expression, unless knowledge extends “to things presupposed to our experiencing anything at all”¹⁵⁶ through structures of experience or consciousness. Theologically, humans “can imagine finite personal beings created in the immediate presence of God, so that in being conscious of that which is other than themselves they are automatically and unavoidably conscious of God.”¹⁵⁷ Religious traditions represent various knowledge communities with diverse, overlapping ways of knowing or imagining due to culture, history, and interrelation. This entangled multiplicity accounts for pluralistic views of experiencing and comprehending the divine.

Due to cultural and societal proximity, humans interact in a variety of linguistic communities. Each language expresses humanity’s relationship to the world as “a direct relationship to the infinity of beings.”¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, religious language describes the

¹⁵³ Bracken, *The Divine Matrix*, 39.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II/II, Q1.2.

¹⁵⁶ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 205.

¹⁵⁷ Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 50.

¹⁵⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2004), 449.

Creator/creation relationship. During interreligious dialogue, specific language and ritual formulas express each religion's diverse encounters with divine immanence. Subtle nuances in terminology and symbolic representations complicate efforts at describing the already ambiguous, incomprehensible Creator/creation relationship through dialogue. Mutual prayer meetings and shared rituals likewise encounter language limitations that impede understanding. Nevertheless, interreligious dialogue offers an opportunity to attain additional theological growth and comprehension by learning new languages or methods that preserve or enhance relationality between other religions and with God.

Language functions as a sign and a symbol of communication. As a symbol, language points to something other when abstracted from its particular context. If through abstraction the language–sign becomes unambiguous, then it functions more as a pure sign, subsisting in what it signifies as well as in the sign itself. In this case, “only on the basis of its own immediate being is it [language] at the same time something referential, ideal. The difference between what it is and what it means is absolute.”¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, different words (in the same and various languages) provide a variety of perspectives that signify and give expression to an experience or concept. Multiplicity introduces inherent inexactness into interreligious dialogue, but it does not necessary imply incorrectness; yet, “this kind of essential inexactness can be overcome only if the mind rises to the infinite.”¹⁶⁰ Bias and inexactness occur in interreligious dialogue when participants engage positional power to impose their perspectives or to deny others' ideas. Effective

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 413.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 435.

communication happens only by valuing then evaluating each religious viewpoint as it contributes or relates to the all-encompassing interconnectedness of reality.

Conclusion

The act of creating establishes a Creator/creation relationship. Yet assertions that the relation is interdependent provide inadequate differentiation between God and the world. The Creator/creation relationship, especially in Christianity, involves distinction and relation. Christian distinction employs the divine attribute of transcendence to constitute radical difference. The Creator, as wholly other, is a notion contributing to divine mystery. Nevertheless, being-in-relation means connection and intimacy, not distance. Christian distinction also articulates how God freely chooses to create, rather than from necessity. Through divine aspects of immanence, the Creator subsequently sustains and guides creation to its perfection. As a result, God's unceasing presence and activity in the world encourages relationality with creation, including human creatures. A spectrum of perspectives exists regarding the Creator/creation relationship. Differing views include atheism, agnosticism, deism, pantheism, panentheism, and classical theism.

Furthermore, perceptions of the Creator/creation relationship influence methods of creation. Some religions believe creation is continuously cyclic or emanates from God, others posit God organizes chaos or creates out of nothing at all. Christian tenets claim the latter; as the source of all being, the Creator bestows existence upon creation from nothing (non-existence). Hence, the Creator/creation relationship exemplifies relational ontology; being is and creates being-in-relation. God's ontological distinction as being *per se*, likewise illustrates being as being-in-relation, since the one Trinitarian Godhead entails three divine persons in a unified, unending, loving relationship.

For Christians, the Creator/creation relationship manifests in divine immanence, grace, and the Incarnation. In fact, “communion between God and his [sic] people finds its definitive fulfillment in Jesus Christ.”¹⁶¹ Through the Incarnation, the Creator is as immanent to creation as possible, while maintaining a divine transcendent distinction. Divine relationality with humanity highlights “dynamism and mutuality, a unity that incorporates difference,”¹⁶² and a hospitable orientation to the other. Human relationality, in interreligious dialogue ideally emulates the Creator/creation relationship.

The presence of diverse religious traditions provides opportunities for shared experiences that promote relationality. Respect for theological differences fosters productive discourse. Increased understanding combined with the active presence of diverse religious traditions provides an opportunity for shared experiences, which promotes relationality. Appreciating unique religious identity along with the value of being as being-in-relation mitigates challenges encountered in interreligious dialogue.

The next chapter evaluates the analogical implications of quantum entanglement as well as what insights Christian perspectives on the Creator/creation relationship offer regarding relational ontology. Then it applies the analysis to construct a solution based on being as being-in-relation that averts or resolves challenges in interreligious dialogue.

¹⁶¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, (November 22, 1981), <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html> (accessed March 2, 2009), para. 13.

¹⁶² Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God*, 29.

CHAPTER 5 – RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY TO IMPROVE INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Introduction

Theological, philosophical, scientific, and other interdisciplinary arguments from previous chapters validate the primary premise of relational ontology, that being is being-in-relation. Human beings, in particular, are adept at establishing relationships for political, economic, or social advantages. Religion is another aspect of humanity's interrelatedness; religious traditions develop from associations among members who share similar beliefs. Religious plurality likewise demonstrates relationality since mutual relations distinguish each religion's particular identity. Interreligious dialogue is a mechanism that facilitates understanding between religious others and encourages reciprocal relationships of respect.

When interreligious dialogue utilizes prevailing notions of substantive ontology as a framework, confrontation, contention, and conflict within and among religious traditions often results. The previous chapters described current challenges influencing the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue, explained the rationale for relational ontology as a more advantageous approach, and evaluated two interdisciplinary examples of relationality from physics and Christian theology. Because relational ontology is intrinsic to reality, it advances interreligious encounters by neutralizing existing tensions between theologies of religions, interreligious dialogue, and comparative theology. This chapter assesses the benefits of relationality and analyzes how a relational method improves the efficacy of interreligious dialogue.

The starting point for relational ontology as an approach to interreligious dialogue focuses on the interconnected unity of unique religions in order to yield new insights that eliminate current challenges. Modern and postmodern worldviews introduce polarizing perspectives about unity and particularity among religious traditions. These viewpoints raise questions about religious identity, as well as language and epistemological issues necessitating dialogue for deeper understanding and reconciliation. Relational ontology encourages right relationships between religions and their members. Mutually respectful relations lead to a deeper understanding about ultimate reality from dialoguing about the diverse tenets entangled religious traditions offer each other.

Additionally, the effects of religious hegemony and colonialism along with lingering imperialism continue to perpetuate the Western imposition of values and self-serving agendas in religious, political, cultural, social, and economic spheres. Such hegemony leads to elitism, exclusion, and marginalization, which inhibit effectiveness and challenge the goals of interreligious endeavors. A relational paradigm is a practical approach that minimizes the existing issues of religious bias and factors of dominance since relationality reflects the nature of reality and thus responds to the needs of religious traditions during dialogic encounters. Relational dialogic methods invite interreligious participants to learn heuristically from one another then evaluate new perspectives with respect to their own traditions.

State of Interreligious Dialogue

The aim of interreligious dialogue is to reduce or remove conflicts through improved understanding, respect, and a balanced, open, receptive attitude toward a variety of religious convictions. Yet religious plurality, along with cultural, political, and

economic differences, continues to generate conflict within society. Attempts to reconcile tensions in the theological sub-disciplines of interreligious dialogue, theologies of religions, and comparative theology also remain at an impasse. The methodological use of substantive ontology reinforces notions of individuality, autonomy, and isolation that encourage negative relationships of comparison, competition, and conflict during interreligious dialogue.

Conversely, relational ontology affirms that reality is relational; diverse religions exist in relation to each other. Several academic disciplines support ideas of relationality. In science, for example, quantum entanglement illustrates an interconnectedness of particles at subatomic levels of physical reality. Christian theology emphasizes God as wholly other within the complex yet relational Creator/creation relationship, while epistemology examines interpersonal influences on knowledge. When relationality informs interreligious dialogue, religions encounter each other as already ontologically interconnected. Consequently, participants are receptive to listening then understanding theological perspectives from ontologically associated religious traditions.

Interreligious dialogue demonstrates relationality *per se* since it engages at least two persons in mutually beneficial bidirectional discourse. Unlike dispute or debate, which disintegrates into rivalry or polemics, dialogue is practical collaboration; it is “an exchange between persons and only secondarily an argument over opinions.”¹ As a form of religious engagement, interreligious dialogue is “about the meeting of minds and spirits in an attempt to understand and develop a shared commitment to the spiritual life

¹ Michael J. Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 75.

of this society.”² Entering into interreligious dialogue with balanced attitudes that are open, receptive, unselfish, and impartial enables participants to accept and appreciate what is good in other religions, even those with divergent theologies.

Every dialogic encounter involves relations that include discussion as well as other forms of human interaction. The dialogue of life, action, shared experience, and theological exchange all have components of relationality among and between religions.³ The dialogue of life involves sharing the joys, sorrows, and problems of one’s life with friends and neighbors. Through a dialogue of action, people from various religions work together on common causes of social justice, human rights, and liberation. A dialogue of mutual religious experience engages faith, prayer, contemplation, and spiritual practice in a collective search for divine reality. The goal of theological exchange is dialogue among diverse religious representatives to develop a deep understanding and appreciation for their own and others’ traditions, which enhances meaningful dialogues of life, action, and religious experience.

