

**UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

**Church of England ministers' beliefs about other religions:  
A constructivist grounded theory study**

**SABINE BOHNACKER-BRUCE**

ORCID 0000-0001-6789-5265

Doctor of Philosophy

January 2016

This Thesis has been completed as a requirement  
for a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester

## ACCESS AGREEMENT

I agree to supply a copy of my thesis to the University of Winchester Library and an e-copy to the Data Repository.

*Tick one of the following statements:*

The thesis is to be made available from the moment of deposit

In order to facilitate commercial publication I request an embargo period of 1 year

In order to facilitate commercial publication I request an embargo period of 2 years

In order to facilitate commercial publication I request an embargo period of 3 years

*(please provide an explanation for the length of the embargo period and information about the proposed publication arrangements)*

**To allow for publication as monograph if a suitable publisher can be found.**

The title, abstract and keywords may be published, but the thesis may not be published in the data repository because it contains commercially sensitive data in the following sections *(please identify the commercially sensitive data)*:

The title, abstract and keywords may be published, but the thesis may not be published because my sponsors/funders own the rights to it *(please identify the funder/sponsor and the contract information)*:

I agree that my thesis may be copied on demand by individuals or libraries. The copy of my thesis will contain the following statement:

**This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.**

**I confirm that the thesis and abstracts are my original work, that further copying will not infringe any rights of others, and that I have the right to make these authorisations. Other publication rights may be granted as I choose. No profit may be made from selling, copying or licensing my work without further agreement.**

I agree that my obligation is to notify the University of Winchester of any change of address in order to facilitate any future requests for licensing.

Author's signature .....*Sabine Bohnacker-Bruce*.....Date.....15/04/2016.....

## **DECLARATION AND COPYRIGHT STATEMENT**

### **Declaration:**

No portion of the work referred to in the Thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

I confirm that this Thesis is entirely my own work.

### **Copyright:**

Copyright © 2016 Sabine Bohnacker-Bruce ORCID 0000-0001-6789-5265

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the Thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement. Copies (by any process) either in full, or of extracts, may be made only in accordance with instructions given by the author. Details may be obtained from the RKE Centre, University of Winchester.

This page must form part of any such copies made. Further copies (by any process) of copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the permission (in writing) of the author.

No profit may be made from selling, copying or licensing the author's work without further agreement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisory team:  
Prof Anna King (Director of Studies), Dr Paul Hedges and Dr Tansy Jessop -  
sage, erudite, insightful (and patient) guides on a long and winding journey.

Thank you also to Beate Hellowell for proofreading the final draft of the thesis,  
and to Izzy Matthews for transforming my plain models into stylish illustrations.

Heartfelt thanks to my husband, Malcolm Bruce - without his practical, financial and  
emotional support I would not have been able to start, let alone finish this thesis;  
and to our children, Callum, Dominic and Helena,  
who helped me keep things in perspective.

For my parents,  
Jakob and Anneliese Bohnacker

In memory of  
Frank-Rainer Schulz  
1952-2015  
Minister, mentor and friend

**UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

**ABSTRACT**

Church of England ministers' beliefs about other religions:

A constructivist grounded theory study

Sabine Bohnacker-Bruce

ORCID 0000-0001-6789-5265

Doctor of Philosophy

January 2016

This thesis explores the beliefs of Church of England (CofE) parish ministers about religions other than Christianity, and the theological frameworks supporting them. I argue that these beliefs are informed by a Ministers' Theology of Faiths, which evaluates other religions predominantly with regard to their 'beneficent potential', namely their effects on the flourishing of individuals and communities; it draws on a 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry that implies responsibility for parishioners of any faith and none. In an era of fundamentalism, Islamophobia and religiously inspired violence, beliefs about other religions are socially significant because they influence attitudes and behaviours. Within the Christian tradition they are theologically significant since they express beliefs about God and humanity, and inform approaches to religious others. CofE clergy represent the established church and embody the Christian tradition in local communities, many with substantial numbers of non-Christian parishioners, yet little is known about their beliefs. Drawing on constructivist grounded theory, this interdisciplinary study employed an innovative, multifaceted methodological approach, using the nominal group technique in focus groups, and prompt cards and a semi-structured questionnaire in qualitative interviews with 21 ministers in the southern, largely rural Diocese of Winchester and in Leicester, a religiously diverse city in the Midlands. The principally Christian perspective of interviewees was held in tension with perspectives originating from other aspects of their personal and social identities. Ministers emphasised the centrality of relational and experiential factors in the formation of their beliefs, resulting in recognition of the influence of the cultural context on religious faith, appreciation of the commonalities between the religions, and relationships marked by mutual respect. These findings suggest that CofE institutional policies and practices for clergy training and ministerial development should facilitate improved opportunities for ministers to engage with people of other religions, and to empower their congregations likewise.