One example that encompasses the four types of dialogue is the growing phenomenon of interreligious marriage. Although leaders of most religious traditions believe the practice is a risk to propagating the faith, supporters perceive this most intimate expression of relationality as an ideal form of interreligious dialogue.⁴ Many

² Jonathan Magonet, *Talking to the Other: Jewish Interfaith Dialogue with Christians and Muslims* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 9.

³ Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. *Dialogue and Proclamation* (May 19, 1991). <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html> (accessed February 1, 2013), para. 42–4. For more information, refer to Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 98–9.

⁴ Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69.

interfaith couples practice interreligious dialogue and ongoing acts of comparative theology frequently throughout their shared married life. From a foundation of mutual love, trust, and respect, they exemplify the necessary relational features for genuine interreligious dialogue to promote understanding. While some theological assimilation or blending occurs, these couples incorporate their most meaningful, relevant religious traditions that they identify, value, and negotiate through interreligious dialogue.

Theologies of religions define high-level relationships between religious traditions that influence participants' perspectives during interreligious dialogue. Even though the prevalent typography featuring exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism creates marginalization and borders, these aspects necessarily contribute to religious identity, thereby, establishing otherness and a space for dialogue. Each religious tradition possesses distinctive fundamental categories, symbols, and concepts that frame its unique worldview and structure. Because these tenets are subject to historical reinterpretation, comparative theology critically correlates several religions' classic texts, sacred poetry, art, songs, rituals, and practices by examining theological similarities and differences.⁵ Consequently, comparative activities establish "a never-ending hermeneutical circle which moves between identity and openness, conviction and critique, commitment and distanciation [sic],"⁶ ultimately to enhance relations and understanding between religious traditions. As dialogic participants share sacred narratives and personal stories of faith,

⁵ James L. Fredericks, "Introduction," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), xi–xii.

⁶ Marianne Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: from Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 1 (January 2012): 26.

existing religious boundaries dissolve into interconnections of increased understanding and deeper relationship.

Despite occasional tension between the systematic approaches of interreligious dialogue, theologies of religions, and comparative theology, they mutually interrelate through common goals and reciprocal influences upon one another. Comparative theology and dialogue consider interreligious encounters as a continuous conversational process, a place to cultivate meaning. Likewise, theologies of religions are necessary because religious bias and one's pre-understanding are "an unavoidable consequence of our epistemic situation."⁷ Divulging one's theological position prevents distorted outcomes and alleviates lingering suspicions; it also demonstrates respect that engenders trust and open cooperation during dialogue. The interrelatedness of these interreligious approaches exemplifies relational ontology. Religious traditions exist in relation to each other; thus, theologies of religions describe their ontological being as relational. An epistemological awareness of religious relation serves as a starting point for comparative theology while interreligious dialogue manifests relational ontology through discourse as well as empirical activity.

Analysis of Relational Ontology as a Dialogic Method

Contrary to substantive ontology that claims substance is the essence or nature of a being, relational ontology posits that existence is being-in-relation. Entities have being but being is not substantive; existence is a non-physical relational principle. Relationality

⁷ Peter Feldmeier, "Is the Theology of Religions an Exhausted Project?" *Horizons* 35, no. 2 (2008): 257. For more information, refer to Kristin Beise Kiblinger, "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), 22, 24, 31.

characterizes reality as “irreducibly pluralistic and inescapably unitary”⁸ so the world exemplifies ontological unity and plurality simultaneously. Therefore, nothing exists “except in a relational unity of its constituents [thus] the identity of an entity is defined by its relations.”⁹ The notion of causality also illustrates relationality. Anything that exists “is dependent on a host of past and present conditions which in principle involve the entire universe.”¹⁰ Because substantive models describe isolated entities, they fail to recognize any historically and ontologically relational conditioning.

Relationality is ontologically prior to individual personhood, which implies that human beings by nature cannot exist in isolation. By integrating Enlightenment ideas of an autonomous, individual self with the twentieth-century social self, “individuality emerges through a process of interaction between the organism and the environment.”¹¹ Humans exist as a self, as a being-in-relation to the world. Yet as self-conscious and self-reflective, humans are not merely beings in the world; instead, “the human person self-understands in relationship with other selves and the world at large.”¹² The self as a person “refers both to the irreducible identity and interiority that constitutes the particular individual being and to the fundamental relationship to other persons that is [sic] the basis

⁸ Joseph Kaipayil, *Relationalism: A Theory of Being* (Bangalore, India: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy Publications, 2009), 10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ H. Hudson, “Buddhist Teaching about Illusion,” *Religious Studies* 7, no. 2 (1971): 146.

¹¹ Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986), 179.

¹² Joseph Kaipayil, *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay* (Bangalore, India: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy Publications, 2002), 52.

for human community.”¹³ Relationality thereby affirms the self, self-knowledge, and the other within dialogic encounters.

No self-made person exists; hence, communal relationships constitute a person. In fact, “if the separateness of our lives is a sham, then the work of our civilization to produce us as discrete subjects vying to emulate, master, know, and consume external objects maintains a systemic repression of that ‘place of the universe in us,’ that site of active relationship.”¹⁴ For Buddhists, the notion of self-contained or self-subsistent individuals is illusion; it is empty and lacking one’s true self-nature.¹⁵ In Chinese philosophy, ideas of a *yu-wu* continuum “represent poles of inclusion, indicating that the primary ontological concerns of the Chinese are at once pluralistic and nonindividualistic [sic]”¹⁶ manifestations of being. Hence, emptiness is not absence but unbounded inter-relationality.

People exist in entangled relationships with each other, the world, and the divine. From new associations and perspectives, “we ‘are’ in a new way, we ‘exist’ in a new way, we have our being from another,”¹⁷ thus dynamic relationships create a constantly novel and evolving reality. Mutually positive, authentic, right relationships impart meaning to people and by extension, to religious traditions. Ontologically, religions are

¹³ International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship": Human Persons Created in the Image of God* (July 23, 2004), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html> (accessed March 13, 2015), para. 41.

¹⁴ Catherine Keller, “Tangles of Unknowing: Cosmology, Christianity, and Climate,” in *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁵ Hudson, “Buddhist Teaching about Illusion,” 146.

¹⁶ Peter D. Hershock, “Person as Narration: The Dissolution of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in Ch’an Buddhism,” *Philosophy East and West*, 44, no. 4 (October, 1994), 695.

¹⁷ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 291–2.

relational internally and externally. They exist because people develop a unique religious identity by sharing beliefs and interacting with each other. Yet religious traditions retain their individuality by distinguishing their similarities and differences in association with other religions.

Relational aspects of religious plurality also are defining features of interreligious dialogue. As a model of relationality, the impetus of dialogue is interconnection through communication. The core elements of relation include continuity, growth, expansion, relative stability, reciprocity, and co-enhancement in dynamic freedom.¹⁸ These traits apply to interreligious dialogue, which promotes existing relationality within and among diverse religious traditions. By analogy, quantum entanglement exhibits an intrinsic interconnectedness between subatomic particles in the physical universe, while in some religions, a Creator/creation relationship exists despite radically ontological distinctions.

Quantum Entanglement

As evidenced by scientific empirical data, the universe displays pluralistic levels of relationality that portrays physical reality as a complex, unified, complete system. Classical physics presents a predictable, relational cosmos using theories and principles that associate objects (matter) with the effects of gravitational, weak, strong, and electromagnetic forces (energy) on momentum. However, at microscopic levels, quantum physics demonstrates unpredictability and randomness in nature as well as reality's fundamental interaction and relationality. Quantum physics describes the structure and

¹⁸ Michael Welker, "Relation: Human and Divine," in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 164.

behaviors of subatomic particles that interconnect to comprise all matter and energy in the universe, such as the stars, the Earth, and human beings; thus, everything exists in relationship rather than isolation. Relationality in the universe extrapolates analogously to validate humanity's social nature and religious, political, and cultural institutions that foster interpersonal relationships. Because humans are expressive, they relate utilizing dialogue. By extension, relationships exist among diverse religions. Interreligious dialogue similarly presupposes interreligious relationality.

Quantum physicists recognize the relational nature of physical reality in their work with entangled subatomic particles. Quantum entanglement does not conflate individual particles; instead, it identifies entities as pairs, as unified quantum correlations that potentially endure through time and space. External influences such as observation, measurement, or environmental noise operating on entangled particles causes decoherence or disentanglement. Interestingly, a single instance of entanglement untangles easier than particles (or by analogy, humans) sharing multiple relations,¹⁹ which suggests that complex webs of interconnectedness, whether between particles, humans, or religions, maintains stronger, more durable links of relationality.

Entangled human relationships, whether among physicists or religious adherents, produce enduring influence on dialogic interactions. During the development of quantum theory for example, physicists present experimental results to colleagues who discuss, question, and argue, in attempts to disprove initial concepts. If dissatisfied, the skeptics encourage, persuade, and at times cajole their peers to delve deeper for answers. Such spirited collaboration creates more defensible, complete theories. Standard scientific

¹⁹ André R. R. Carvalho, Florian Mintert, and Andreas Buchleitner, *Decoherence and Multipartite Entanglement* <<https://arxiv.org/pdf/quant-ph/0410208>> (accessed December 20, 2016).

methods and mathematical formulas help physicists communicate evidence, justify hypotheses, and gain consensus during dialogue.

The lack of agreed-upon techniques and common terminology among interreligious dialogue participants makes it more difficult to explain unfamiliar religious ideas, beliefs, or spiritual experiences. Applying relational dialogic methods from academic disciplines outside predominately Western religious constructs introduces fresh perspectives that neutralize the tensions plurality, identity, and language introduce into interreligious work. Additionally, promoting interdisciplinary dialogue improves relationships between scientific and religious organizations because it counteracts the marginalization of previously ostracized religious and non-religious voices that offer diverse viewpoints. Science-religion dialogue is a particularly effective way to address mutual concerns about the environment, which exemplifies the entangled relationships between humanity, creation, and Creator.

Creator/Creation Relationship

Despite their radical differences and otherness, entangled interpersonal, interreligious, and human-world relationships share a mutual relational ontology as created entities. Because of creation, creaturely existence is being-in-relation. The implication that relationality requires ontological similarity causes issues for religions believing that the Creator is completely distinct from creation. In fact, Christian distinction perceives the Creator as being itself; although not created being, God is still being-in-relation. Christian creeds describe divine relational being as Trinitarian monotheism. Richard of St. Victor clarifies at least three divine persons necessarily

comprise the Christian Godhead. He states that God is love,²⁰ but self-love turned inward is not true love. Genuine love is self-giving, mutual exchange; therefore, it requires more than one person. However “two persons still falls short of the perfection of love [for relational love is] characterized by sharing and communion, [so] two have to share their reciprocal love with a third”²¹ person in community, without implying any lack or deficiency of God, who is perfect. Hence, God’s triune relational being is not one of existence; it is of essence.

As being *per se*, God’s infinite transcendence clearly is ontologically distinct from finite creaturely existence. Through the act of creating, the wholly other Creator freely enters into a loving relationship with creation. The Creator’s enduring relational presence sustains creation while granting it full freedom and otherness. Though not divine, creation intimately relates to its Creator since divine “being is present in the human being as the ultimate source of its (his/her) being.”²² Creaturely existence is created being-in-relation, hence, all creatures, including humans, are unable to comprehend their Creator fully, because God is absolute being. Although the Creator is irreducible to any creature’s perceived images or accounts, humans still attempt to describe spiritual experiences with their Creator through scriptures, rituals, and dialogue.

²⁰ Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenological starting point that God is love also contributes to interreligious dialogue. Setting aside ontological categories, he perceives God as love or gift (which could be interpreted to express relationality). His method of utilizing Christian scriptures to correct ontological concepts and enrich phenomenological ideas might be applied in comparative theology to enhance understanding during interreligious dialogue.

²¹ Kallistos Ware, “The Holy Trinity: Model for Personhood-in-Relation,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 121–2.

²² Kaipayil, *Critical Ontology*, 53.

Christians believe the Creator made creatures, especially human beings, in God's own relational image, ultimately to share in communion with the divine. This logically suggests the Holy Trinity as an ideal metaphor for interreligious dialogue since the Trinitarian model values uniqueness within its essential unity. If participants of interreligious dialogue initially were to admit that a fundamental relationship exists among them, then marginalization and conflict disintegrate while respect and cooperation intensify. Furthermore, equality is crucial within interreligious relationships; otherwise, hegemonic tensions such as trivializing or Christianizing other religious beliefs persist. These imperialistic implications arise from even suggesting the Trinitarian paradigm, which is a sensitive topic for non-Christian monotheistic religions. Also the Christian illustration of communion that entails a relational *perichoresis* of Trinity (God in God's self), Incarnation (God in the other), and Church (God in the others) as "a sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind [sic]"²³ is problematic for non-Christian religions. So is the belief that God sanctifies and reconciles human existence, by interconnecting the Creator/creation relationship through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. These Christological approaches are much more effective in ecumenical rather than in interreligious dialogue.

Interestingly, the work of the Holy Spirit is a more acceptable dialogic metaphor for many religions. Various traditions believe in a divine spirit who animates, sustains, and holds creation in tension through mutual interdependence, so that all creatures "in the

²³ Robert Kress, *The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1985), 94.

relational web of life can only grow and flourish through relationality.”²⁴ To achieve relationality in interreligious dialogue, participants must search for and “*expect* to encounter the truth and grace of the Spirit in other communities [in order to] see and identify what fruits of the Spirit may be growing in the gardens of other religions.”²⁵ The Spirit becomes an interreligious unifier amid a multiplicity of religious traditions.

Evaluation and Analysis

A common trait quantum physicists and theologians possess is an unquenchable sense of wonder. Scientific wonder motivates research and experimentation toward novel, unusual mysteries of the entangled universe. For philosophers and theologians, the original purpose of metaphysics entails a “wonder-filled encounter of the human with the Mystery of Being,”²⁶ which reconstructs a fuller state of human relationality. Through wonder, a person appreciates differences in the world, in other people, and in diverse religions even though the vastness of physical reality and “the persistent unknowability of our neighbors of other faiths reminds us of the limits of the human project in coming-to-know-God.”²⁷ At moments of absolute incongruity or confused incomprehensibility, profound wonder reveals the relational, dialogical structure of reality as essential human

²⁴ Diarmuid O’Murchu, “How to Relate in a Quantum Universe!” in *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 148.

²⁵ Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 101, italics original. See also Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.; Orbis Books, 1997), 249–50.

²⁶ Connie Lasher, “Dialogue with Nature and Interreligious Encounter: Toward a Comparative Theology of the Sense of Wonder,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 21 (2011): 194–5.

²⁷ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, “As Long as We Wonder: Possibilities in the Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 553.

experience. Interreligious dialogue instantiates a relational method for sharing the wonder of religious experiences among various traditions.

The Second Vatican Council was instrumental in reevaluating the changing roles of interreligious dialogue and relationality. By recognizing “what is holy and true”²⁸ in other religions, the Church revitalizes the notion of catholic as universal in its efforts to build interreligious connections. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share a relationship through a common origin in faith; all three faiths identify with the God of Abraham. Within some practices of Judaism, how well a religion forms partnerships with other communities to seek God’s truths, provide meaning, and advance God’s goodness determine its value and holiness.²⁹ Jews who engage in interreligious dialogue believe “the world needs the contribution that the other religions can make for the sake of achieving wholeness and perfection for all.”³⁰ The Qur’an stresses theological connections with Abrahamic religions; therefore, Islam encourages interreligious dialogue, particularly with Judaism and Christianity.³¹ In Buddhist thought, the doctrine *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent co-origination) posits every relation is a cause of suffering and a simultaneous opportunity for enlightenment. Hence, some Buddhist understandings of relations indicate that everything is related, including religious

²⁸ Paul VI. *Nostra Aetate* (October 28, 1965), <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html> (accessed February 15, 2013), para. 2.

²⁹ David M. Elcott, “Meeting the Other: Judaism, Pluralism, and Truth,” in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹ Asma Afsaruddin, “Discerning a Qur’anic Mandate for Mutually Transformational Dialogue,” in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 101. For an example scriptural passage, refer to the Qur’an 29:46.

traditions.³² The Zen notion of *Nim* (love) is also relational; in fact, “*Nim* is Being in relation.”³³ Various conceptions of *Nim* exist because each religion represents *Nim* differently. Thus, to perceive *Nim* as other than relational is an illusion.

Although the religious history of humankind is one of relational interdependence, humans are not proficient at relationships. Societies, cultures, and religions historically confront one another when their worldviews, ideals, or beliefs clash. A pertinent question in an age of postmodern globalization is whether interreligious conflict is inevitable or avoidable. Certainly, religions are as responsible for many historic and current tensions as they are for several efforts at peace. When engaging in interreligious relationships and cooperative community activities, it is important to remember what is known as the “Protestant principle,”³⁴ which refers to the potential for corruptibility, the self-serving or self-important notions to which every religious tradition is susceptible. Without this realization, interreligious “dialogue can all too easily become a sugary irenicism [sic] in which the religions of the world come together to tell each other how wonderful they are.”³⁵ To inspire beneficial outcomes during interreligious dialogue, perhaps vulnerable, suffering, poor, and marginalized victims might function as theoretical observers similar to those who influence measurements during quantum entanglement experiments.

Positive flourishing friendships and beneficial outcomes indeed are the preferred results from interreligious dialogue. Sometimes dialogue develops an edge or hostile tone

³² Wesley J. Wildman, “An Introduction to Relational Ontology,” in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 2.

³³ Seung Chul Kim, “Bodhisattva and Practice-Oriented Pluralism: A Study on the Zen Thought of Yong Woon Han and Its Significance for the Dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 18 (1998): 199.

³⁴ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

when discussing sensitive theological topics or historical tensions. A relational approach to delicate situations diffuses anger, resentment, and lingering hostility. When religious traditions view themselves as individual, isolated entities, they limit interreligious dialogue to a comparison and contrast of incompatible beliefs. Although religions often become entangled in negative, violent, or hegemonic relations, opportunities still exist to interconnect in solidarity against injustice and oppression. A relational view of dialogue nullifies damaging effects of alterity by emphasizing and nurturing intrinsic associations from which to resolve conflict and difference. Through successful cooperation and dialogue, religious traditions retain their identity and uniqueness but remain open to the possibility of positive right relationships.