Keywords: Church, Minister, Clergy, Beliefs, Religions, Faiths, Theology

## LIST OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page No.</b>
Declaration and copyright statement	1
Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
List of contents	4
List of tables and figures	9
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1. Rationale for the study	10
1.2. Story of the study	11
1.3. Motivation for the study	13
1.4. Significance of the study	17
1.5. Contribution of the study	18
1.6. Position of the researcher	20
1.7. Structure of the thesis	20
<b>Chapter 2: Christian theology of religions – concepts and definitions</b>	<b>22</b>
2.1. Introduction	22
2.2. Definitions of terms and concepts	23
2.2.1. Religion	23
2.2.2. Faith	27
2.2.3. Belief	29
2.2.4. Theology of religions	32
2.2.5. Interreligious studies	34
2.2.6. Interreligious (interfaith) dialogue or engagement	35
2.3. Importance and relevance of theology of religions	37
2.3.1. Socio-political considerations	37
2.3.2. Theological considerations	39
<b>Chapter 3: Approaches in Christian theology of religions</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1. Introduction	42
3.2. Alan Race's threefold typology	43
3.3. A fourth category: particularities or particularism	45
3.4. Critiques of Race's typology	47
3.5. Different approaches in the theology of religions	49
3.5.1. Central questions of the theology of religions	49
3.5.2. Definitions of the different approaches	52
3.5.3. Arguments for and against exclusivism	53
3.5.4. Arguments for and against inclusivism	56
3.5.5. Arguments for and against pluralism	59
3.5.6. Arguments for and against particularism	63
3.6. Personal reflection	64

<b>Chapter 4: The Church of England and other religions</b>	<b>68</b>
4.1. Introduction	68
4.2. Theological approaches to other religions in official CofE documents	70
4.3. Common features and themes in CofE documents on other religions	76
4.3.1. Special position of Judaism	76
4.3.2. Increasing importance of engagement with Islam	77
4.3.3. Lack of engagement with non-Abrahamic religions	77
4.3.4. Focus on practice and lack of theological engagement	78
4.4. <i>Presence and Engagement</i>	79
4.5. Conclusion	82
<b>Chapter 5: Research design and methodology</b>	<b>84</b>
5.1. Introduction	84
5.2. Qualitative research	84
5.3. Quality of qualitative research	86
5.3.1. Theoretical considerations	86
5.3.2. Implications for this study	89
5.4. Research paradigm	91
5.4.1. Theoretical considerations	91
5.4.2. Constructivism	91
5.5. Research strategy	92
5.6. Person and role of the researcher	95
5.7. Methodology: constructivist grounded theory	97
5.8. Ethical considerations	101
5.8.1. Standard ethical requirements	101
5.8.2. Julia Laible's 'loving epistemology'	102
5.8.3. Ethical issues in this study	105
5.9. Conclusion	106
<b>Chapter 6: Data collection</b>	<b>107</b>
6.1. Introduction	107
6.2. Data selection: sampling	107
6.2.1. Sample size and sampling methods	107
6.2.2. Sampling criteria	109
6.3. Development of research tools	111
6.3.1. Initial considerations on methods and tools	111
6.3.2. Prompt cards	112
6.3.3. Development of prompt cards in focus groups	114
6.3.4. Use of the nominal group technique in focus groups	114
6.3.5. Development of the interview questionnaire	117
6.4. Interviews	117
6.4.1. First round of interviews: Winchester diocese	117
6.4.2. Interview format	118
6.4.3. Transcription	120
6.4.4. Development of research	120
6.4.5. Second round of interviews: Leicester	121
6.5. Demographics of participants	122

<b>Chapter 7: Data analysis</b>	<b>124</b>
7.1. Introduction	124
7.2. Theoretical considerations	125
7.2.1. Data analysis in qualitative research	125
7.2.2. Data analysis in grounded theory	127
7.2.3. Grounded theory and existing theory	129
7.3. Approach to data analysis	130
7.3.1. Transparency of choices	130
7.3.2. Transcription and data analysis	130
7.3.3. Use of computer software in data analysis	131
7.4. Analysis of prompt cards	133
7.4.1. Compilation of spreadsheets	133
7.4.2. Prompt selection	133
7.4.3. Conclusions from the analysis of the use of prompt cards	135
7.5. Analysis of the interview transcripts	136
7.5.1. Coding of first round interview transcripts	136
7.5.2. Emergence of themes	138
7.5.3. Coding of second round interview transcripts	139
7.5.4. Final review of all interview transcripts	139
7.6. Conclusion	139
<b>Chapter 8: Interviewees' beliefs about other religions</b>	<b>141</b>
8.1. Introduction	141
8.2. Commonly described characteristics of specific religions	142
8.2.1. Judaism	142
8.2.2. Islam	143
8.2.3. Buddhism	146
8.2.4. Hinduism, Sikhism and other Eastern religions	146
8.3. Common themes in statements about other religions	148
8.3.1. Admiration for religious commitment	148
8.3.2. Admiration for familiar aspects of religious practice	149
8.3.3. Difficulty with unfamiliar aspects	150
8.3.4. Rejection of fundamentalism	150
8.3.5. Culture and religion	151
8.3.6. Equality of women and minorities	153
8.4. Features of interviewees' responses	154
8.4.1. The central role of personal experience	154
8.4.2. Differentiation between religious individuals and religions	156
8.4.3. Centrality of the Christian perspective	156
8.4.4. Interviewees' alternative perspectives	157
8.5. Conclusion	159



<b>Chapter 9: Perceived formative influences on interviewees' beliefs about other religions</b>	<b>161</b>
9.1. Introduction	161
9.2. 'Friends & acquaintances' and 'Personal relationships'	162
9.3. 'Interfaith engagement'	165
9.4. 'Experience' prompts	169
9.5. Other influences	173
9.5.1. The family	173
9.5.2. The media	175
9.5.3. Christian leaders and Church of England senior leadership	177
9.5.4. Clergy training	178
9.5.5. The Bible	180
9.6. Conclusion	183
<b>Chapter 10: Theological frameworks and themes in interviewees' beliefs about other religions</b>	<b>185</b>
10.1. Introduction	185
10.2. Ministers' Theology of Faiths	187
10.2.1. Comparison of theological frameworks	187
10.2.2. Terminology and language of the frameworks	189
10.2.3. Central theme, meaning and focus of salvation in the frameworks	191
10.2.4. Theological focus of the frameworks	194
10.2.5. Characterisation, criteria and philosophical focus of the frameworks	196
10.2.6. Positions on the beneficent potential of other religions	198
10.2.7. Ministers' Theology of Faiths and other theological frameworks	200
10.3. The 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry	201
10.4. 'Roots' and 'respect'	207
10.4.1. 'Roots'	207
10.4.2. 'Respect'	209
10.5. Conclusion	213
<b>Chapter 11: Dimensions of Church of England ministers' beliefs about other religions</b>	<b>214</b>
11.1. Introduction	214
11.2. Discussion of the model	214
11.3. The foundational frameworks	217
11.4. The matrix of dimensions	218
11.5. The themes	224
11.6. Conclusion	224
<b>Chapter 12: Conclusions</b>	<b>226</b>
12.1. Personal reflection	226
12.2. Reflections on the study	227
12.3. Contribution of the study	229
12.4. Limitations of the study	231
12.5. Directions for future research	232
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>235</b>

<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>254</b>
A. Researcher’s stories of significant experiences	254
B. Some alternative frameworks in the theology of religions	256
B.1. Perry Schmidt-Leukel	256
B.2. Owen Thomas	256
B.3. Paul Knitter	257
B.4. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen	258
B.5. Discussion of the alternative frameworks	259
C. Definitions of approaches in the theology of religions	261
C.1. Definitions of exclusivism	261
C.2. Definitions of inclusivism	262
C.3. Definitions of pluralism	263
C.4. Definitions of particularism	264
D. Overview of Church of England website pages on ‘Work with other faiths’	265
E. Overview of Presence and Engagement website	268
F. Information sheet for participants	272
G. List of prompt cards	274
H. Questionnaire	275
J. Recruitment of interview participants in Winchester diocese	277
K. Prompts selected as most important influences by interviewees	278
L. Prompts selected as most important in order of frequency	279
M. Frequency of prompt combinations	280
N. Thematic groups of codes	281
O. List of documents from CofE website for Leicester interviews	283
P. Interviewees’ travel experiences	284
Q. Transcript excerpts	287
Q.1. NANCY	287
Q.2. LEE	289
Q.3. LAURA	290
Q.4. ROBERT	293
Q.5. RICHARD	296