Without dialogue, relationships between religious traditions disintegrate into resentment and anger, which generates tension and conflict. One of Buddha's rare external truths asserts, "hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone do they cease,"³⁶ a parallel reaffirmation of Jesus' command to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). An objective of interreligious dialogue is to satisfy each religion's fundamental relational needs by contextualizing issues against communal and particular religious interests and then to educate all parties toward a common understanding and eventual reconciliation that leads to a community of love. Reciprocal love and justice are restorative; it is "justice that rebuilds God's intended network of relationships."³⁷ Interreligious dialogue establishes love in the broadest terms

³⁶ Havanpola Ratanasara, *Interfaith Dialogue, Buddhist Perspective: An Examination of Pope John Paul II's Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Presentation at the Intermonastic Dialogue Gethsemani Monastery, Louisville, Kentucky July, 1996. <<http://www.urbandharma.org/bcdialog/bcd2/interfaith.html>> (accessed July 1, 2015).

³⁷ John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 201.

of mutual beneficial friendship and compassion with the added goal of easing historical tensions to develop positive relationships for deeper theological and spiritual discourse.

Relational Solution to Challenges within Interreligious Dialogue

Religious plurality indicates that religions exist in relation to each other; the being of each religion is being-in-relation. Hence, when interreligious dialogue utilizes an ontology that posits reality is relational, logically it is more effective than substantive ontological models that emphasize autonomous individualism and view religions as discrete groups of individuals performing independent actions. Alterity is an inevitable circumstance of existence; substantive approaches stress the independence of otherness while relational methods embrace otherness as a necessary component of interpersonal interaction. From relational models, interreligious participants begin dialogue already interconnected, which neutralizes theological and hegemonic conflicts and reduces issues involving religious identity and language.

To resolve challenges facing interreligious dialogue, relational methods obligate religious traditions to listen and embrace their unique stories, especially narratives from marginalized, subaltern members. Relationality also necessitates the recognition and appreciation of different theological approaches such as liberation, black, feminist, and womanist perspectives. While sacred stories increase the comprehension and appreciation of rituals and worship practices, their “meaning is written on hearts and minds in ways that can be understood only if experienced.”³⁸ Hence, understanding religious traditions requires participation within their communities. Since religions represent unique ways of

³⁸ Fletcher, “As Long as We Wonder,” 539.

being human, interreligious dialogue empowers them to share narratives and experiences that celebrate their theological uniqueness as well as their interconnectedness. Instead of a religious construct, relational ontology provides a thin metaphysics, one of many frameworks applicable and beneficial to interreligious dialogue.

Interreligious dialogue also offers opportunities to discover or create common ground among religions. The aim of a relational dialogic approach is not a single world religion since variations, differences, and unique identities are fundamental to religious traditions. However, shared interests and experiences build bridges of understanding among dialogic partners. Neutral topics such as the arts, are apropos for dialogue and comparative theology. A religion possesses unique liturgical and artistic attributes, hence, discussing symbolism in painting, sculpture, and poetry, or enjoying music and dance generates reciprocal appreciation for human expressions of goodness, truth, and beauty. From sharing prayers, meals, and liturgical events, participants experience firsthand knowledge of religious traditions. These mutual activities generate a greater appreciation for religious diversity, improve interreligious dialogue, and establish lasting, meaningful relationships.

Participating in authentic interreligious dialogue involves radical yet empathic encounters that transform one's thinking about otherness and one's actions in the world. A common issue confronting dialogic participants involves how to retain a person's beliefs and remain receptive to other religious insights. It is a crucial question of "where one draws the line between a sincere openness towards another religious perspective and

a compromise of one's core convictions."³⁹ Consequently, preparation for interreligious dialogue entails knowledge as well as an internal conversation to clarify and commit to one's own faith tradition. Personal introspection avoids theological myopia or tunnel vision thwarting healthy theological discourse. Participants ignore presuppositions, humbly admit their ignorance, and appreciate existing interreligious relationships in order to exhibit genuine openness toward others and their unique contributions. Engaging in dialogue as already interrelated creates a context for affirming each other's religious beliefs and a trusting environment for analyzing one's own religious sensibilities.

Hegemony

Power through control is the antithesis of connection. During interreligious dialogue, hegemonic tendencies mask the insecurities of an objectifying ego that needs to dominate by keeping others at a distance.⁴⁰ The desire to retain one's identity coincides with a craving for influence that establishes an elitist sense of intellectual certainty and security. The abuse of power ignores, marginalizes, or manipulates dialogic participants as a form self-control through the control of others in order to resist close interpersonal relations that inspire open, honest communication. Oppressing and objectifying others reinforces hierarchical power, which creates a monologue in place of dialogue. Genuine dialogue occurs "only when the participants allow the question, the subject matter, to assume primacy. It occurs only when our usual fears about our own self- image die:

³⁹ Hugh Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism," in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), 62.

⁴⁰ Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 200.

whether that fear is expressed in either arrogance or scrupulosity matters little.”⁴¹ Fear creates relational barriers; dialogue dissolves barriers and fear.

Genuine interreligious dialogue facilitates constructive relationality among participants, but without relational mindfulness toward others, dialogue provokes harmful comparisons and unhealthy competition, resulting in hegemony and marginalization. Dominance and historic colonial imposition create oppression that polarizes relationships between the people (or religions) who possess power and the excluded people who resist that power.⁴² Existing hierarchical relations encourage separation, marginalization, and often promote violence. Hence, hegemony hinders interreligiously right relationships, which are inherently positive and relational. Even though “religions are very different in many respects, neither has an inherent upper hand, so to speak, and therefore there is no *a priori* limit to the dialogical conversation.”⁴³ Asserting institutional superiority, exclusivity, and absolutism ignores the fact that interreligious dialogue establishes relationships among people rather than support monolithic religious traditions vying for power. Through interreligious dialogue, participants realize they possess various skill levels and talents that, when combined, contribute to successful discourse. People (or religions) are not adversaries; they are interconnected partners with some mutual religious beliefs and certain common goals of understanding rather than judging or ranking traditions by superiority.

⁴¹ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 101.

⁴² Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider, Eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 10.

⁴³ Douglas Pratt, “Pluralism, Postmodernism, and Interreligious Dialogue,” *Sophia* 46 (2007): 261.

Marginalization

Marginalization can be a tool applied by dominant powers as a hegemonic response to prejudice or fear of plurality. People at the center of power marginalize others by creating boundaries to exploit religious differences. Yet, powerful positions ebb and flow depending upon the circumstances. One's relationship to dominant systems determines one's marginal status; therefore, a person might be a stranger at the borders of Buddhism and not in the context of Islam. Interestingly, interreligious dialogue occurs at the margins where difference establishes religious identity and encourages theological exchanges. However, marginalization due to discrimination or isolation disregards individuals or groups, which obstructs relationality. An ignored person lacks self-esteem along with the ability to relate with others. Relationality counteracts marginalization's effects by reaffirming that being is being-in-relation, which negates any indifference toward others during interreligious dialogue. Rather than marginalize others, relational ontology values alterity as a means of establishing the differences necessary to create being, identity, and relationships.

Moreover, relational approaches blur arbitrary boundaries within interreligious dialogue by asserting an interconnectedness that respects religious identity but avoids the isolating effects of diversity. A relational mode of being is participatory; it is "an ontologically dynamic state in which boundaries connect as they separate and a thing [religion] is always also other than what it is."⁴⁴ Opinions from the marginalized, the minorities, and other oppressed people introduce diverse perspectives and critiques that prevent dialogue from becoming dictatorial or hegemonic. Excluding marginalized or

⁴⁴ T.M.S. (Terry) Evens, *Anthropology as Ethics: Nondualism and the Conduct of Sacrifice* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2008), xx.

subaltern people from participation cheats all participants of dialogue's optimal benefits and multiple perspectives.

A relational both–and approach to dialogue mitigates marginalization; it enables people to reside in and participate concurrently across multiple religious boundaries. This phenomenon creates a new “margin of marginality”⁴⁵ in which no center exists, a place where interreligious dialogue occurs. Participants enjoy the benefits, knowledge, and identity of each group, yet gain novel insights from the intimate intersection and assimilation of multiple cultures, societies, or religions. The synthesis of multiple religious concepts, symbols, and language creates accurate translations and greater understanding during dialogue. Instead of encountering and emphasizing separation, with a relational both–and method, people experience connectedness from interreligious dialogue.

Furthermore, interreligious dialogue reduces marginalization by encouraging diverse religious traditions to listen, question, witness, and learn from each other. As diversity and equality increase among dialogic participants, so does creativity and comprehension. Therefore, religious representatives from the center and the margins present a plethora of viewpoints to share, absorb, and evaluate. Expressing varied perspectives challenges participants to recognize and remove negative barriers of difference preventing the theological enrichment plurality contributes to interreligious dialogue. Nevertheless, participant response to diversity influences the relational effectiveness of dialogue. Isolating reactions of resistance, hostility, dominance, or indifference reflect individualistic worldviews. Conversely, concern, interest, acceptance,

⁴⁵ Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 60.

and harmony emphasize humanity's relational nature and invoke an ethics of hospitality and concern toward others, which is common in all religious traditions.

Religious Other

The beginning of otherness and religious diversity is recognizing then accepting others' opinions that differ from one's own. Although easier to ignore, patronize, or view others as threats, to be most effective, "dialogue demands a radical openness and thinking through of our own tradition in recognition of its permeable barriers in relation to the religious other."⁴⁶ Hence, relationality in interreligious dialogue generates "living interconnections even while reason is busy pondering whether such affective exchange across religious boundaries is possible at all."⁴⁷ Entering into dialogue with a religious other involves "first of all taking him or her seriously at the human level and being prepared to learn from another story and another religious vision."⁴⁸ Interreligious dialogue illustrates that relationality between participants is dynamic; it fluctuates between mutual interests and different perspectives. Likewise, otherness is not final or static; it is subject to improvisation, negotiation, and variability. Relationships that permit others to enter and affect one's world actually alter the nature of interreligious dialogue from confrontational to entangled encounters of reciprocal beneficial enrichment. Each person's willingness to listen, to understand, and transform because of dialogue, dissolves obstacles and improves understanding and friendship.

⁴⁶ Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 88.

⁴⁷ Francis X. Clooney, "Passionate Comparison: The Intensification of Affect in Interreligious Reading of Hindu and Christian Texts," *Harvard Theological Review* 98 (2005): 389.

⁴⁸ Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, 117.

Relationships eventually transform all partners. In learning to relate to the other as other, a person gains awareness about oneself and one's religious traditions. Indeed, Augustine credits God for granting a person the ability to understand oneself through knowledge and relationship with others.⁴⁹ Each person's self-understanding changes from comprehending another's self-understanding and viewpoints. However, merely learning about a religious other is insufficient; one must engage in dialogue with religious others to learn from them. All participants "need to understand the ways in which people embody their religious traditions [and to] gain insight into the animating questions, fears, hopes, and dreams of actual religious people searching for meaning and purpose in today's world."⁵⁰ Active, dialogical learning also demands reflection on the history of religious relationships, an analysis of present circumstances, and an assessment on the possibilities for future rapprochement.

Nevertheless, the incomprehensibility of otherness reminds humanity of its finite nature as well as its limitations in grasping the mystery of ultimate reality. Theologically, encounters with radical otherness enable creatures to recognize the Creator's ontological distinctness and infinite incomprehensibility. Interreligious dialogue utilizes otherness as an "opportunity to participate in the unlimited growth of knowledge. And it is only in the presence of the unknown that the growth of knowledge can take place,"⁵¹ especially about divine transcendence. It is as if "relationality, in this sense, laps over and suffers

⁴⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, Trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1992), 1.6.10.

⁵⁰ Or N. Rose, "Continuing the Conversation: Pedagogic Principles for Multifaith Education," *Theological Education* 47, no. 2 (2013): 62.

⁵¹ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), 132.

difference without letting go.”⁵² Similarly, dialogic participants recognize religious others not only by their identities but also as “an analogy of being, whereby we can be both fascinated and frightened by the other, that is truly other yet united to us.”⁵³ Encountering alterity and interpreting it as unity is vital for personal and religious development; otherness is essential for meaningful ethical activities and valuable relationships.

Ethics of Relationality and Friendship

Participating in ethical activities through a dialogue of life or action generates positive experiences and develops profound interreligious relationships. When people unite to improve the lives of society’s less fortunate, “talking after acting makes for better talking.”⁵⁴ In other words, engaging in just concerns builds relationships that make interreligious dialogue more effective. Common ethical experiences likewise are powerful non-verbal opportunities to demonstrate various religious beliefs and form relational connections. Interreligious dialogue establishes relationality that “is basic to aesthetics and ethics [since] aesthetic appreciation of another human being as one’s communicative partner puts us on our ethical responsibility to respect every human being and commit ourselves to their flourishing.”⁵⁵ Interreligious dialogue, especially dialogue of life, action, and shared experience, expresses an interconnected ethical solidarity for humanity’s common good.

The ethics of solidarity and the care for strangers manifests by interconnectedness in dialogue with religious others. Augustine believes good people treat others not only

⁵² Keller, *Polydoxy*, 10.

⁵³ Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions*, 75–6.

⁵⁴ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 139.

⁵⁵ Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 73–4.

with justice but with friendship; therefore, he and Aquinas recognize religious others in their alterity as potential friends rather than political or personal threats.⁵⁶ Human relationality includes initial family relationships along with friends and associates. Augustine extends the idea of relationality to all citizens and even to friendships with angels and with God.⁵⁷ When sharing uniquely personal spiritual experiences during interreligious dialogue, “people of the different religious traditions are free to see one another as friends rather than as enemies or rivals.”⁵⁸ From genuine interest or curiosity about others during dialogue, lasting friendships are possible.

Friendships share similar outcomes with relational approaches to interreligious dialogue. Both relationships are bi-directional so it takes honesty along with courage to evaluate friends or other religions and to be evaluated by them. Each relationship also is reciprocal. Friends enjoy each other’s company; they share thoughts, stories, jokes, laughs, and meals as well as offer comfort to each other through sorrows, troubles, illness, and occasional disagreements. The important point is that they spend time together and accumulate mutual experiences. By observing how each other’s religion provides comfort as well as hope, participants appreciate the value and meaning of lived faith beyond discussing, studying, or investigating religious traditions.

Interreligious friendships sometimes develop into loving, caring relationships. Demonstrating interest in others and their religious beliefs, rather than an emphasis on

⁵⁶ Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 350.

⁵⁷ Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1972), 19.3–14.

⁵⁸ John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1982), 59.

identity, is “the condition of possibility for love as the authentic meaning of being.”⁵⁹ If love is an ontological characteristic of being, then being as being-in-relation specifies being for the other rather than for self-existence. Although interreligious friendship establishes a solid base of shared personal experiences, love in the pure sense of love for humankind (*caritas*) adds relational dimensions. During interreligious dialogue, love strengthens spiritual and civic values such as justice, equality, and respect. Love for humankind similarly increases positive sensitivity to pluralism, which means, “personal identity is not that vulnerable even if existence is constituted in relation to others.”⁶⁰ Nevertheless, when the universality of love combines with the particularity of personal relationships to express being as being-in-relation, then being-in-relation reflects genuine, unadulterated love.

While the reciprocal love between friends is personal and profound, love of neighbor refers to social or civil relationships with others in society. Love of neighbor involves not only ethical actions between human beings but also how well people influence social structures to serve the needs of poor, oppressed, and marginalized neighbors. A dialogic relationship involving interreligious neighbors likewise influences its participants who must be willing to develop or change after listening to ideas with which they might not agree. However, the crucial element is love because “in real interreligious dialogue, heart speaks to heart. Only so, can persons from differing traditions really ‘hear’ each other.”⁶¹ Although each religion possesses its own moral

⁵⁹ Lasher, “Dialogue with Nature,” 199.

⁶⁰ Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 353.

⁶¹ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 131. See also Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 58–61.

code of conduct, most traditions profess ethical principles similar to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matt. 7:12) found in Christian scriptures. At a minimum, interreligious dialogue participants are to treat each other with the dignity and respect they expect for themselves, rather than treat people as a means to an end.

To love interreligious neighbors establishes mutual relationships of solidarity without denying an otherness that enables relationality. Through interreligious activities, participants demonstrate their particular lived faith, which dispels negative or false assumptions even as it promotes relationships.⁶² Positive ethical actions along with sincere neighborly love strengthen interreligious relationships, which increases respect and productive dialogue. Furthermore, loving one’s neighbor extends globally. Religious traditions are in a unique position of building community relationships across national and continental divides. As violence escalates around the world, Hans Küng’s statement that “No peace among nations without peace among religions. And no peace among religions without a greater dialogue among them,”⁶³ remains prophetically true. Interreligious dialogue is vital for creating and maintaining meaningful global relations. True relationality unifies people yet respects their particular alterity.

Unity/Particularity Conundrum

The great debate involving unity versus particularity manifests in humanity’s search for meaning and an understanding of the self as a relational or an autonomous individual. Though notions of relational ontology are countercultural in Western thought,

⁶² Catherine Cornille, “Introduction: On Discernment in Dialogue,” in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), xvii.

⁶³ Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, trans. John Bowden (New York, NY: Continuum, 1995), text opposite title page.

pluralism problems with particularity and unity are actually relationality issues that seek balance between religious identity and interrelatedness. Relationality, as an approach to interreligious dialogue, emphasizes interconnectedness and honors diversity. In fact, difference actually cooperates with relationality. By asserting that being is being-in-relation, “otherness found in particularity is a requirement for the relation of unity. The universal can never be apprehended except in and through the particular.”⁶⁴ Both unity and diversity exist in nature as well as in humanity’s religions, cultures, and languages. The world “from the Big Bang to the present, manifests that it is not a single substance but a unity of many particulars.”⁶⁵ On a personal level, relationality is to see the self in the other as those in close friendships do. Each person relates to the other, whether to God, people, or creation, because one is incomplete in oneself.⁶⁶ Relationships exemplify differentiated parts forming the whole. In interreligious dialogue, unity has its being from associating the diversity of distinguishable yet mutually incommensurable faiths.

Each religious tradition exemplifies the unity–particularity conundrum. Religions *per se* are ontologically relational. Externally, religions represent unified practices and tenets, which form religious identity. Still, particular individuals who possess differing perspectives and beliefs comprise every religious tradition. Thus, the being of every faith tradition is being-in-relation. During interreligious dialogue, problems arise when participants conceptualize religions as impenetrable wholes thereby creating a false impression of religions as collectives with agency and subjectivity. This notion creates

⁶⁴ Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, 127. See also Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 189.