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Possible questions and answers in the theology of religions	51
Table 2: Process of nominal group technique	115
Table 3: Overview of interviewees' alias names, age and churchmanship	123
Table 4: Comparison academic theology of religions – Ministers' Theology of Faiths	188

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Model of dimensions of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions	216
Figure 2: Mapping LISA to the model	220
Figure 3: Mapping BARBARA to the model	221
Figure 4: Mapping DAVID to the model	222
Figure 5: Mapping JAMES to the model	223

## **1. Introduction**

The presence of believers of all the major world Faiths living in close proximity alongside each other, presents people of faith in this country with theological questions about the nature of their faith claims more starkly than has been the case for a thousand years. When other Faiths were for most people located in quite other parts of the world, and often as colonial people in the imperial memory, it was comparatively easy to write them off as irrelevant or wrong. When a Church of England parish has over twenty mosques and Christian people have friends and work colleagues who are Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, deeper experience based questions are posed to our theology. (CofE, 2005, p.82f)

### **1.1. Rationale for the study**

This thesis presents an interdisciplinary study of contemporary Church of England (CofE) ministers' beliefs about other religions. It describes and explores the contents of these beliefs, the perceived significant influences on their development, and the theological frameworks supporting them; and it offers three explanatory theoretical models to enrich and deepen understanding of these aspects.

As a result of globalisation in the twentieth century, multicultural societies now exist in many countries across the world, including the UK. One characteristic of multiculturalism is the existence of religious diversity in local communities. People living in urban areas encounter a range of nationalities, cultures and religions on a daily basis in neighbours, colleagues and friends. Those living in areas where the majority of the population is of one ethnic, cultural and religious background still encounter the challenges and opportunities of multiculturalism, including religious diversity, through the media, through work and trade, through education, and through travel.

Academic theologians of different denominations and persuasions have explored the theological implications of the existence of different religions for the Christian tradition over many decades. However, in an age of globalisation and multiculturalism this is no longer an issue just for theologians but for Christian believers in general, as acknowledged by the CofE's Inter Faith Consultative Group in the quotation heading this chapter.

CofE parish ministers are one group of Christians who have particular cause to engage theologically and practically with other religions. This is especially the case for clergy based in parishes where a substantial number or even the majority of parishioners belong to religious traditions other than Christianity, and where some ministers find themselves in key roles as community leaders. However, even ministers based in traditional rural parishes, whose parishioners are far more likely to have no religious faith at all rather than belong to another religious tradition, are likely to have to respond to questions raised by religious diversity.

These may be prompted by world events, by media reports, by the curiosity of a primary school child in the local CofE School, or by the Scriptural passage set for the Sunday sermon. CofE parish ministers' beliefs about other religions will inform not only their answers to these questions but also express themselves in the way they carry out their wider ministry. Their beliefs in turn are informed by a variety of theological, philosophical, cultural and social influences, by personal experience and relationships, by significant events and other factors.

The three broad research questions this study addresses are:

1. What beliefs do CofE ministers express about specific religions and other religions in general?
2. What factors do CofE ministers consider the main influences on their beliefs about other religions?
3. What theological frameworks inform CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions?

The subject of this study is thus located at an intersection of several fields: one is the theology of religions; another is the sociology of religions, specifically the social construction of individuals' religious beliefs. A further field relates to the particular social group of individuals studied, namely CofE ministers, and as such also touches on the institution of the Church of England. As this study is interdisciplinary, it draws on models and approaches from different disciplines to explore these beliefs; it is broadly located in the developing field of interreligious studies, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Also discussed in the next chapter are some of the other central terms and concepts used, such as religion, faith and belief - all variously defined, and frequently contested.

## **1.2. Story of the study**

This study is based on qualitative research using a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2009), a contemporary revision of the original grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The purpose of grounded theory is the generation of theory from data, rather than the verification of theory, and is therefore particularly suitable for an exploratory study. In line with the methodology used, the focus of this study was sharpened and refined as the research progressed and data was added.