⁶⁵ Kaipayil, *Relationalism*, 68.

⁶⁶ Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions*, 32–4. According to the Christian Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, God is perfect, complete, and relational in Godself.

“them” versus “us” identity politics, which in turn provokes confrontations. Moreover, a collective mindset devalues the religious differences that contribute to dialogic exchanges as well as the fact that dialogic agents are people, not religions.

Applying a model of relational ontology to interreligious dialogue asserts that while all religious traditions are different, they are interconnected. The objective is not to reduce religions into unified similarity; rather, to celebrate each religion’s diverse otherness as being-in-relation. By valuing diversity and unity, relationality reduces dialogic conflict. After establishing rapport, participants are able to discuss the difficult religious differences regarding interpretation and belief. Through critical self-analysis, interpretive efforts, and mutual trust, dialogic participants realize their connectedness as well as the advantages of engaging a variety of perspectives. Thus relationality unites people and religions, “not through syncretism, imperialism, or tolerance, but by remaining many and unique in dependence and contributions to the whole”⁶⁷ meaning of reality. Neither plurality nor relationality is independent; both work in tandem to divulge the mysteries of reality. Otherwise, the alternative to a dialogic entanglement is isolation, which fosters alienation and misunderstanding that leads to resentment, anger, and eventual hostility.

Historically, encounters between various religious, cultural, and national groups, in a struggle for survival, results in violence and conflict rather than unity. For all their goodness, religions too often cause problems and bitter conflicts by seeking to eradicate religious difference in favor of unity as sameness or conformity. If the objective of dialogic interaction is homogeneity, then dialogue becomes imperialism, an imposition

⁶⁷ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 9.

through supremacy and identity politics when it places too much emphasis on similarities and integration at the expense of respect for each religion's diversity and integrity. Proper unity or harmony involves ordered, synergistic relationships of difference that convey dignity and value without domination or asymmetrical power.⁶⁸ Still, the wholesale acceptance of religious differences in the name of unity, harmony, or beauty could be very dangerous or disastrous since not all religious differences improve the human condition nor are they independent of political, social, or economic interests. Harmonious ethical unity, achieved from dialogic interrelationships that value particularity, is more advantageous for attaining the common good. By divesting power and competitiveness, all religions, including the historically marginalized voices, participate in dialogic relationality. A vital starting point is sensitivity about interconnected relations within religions, extending into an expanded web encompassing all religious traditions. Entities maintain their particular identities; all communities exist in relation to each other and the global whole. Effective interreligious dialogue develops a dialogic framework of relational elements to negotiate tensions between unity and particularity.

The association between unity and particularity has critical implications for interreligious harmony. Authentic deep harmony “refers to the quality of being of reality in its plurality and unity,”⁶⁹ however; Eastern (organic) and Western (architectonic) worldviews reflect contrasting approaches to achieving harmony. Within an organic view of reality, creation is an existing intertwined state of communion in which “the various parts are so inter-related that unity is not something in addition or extraneous to this web

⁶⁸ Felix Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies* (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 2008), 130.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

of relationships.”⁷⁰ Instead, unity is an object of experience, where plurality is a part of one’s self rather than a threat. The architectonic view is purpose–driven; unity occurs by removing difference by applying force, imposition, or coercion. An architectonic view perceives diversity as linear phases that are “functionally inter–related to each other”⁷¹ in mechanistic organized coordination, this does not represent harmony. These diverse viewpoints are apparent in interreligious dialogue. In Western thinking, rationality and language logically lead to universal meta–narratives about unity. Though Eastern organic viewpoints recognize that rationality is important, history and culture influence knowledge, therefore, experience is its primary mode of knowledge with language as symbolic interconnectedness.⁷² In Eastern views, interreligious dialogue fosters unity through relationships among differences.

Notions of difference, variety, and diversity actually entail relationality. In Confucianism, difference exhibits “a distinctive pattern of relational propensities”⁷³ or interactions as a function of complex interdependence or unity. Science offers a relational metaphor of sameness and difference involving the optics of reflection and refraction, respectively. Reflection mirrors interreligious similarities and connotes knowledge and contemplation about others and oneself. Diffraction emphasizes differences in a relational manner; a diffused light pattern “does not map where differences appear, but rather maps

⁷⁰ Ibid., 123, 125.

⁷¹ Ibid., 124.

⁷² Ibid., 132–3.

⁷³ Peter D. Herschok, *Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflection on Realizing a More Equitable Global Future* (New York, NY: State of New York University Press, 2012), 57–60.

where the effects of differences appear.”⁷⁴ Difference is neither essential nor irrelevant. How participants react to and reconcile difference is crucial to interreligious dialogue.

Although used as synonyms, variety and diversity describe two modes of differentiation in relational systems. Succinctly, variety is many individual things being together, for example animals in a zoo, while diversity is belonging together, expressing interdependence with patterns of “mutual contribution to sustainably shared welfare”⁷⁵ such as a complex natural ecosystem. The optimal conditions that benefit diversity include intense values, interests, practices, high probability of conflict, along with extensive amounts of coordination and surprisingly, inequality.⁷⁶ Globalization intensifies these conditions. Interpenetration and interdependence actually generate additional multifaceted expressions of diversity leading to more creativity and innovation for relational transformation.

Diversity and creativity are advantageous when solving ethical issues or gaining a deeper understanding of religious traditions. In interreligious dialogue, narratives describing spiritual encounters with the divine exhibit religious diversity. Through various contexts and perspectives, religions are “expressions of the pluralism of being itself in its freedom and spontaneity, religions manifest different facets of reality.”⁷⁷

Theologically, to “think of God’s activity in the world as simply limited to one tradition

⁷⁴ Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 300.

⁷⁵ Hershock, *Valuing Diversity*, 49, 52.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 60–1.

⁷⁷ Raimon Panikkar, “Religious Pluralism,” in *Religious Pluralism*, ed. L. Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 15. See also Raimon Panikkar, “The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?” in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religions*, ed. Leonard Swidler (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 127–32.

is a total impoverishment of the rich diversity of human religious history.”⁷⁸ Unique tenets, scriptures, and rituals reflect each tradition’s spiritual experiences with the divine. However, like the Hindu and Buddhist simile of blind men touching portions of an elephant then describing their experience, dialogic participants should not be satisfied with grasping only partialities of reality. Because the whole is best understood from a consolidation of its parts, religious traditions represent diverse viewpoints and experiences of ultimate reality. Through interreligious dialogue, all participants search together, albeit from different starting points, to learn insights from one another. This is not an attempt at reductionism or completely removing ambiguity. Instead, interreligious dialogue serves as a basis for comprehension and a foundation for praxis and cooperation that entangles religions to achieve positive ethical outcomes involving social action and justice for all people.

Feminist theology, for example, concentrates on tensions between unity and particularity with respect to gender and other marginalizing concerns. Though sexual difference is “a real and irreducible component of [and therefore] the most appropriate content for the universal,”⁷⁹ nature imposes a minimum limit of at least two differences: male and female. Secondary particularities such as age, size, and race exist; but when predominately patriarchal societies attempt to reduce nature to oneness or unity, they ignore the fact that “no woman or man accomplishes the whole... neither of nature nor of consciousness.”⁸⁰ In relational constructions of reality, “being ‘we’ means being at least

⁷⁸ Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, 81.

⁷⁹ Luce Irigaray, “Sexual Difference as Universal,” in *I Love To You: Sketch for a Felicity within History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 47.

⁸⁰ Luce Irigaray, “Human Nature is Two,” in *I Love To You: Sketch for a Felicity within History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 36.

two, autonomous, different [people being] first of all simply a man or a woman.”⁸¹ Thus, a human being belongs to a pre-existing unity in recognizing his or her gender is only half of humanity. Each person also possesses a particular genealogy and history, which forms the self’s own intentions. However, if one is attentive to another’s intentionality, fidelity, and becoming, then both intentionalities act together, not as a single intentionality, but with compatible goals for long-lasting alliances.⁸² Relationality between men and women or religious traditions fosters respect and knowledge of the other’s nature, history, and intentionality; it encourages each other’s becoming while remaining oneself.

Participating in interreligious dialogue from a relational perspective is to see beyond religious differences or dualistic confrontations involving gender, race, or economic status and embrace the integrative dimension of being as being-in-relation, entangled as a web of reality’s diversity. During interreligious dialogue, reality’s web fluctuates as participants engage each other in various combinations; “we arise from the matrix; we redesign its elements; we are woven back into the matrix. This is the religious action of reconnecting,”⁸³ that constantly alters relations among a matrix of dialogic communities. Through humility and vulnerability, “we open the fold between self and other [to] expose the margin of entanglement that holds us in relation.”⁸⁴ Dialogic collaboration correlates the unique resources and perspectives of particular traditions to offer new theological concepts of ultimate reality as well as what it means to be human in

⁸¹ Irigaray, “Sexual Difference as Universal,” 48.

⁸² Luce Irigaray, “I Love to You,” in *I Love To You: Sketch for a Felicity within History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 112.

⁸³ Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 248.

⁸⁴ Keller, *Polydoxy*, 9–10.

a relational world. Sharing mutual religious and humane concerns likewise strengthens a web of relationality and solidarity that values the otherness of all people. Even though interreligious dialogue encourages greater connectedness and unity, “the unity will always remain messy, incomplete.”⁸⁵ Real differences exist between religions; therefore, blending them into one metaphysical narrative or theology is problematic, especially for religious identity and the boundaries that such identity delineates.

Identity and Multiple Religious Belonging

The notion of identity is an ambiguous, difficult term to define in both form and function. Because one’s identity defines clear boundaries over and against others, it is often difficult or costly to change, even during interreligious dialogue or other relational engagements.⁸⁶ Identity formation that emphasizes extreme autonomy prefers alterity, marginalization, and conflict, which severs relationships with others and produces an almost pathological “crisis of identity.”⁸⁷ In an “age of increasing rootlessness, with more and more people searching for meaning and identity,”⁸⁸ unhealthy autonomous identities manifest in extreme nationalism, fanaticism, or religious fundamentalism. An alternative to autonomous identity formation recognizes that identity develops in relation with other identities. Integral relationships accumulate positive and negative histories that combine

⁸⁵ Raimon Panikkar, “Have ‘Religions’ the Monopoly on Religion?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1974): 517.

⁸⁶ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 50.

⁸⁷ Raimon Panikkar, “On Christian Identity: Who is a Christian?” in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 139.

⁸⁸ Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, 4.

to create a unique “psychological fingerprint”⁸⁹ defining individual identity. Personal as well as religious identity entangles one’s religious association, gender, culture, ethnicity, and many other features; “it is the overlap in our webs of identity that draws us into relationships of simultaneous sameness and difference.”⁹⁰ Interactive social relationships construct shared experiences over time that form personal and corporate identity and encourage openness toward religious others during dialogue. Religious traditions define and maintain their unique identity through shared beliefs, rituals, values, and spiritual experiences.

Religious identity and membership involves reciprocal, relational acts. Identifying oneself as a group member is a necessary first step requiring subsequent commitment to and recognition from the community. Essentially, religions and other groups “are seen as communal ways of being in the world marked by certain identifiable characteristics shared among members in distinction from non–members.”⁹¹ Maintaining group identity necessitates some similarity among members but not a homogeneous unity that eradicates difference. Interreligious dialogue also forms and informs religious identity; thus, “to adopt a Christian [or any other religious] identity today is to be in dynamic relationship with other traditions in a global and intercultural context.”⁹² Conflicting beliefs and values no longer dictate religious identity; instead, religions form and flourish through relationships and shared ethical concerns. Mutual identity formation likewise extends

⁸⁹ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 99.

⁹⁰ Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 129.

⁹¹ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, “Shifting Identity: The Contribution of Feminist Thought to Theologies of Religious Pluralism,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 19 (Fall 2003): 11.

⁹² Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 87.

from interpersonal and interreligious connections to encompass the cosmos as “an instance of becoming–in–relation. Nothing is independent of anything else.”⁹³ Therefore, relational ontology validates existence as well as identity. Although identity develops within a communal unity, each person possesses the necessary features to maintain one’s particularity.

In interreligious dialogue, participants develop relationships, which eventually influence their unique identities. Because identity formation is fluid, they fear a loss or erosion of religious identity. In actuality, interreligious dialogue necessitates a strong understanding and a firm foundation of one’s own faith during discourse involving other religious traditions. From a secure grounding in one’s religion, dialogue intensifies rather than threatens identity.⁹⁴ Dialogic encounters offer a radical opportunity to reevaluate and affirm one’s religious and personal identity since “the old does not disappear; it becomes more highly prized.”⁹⁵ Relating to others with empathy and intentions of understanding different religious beliefs conveys respectful appreciation for diverse religious identities. One’s current religious identity or loyalty need not diminish from relational, educational encounters with other religious traditions.

Religious traditions also experience the relational, dynamic nature of identity. Hinduism is a prime example of incorporating aspects from various cultures and religions into its religious identity. Early Christianity fashioned its distinctiveness using concepts from Judaism and Greek philosophy. Islam likewise borrows Jewish and Christian ideas

⁹³ Keller, “Tangles of Unknowing,” 119.

⁹⁴ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 52, 59.

⁹⁵ Joseph W. Devlin, “The Bridge of Partnership: Christians, Jews, and Muslims as Participants in the Struggle for World Transformation,” in *Religions of the Book*, ed. Gerard S. Sloyan (New York, NY: University Press of America, Inc., 1996), 15.

in forming its identity. When religions encounter new cultures, they often integrate local customs into worship. To avoid the negative effects of inculturation or hybridity requires “individual negotiations and relational encounters as well as on scholarly endeavors.”⁹⁶ As a result, relationality extends beyond religious and cultural boundaries to enhance identity by encouraging unity yet increasing particularity within and across traditions. Interreligious dialogue also celebrates plurality and relationality. Dialogue encourages discussion between diverse religious identities, which provides opportunities for people to form interreligious relationships that eventually influence or sometimes result in hybrid identities.

A naturally occurring individual hybrid identity introduces diversity within a religious tradition. Such an identity erodes dualisms and increases relational connections between religions. Nevertheless, without scholarly efforts and religious relationships for guidance, people may utilize the cafeteria approach of only selecting favorable religious beliefs and ethics, which increases diversity to the point of losing one’s original religious identity.⁹⁷ To avoid the spiritually disturbing loss of religious identity, people engage in multiple religious belonging, which enhances a person’s primary religious identity while comprehending, appreciating, and frequently practicing some of another tradition’s tenets. For some Asian religions, such as Hinduism, the practice is common, but multiple religious belonging creates theological problems for religions requiring absolute exclusive commitment.

⁹⁶ Jenny Dagers, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 170.

⁹⁷ Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 97.

Multiple religious belonging is not antithetical to interreligious dialogue; in fact, it facilitates communication and understanding amid the plurality of religions during discourse. Often described as an internal dialogue, practitioners of multiple religious belonging experience the lived reality of another religion's texts and traditions from one's original religious affiliation. Proponents claim multiple religious belonging naturally happens; all religions share similar spiritual encounters such as feelings of a non-dual (*Advaita*) mystical experience or an "assumption into the knowledge that the Absolute has of itself."⁹⁸ Based on the relational idea of religious complementarity, multiple religious belonging portrays contrasting religious aspects in positive ways to promote cooperation and collaboration during interreligious dialogue.

Language

Language establishes a relationship between interpretation and understanding that explains concepts as varied as religious experience or quantum physics theories. Though unique like religions, languages also are interrelated; they express common objects, ideas, and experiences using diverse terms. To articulate an experience requires acquiring and applying accurate words so an event enters into language as a concept referencing back to the experience.⁹⁹ Language expresses a particular worldview of human experience due to cultural traditions and historical influences embedded within it. Studying other languages extends one's knowledge and learning capabilities by entangling existing viewpoints with

⁹⁸ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 75, 81.

⁹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2004), 417. Gadamer explains how the word "Incarnation" exemplifies his point and how creation occurs through the Word of God. For more information, refer to 418ff.

foreign cultural and religious perspectives. These historically, linguistically conditioned worldviews facilitate communication and understanding during interreligious dialogue.

To comprehend diverse religious traditions along with their unique signs and symbols requires the theological equivalent of multilingual skills. Interreligious dialogue involves language that paradoxically reveals the similarities as well as the differences among various religions. Hence, all interpretation is speculative so there is no “meaning-in-itself,”¹⁰⁰ which reflects the ontologically parallel notion that nothing exists except as being-in-relation. In discourse, context and interpretation influence meaning. Dialogic participants, who comprehend a plurality of religious languages, symbols, and concepts, facilitate understanding and respectful relationships between traditions. Interestingly, increased knowledge of other religious traditions, improves comprehension of one’s own.

Another possibility is the use of a common language to facilitate understanding. Science, for example, relies on experimentation and mathematics to explain theories and share empirical results. Symbols in mathematics are unambiguous in classical physics equations, which reduce translation or interpretation errors. However, the same symbols are misinterpreted and ambiguous, when applied to quantum physics.¹⁰¹ Interreligious dialogue experiences similar ambiguity since “nirvana is not the same as ‘liberation’ nor is Brahman to be translated simply as ‘God.’”¹⁰² To translate meaning accurately requires sensitivity to context, verbal nuances, and different religious perspectives. Nevertheless, applying interdisciplinary languages to interreligious dialogue enhances relationality and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 468. Gadamer suggests a universal speculative ontological structure in which “being that can be understood is language” (470–1); however being is still being-in-relation since understanding relates to listener interpretations and predispositions.

¹⁰¹ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2000), 122.

¹⁰² Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, 119.

provides alternative linguistic tools and techniques to resolve existing challenges. This theologically and symbolically neutral language approach invites secular organizations and marginalized religious traditions into dialogue.

Symbolic language develops in religious traditions and cultural norms through a dialogue of relational interaction. Religious communities are “story–shaped”¹⁰³ by mutual experiences so they share a common language. Because they are linguistic communities, religions use specific language constructs in sacred writings and scriptures that preserve past knowledge while serving as a lens to organize and interpret present events. Unique stories, experiences, along with the additional social context of interpretation establish diverse religions, cultures, and nationalities. Consequently, language forms and informs the worldviews of these epistemologically diverse institutions and societies. Pluralism exponentially extends religious language and comprehension via interreligious dialogue. Complex associations develop when people identify with and participate across various religions, cultures, and national affiliations. During dialogue, various religious experience shared with others eventually “alters one’s horizon for understanding the community’s central story.”¹⁰⁴ Increased epistemological understanding and appreciation occur from listening, interpreting, and interrelating multiple religious narratives.