At the beginning of the research process I set out to explore CofE parish ministers' accounts of their beliefs about other religions in relation to academic theology of religions and to the Church of England's official position, and to investigate what they considered significant influences on their beliefs.

In the first round of interviews in the Winchester diocese, I asked ministers about the most significant influences on their beliefs about other religions. My expectation was that ministers would express specific theological positions, using the language of academic theology of religion to describe these. I expected my research to focus on specific influences or factors associated with particular theological beliefs.

Interview data was rich with stories about what ministers considered significant experiences and factors regarding their beliefs about other religions. There was a wealth of data referring to personal relationships, to meaningful encounters with individuals from other faith communities, to experiences made when travelling or living abroad for a period of time, and to a lesser extent to various social and cultural influences such as the family and the media, which combined to present a complex picture. However, while the data included some theological statements and references, interviewees rarely used the language of theology of religions; in fact, there was generally very little reference to theology, or to Scripture, or indeed to CofE documents.

When reviewing CofE documents relating to other religions and interreligious engagement, it became evident that this dearth of theological engagement was not particular to my study. *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005) is a significant publication on interreligious engagement based on extensive consultation with CofE ministers in parishes with substantial communities of other religious traditions. The document's authors note:

We found it harder than we had expected to encourage Consultation participants to engage explicitly with these [theological and spiritual] issues rather than with the 'practical' issues and language of resourcing or socioeconomic and political analysis. (CofE, 2005, p.79)

Consequently, it was evident that instead of academic theology of religions a different framework was required to account for the themes emerging from the interview data. I therefore developed a provisional model, which included the various themes identified in ministers' descriptions of their beliefs about and experiences with other religions in the first round of interviews. I then carried out a second round of interviews, this time in the multicultural city of Leicester. In these interviews I first followed the interview format of the first round, and afterwards asked interviewees to comment on the provisional model. The additional data from the second round of interviews led to the development of three separate models: a theological framework, a framework of ministry and a framework of beliefs to illustrate the different themes and aspects of the findings.

Data from the different stages of this study is presented in this thesis and contributes answers to the research questions set out above. However, these findings are provisional; they offer a starting point and invite further research in order to develop, balance and complete them.

### **1.3. Motivation for the study**

My motivation for undertaking PhD research stemmed from discovering a deep enjoyment of academic study. After a first degree in a professional subject and a career in a commercial context I decided, during a family break, to study Philosophy and Religion, purely out of interest and without direct relevance to my professional career. While I had expected to enjoy the subject, I unexpectedly also discovered a love of the processes of academic study and writing. Although I initially returned to my previous career after completion of both the MA and the family break, I soon found that my professional work had become unsatisfying. To take my studies further, a doctorate seemed the obvious next step, and once I started exploring working in Higher Education I realised that a PhD is increasingly a prerequisite for a career in this field. While the decision to undertake PhD research was initially prompted by interest in my subject and enjoyment of academic research, practical considerations soon followed.

Focusing on a research subject was far less straightforward, as I considered various areas of interest that had emerged from my MA studies and other engagements outside the academic field, and as my undergraduate studies and professional work were in yet different and unrelated fields. Like many PhD candidates I found that my first ideas were too general and unmanageable, and my initial proposal went through many cycles of change and refinement.

I finally chose a subject that brings together three different strands of personal interests: firstly the development of beliefs in general and religious beliefs in particular, secondly the theology of religions, and thirdly a particular social group, namely CofE ministers. The interdisciplinary nature of my subject held an additional appeal for me, as my own background is a multi-disciplinary collage of academic and professional fields.

My interest in the development of beliefs stemmed from my MA in Philosophy and Religion, where I chose the 'Ethics Pathway', focusing on ethical models informed by Christian beliefs and their application to moral questions. The MA course was taught part-time and most of the students were mature, bringing a breadth of life and professional experience to the discussions. I quickly became aware that individuals' positions on ethical questions were influenced less by their philosophical and theological beliefs and more by their personal

relationships and experiences. This was particularly noticeable concerning medical, reproductive and sexual ethics. Even students who were staunchly Catholic did not necessarily accept the ethical teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in these areas, instead arguing their positions with examples and experiences from their own life or that of family and friends.