Epistemology

Although knowledge and understanding through interconnected engagement is a desired result of dialogue, religious otherness challenges participant belief systems and existing worldviews. During dialogue, “most people experience the encounter with other

¹⁰³ Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 106.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

faiths as radically disorienting, as something that cannot be fully incorporated into their own realm of understanding.”¹⁰⁵ Confrontations with otherness generate bewilderment; people admit they just do not understand. This response initially implies that dialogue is doomed or hopeless, yet recognizing a lack of knowledge or sufficient understanding is a first step toward comprehending the religious other, whether the other is another dialogic participant or transcendent mystery.¹⁰⁶ Natural inclinations to ignore, reject, or erase religious difference impedes genuine relationships and effective interreligious dialogue. A relational dialogic approach first concentrates on commonality between religions to build rapport before discussing sensitive religious differences.

Consequently, one important result of interreligious dialogue is the assimilation of knowledge, an agreed upon understanding between subjects about what it means to be human and associated with a particular religious community. Dialogic encounters entail “the willingness to understand the other in his or her otherness and to avoid reading one’s own presuppositions into the religious world of the other.”¹⁰⁷ The knowledge of already being-in-relation with others reassures dialogic participants and increases a willingness to actively listen and learn about other religious traditions. Active listening is paying attention to the speaker while blocking prejudices, presuppositions, or judgements about the message and its meaning. In an interchange of questions and answers, each dialogic participant “transposes himself [sic] into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, interreligious dialogue is more

¹⁰⁵ Fletcher, “As Long as We Wonder,” 546.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 547–9.

¹⁰⁷ Moyaert, “Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue,” 38.

¹⁰⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 387.

than an exchange of knowledge about the tenets and practices; it includes interpretation and understanding. Relational ontology creates openness to others by lessening attitudes of bias and absolute certainty, which are common roadblocks to effective dialogue.

Practices of interrogation or therapy do not constitute authentic dialogue since they emphasize individual objectives and knowledge, not a relational, mutual exchange of information between subjects. Object–exchange utilizes parental, hierarchical instruction, which conveys power that perpetuates dependency. However, meaning–exchanges are intersubjective; they employ respectful, reciprocal listening in unique epistemological situations.¹⁰⁹ Genuine interreligious dialogue is a game of understanding; its goal is to release self–consciousness through back–and–forth dialogic movements, which results in a “fusion of horizons.”¹¹⁰ Participants rise above their differing horizons of knowledge, religion, history, beliefs, and worldviews, thereby fusing or entangling them in dialogic relationship with others. The interaction of theological knowledge and presuppositions illustrates the dynamic relational nature of religious meaning.

Formed by a community of believers, each religious tradition is a source of shared experiences and mutual knowledge. Because religious meaning evolves from communal involvement, “without exception, knowledge is relational... we order our experience as subjects—in order to situate our agency, shape it in relationship to others, and to become *subjects to ourselves*.”¹¹¹ Religious relationships therefore cultivate individual subjects who then respond to collective knowledge derived from sacred narratives, rituals, and

¹⁰⁹ Irigaray, “Sexual Difference as Universal,” 46.

¹¹⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 390. Gadamer asserts that people enter dialogue with preconceptions, including a historically effected consciousness, which form their horizons of knowledge and understanding. Reciprocal dialogue and listening fuses (alters and expands) each participant’s horizon.

¹¹¹ Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 124, italics original.

spiritual encounters with the divine. Culture and history also contribute to the communal and contextual nature of religious knowledge. While intra-religious dialogue reinforces a community's internal relationships and unique traditions, interreligious dialogue extends relationality across religious contexts.

During the exchange of customs and myths, people recognize similar messages and other unifying aspects across religious traditions. Even though perspectives and meanings vary, common core principles and baseline ethics are foundational for many religious traditions. Shared beliefs and values assist participants in relating to each other and understanding their differences. Religious interconnections do not imply one universal normative religion nor are they meant to relativize traditions.¹¹² Rather, religious relationality indicates all faiths possess some universal traits along with their particular tenets. A sensitive epistemological example involves claims of absolute truth. Since a person's experience provides limited views of truth as attested to by numerous interpretations of quantum physics and the plurality of religions, Leonard Swidler posits truth is "de-absolutized, dynamic, and dialogic—in a word relational."¹¹³ This notion of truth suggests that other religious traditions' precepts and ethics "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men [sic]... [and to] recognize, preserve, and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, and the socio-cultural values found among these men."¹¹⁴ To reject the relational nature of truth invites error since it contradicts reality's interconnectedness. Knowing that truth is ontologically relational does not privatize or

¹¹² Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 51.

¹¹³ Leonard Swidler, "Part One: The Importance of Dialogue," in *Triologue: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue*, eds. Leonard Swidler, Khalid Duran, and Reuven Firestone (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), 10. For more information on various views of truth, refer to pages 9–11.

¹¹⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, para. 2.

relativize a religion's tenets; instead, the prospect avoids absolutism, idolatry, hegemony, and other challenges influencing effective interreligious dialogue.

Concluding Contributions and Future Research

The increasing number of interreligious encounters and their growing importance in people's lives and in society warrant a reevaluation and further reflection on existing dialogic methodologies. Relational ontology offers an alternative approach to prevalent substantive methods and the issues they present to interreligious dialogue, theologies of religions, and comparative work. As a philosophical process, relational ontology averts fundamental challenges and significantly eradicates roadblocks associated with dominant Western religions and their techniques. Relational paradigms inspire broad participation from previously marginalized religious traditions as well as non-religious organizations, thereby including novel answers to life's ultimate questions. Religious interrelatedness exposes hegemonic centers of power and marginalization as human-defined and human-imposed constructs to be eradicated. In reducing marginalization and elitism, relationality combined with interreligious dialogue mitigates hegemony, imperialism, and imposition.

Relational ontology asserts that being is being-in-relation. Therefore, religious traditions constitute each other's existence. Interreligious dialogue is one mechanism for developing and expressing relationships between religions. Unlike substantive ontology, which views of religious others as autonomous individuals, relational ontology perceives religious difference as interrelated. Relational ontology provides a both/and solution for resolving challenges and conflict during interreligious dialogue since the method values both religious particularity and relational unity. By embracing both sides of the unity-

particularity issue, religious traditions retain their unique being yet that being manifests in dialogic relation to other distinctive religions.

Although loss of identity is a legitimate concern in relationships, relationality in interreligious dialogue enhances identity because participants learn more about their own as well as different religious tenets. Religious otherness affords a surplus of meaning and historical consciousness with which to interpret religious language and concepts. Starting dialogue with an initial focus on theological similarities fosters mutual respect and trust that develops lasting friendships, while knowledge and new insights regarding religious differences improves understanding, which reduces potential conflict. Attempts to learn and appreciate each other's religious tenets and practices promote patience and sensitivity that corrects or dispels perceptions of imperialism, colonialism, exclusivism, along with proselytization during dialogue. Marginalization and isolation also cease when relational approaches encompass interdisciplinary participants from diverse epistemological groups, including physical sciences that describe humanity's relation with the world, the political, economic, and social sciences that examine humanity's relationships with each other, as well as religious and theological studies, which theorize on humanity's relation with the divine. Relationships among various religions, nations, and societies likewise illustrate relational ontology's significance in dialogue.

Additionally, contemporary challenges demand integrating relational techniques into interreligious dialogue. Interdisciplinary instances of relationality, such as quantum entanglement, offer religiously neutral theories, frameworks, and mathematical languages to improve communication, interpretation, along with mutual understanding in dialogue. These impartial relational tools extend and encourage dialogic participation from under-

represented religious groups and from scientific, political, and cultural entities who posit valuable ideological responses to humanity's ultimate questions. Moreover, examining specific theological perspectives, such as Christianity's Creator/creation relationship, validate relational ontology as an effective approach for interreligious dialogue. It exemplifies how to apply relational approaches to other religions for study or dialogue. Most significantly, these diverse interdisciplinary perspectives validate that reality is being as being-in-relation. The fact that relationality is intrinsic to reality confirms the importance of relational ontology as fundamental to human beings as well as to religious traditions during interreligious dialogue. Employing radically different evidence from quantum physics in dialogue with theology corroborates this project's methodology as effective for interdisciplinary as well as for interreligious discourse.

A variety of research opportunities exists for utilizing relational ontology as a method for interreligious dialogue. From theological views, research includes examining the Creator/creation relationship from different religious perspectives or in comparison with multiple traditions. An analysis of relational ontology in scriptures, tenets, as well as the ritual expressions of faith communities likewise offers research prospects within and between religions. Additional research involves ways to incorporate relational ontology methods into interreligious dialogue as well as broaden its application to international and intercultural dialogic encounters.

Furthermore, a study of relational ontology within the physical sciences expands opportunities to explore different religious traditions with respect to scientific relational analogies such as quantum entanglement. Success during science-religion dialogue encourages research into other academic areas, for example, social studies, psychology,

women's and gender studies, political sciences, business, education, and the arts. The relational insights from these diverse disciplines should yield valuable perspectives for resolving challenges to effective interreligious dialogue.

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