In a paper that discusses whether religious faith adds to ethical perception, McCormick (1979) argues for the centrality of experience in the formation of moral beliefs, claiming:

The first thing to be said is that moral convictions do not originate from rational analysis and arguments. Let me take slavery as an example. We do not hold that slavery is humanly demeaning and immoral chiefly because we have argued to this rationally. Rather, first our sensitivities are sharpened to the meaning and value of human persons and certainly religious faith can play an important part in the sharpening. We then *experience* the out-of-jointness, inequality and injustice of slavery. We then *judge* it to be wrong. At this point we develop 'arguments' to criticize, modify and above all communicate this judgement. Reflective analysis is an attempt to reinforce rationally, communicably, and from other sources what we grasp at a different level. Discursive reflection does not *discover* the right and good, but only *analyses* it. (McCormick, 1979, p.141, italics in original)

It is debatable whether McCormick's claim of the critical role of experience in the development of ethical and moral values and beliefs is necessarily applicable in all cases. It is also not entirely clear whether he uses the word 'experience' in the sense of 'feeling something', or in the sense of 'having an experience of something', or both. However, his assertion caused me to consider the influence of experience in the development of specific theological beliefs and, more generally, religious beliefs. Reflecting on my own beliefs, I had to acknowledge that many were based not on rational analysis or well-informed deliberation, but were intuitive, instinctive and strongly influenced by a few significant experiences. I also noticed that the role of personal experience was acknowledged comparatively rarely in academic papers and books on our reading list, no matter what particular field of theology or ethics under consideration.

This awareness shifted the focus of my interest from the 'what' of ethical and religious beliefs to the 'why': when I started the MA course, I was focused on comparing and contrasting different positions on various issues and analysing the arguments for and against these positions. This now seemed somewhat narrow or limited, as it disregarded a critical element in the development of beliefs, namely personal experience. An existing interest in the role of experience in informing particular beliefs therefore shaped my perspective when I started engaging with the theology of religions.



The theology of religions is an area of theology that endeavours to explain the existence of different religions, their relation to Christianity and their salvific potential from a theological perspective (Hedges, 2010); it deals with 'the theological implications of living in a religiously plural world' (Race, 1983, p.ix).

I became interested in the theology of religions through a number of influences: one was the study of the philosophy of religion on my MA programme, requiring engagement with differing beliefs about the nature and action of God held by different Christian traditions. Another was through living and working in multicultural South-East London for a number of years. The events of 9/11 and later, much closer to home, the 7/7 London bombings added a sense of urgency to this general interest; they brought a sharp awareness of the critical role the religions play in many conflicts and wars around the world, and as a powerful influence on social and ethical norms. Sadly, religiously inspired violence seems to have become more common, with numerous lives lost around the world.

A theology of religions expresses a particular perspective on other religions, and so can play a critical role in how religious believers relate to those of other religions or none. An individual's theology of religions is also likely to reflect the perspectives and practices of their particular faith community. It is thus both socially operative and socially constructed. Nevertheless, a theology of religions is, in the first instance, a theological construct: it involves distinctive perspectives on the nature of God, the person and role of Jesus Christ, and the meaning of salvation - all fundamental aspects of Christian theology. Investigating an individual's beliefs about other religions by considering their theology of religions therefore also implicitly explores that person's theology regarding their own faith: their understanding of God's nature and action in the world.

My interest in the development of religious beliefs and in the theology of religions outlined a broad area of study, yet PhD research required a more narrowly defined topic. Personal experience and context led me to focus on the beliefs of CofE clergy.

With around a million UK adults currently attending an Anglican church every Sunday (CofE, 2016a) and around a million children and adolescents at present attending CofE schools (CofE, 2016b), CofE parish ministers are still in a position of some influence within British society, in spite of a historical decline of this influence (Towler & Coxon, 1979; McGowan, 2015). Parish ministers fulfil a distinctive function in local communities, attending to significant life events, such as weddings, baptisms and funerals, and supporting individuals and the community in times of grief and troubles. They also play an often-overlooked role in

contributing to the formation of children's religious beliefs, particularly in CofE primary schools. Ministers are frequently seen as role models for other Christians, while for people who belong to other religions, or none, they are the most visible exemplars of Christianity in an increasingly secular culture.

There were several reasons for focusing on CofE ministers rather than ministers of other denominations: theologically and liturgically the Church of England is particularly diverse – indeed, this is occasionally a source of frustration to people both inside and outside the church. My expectation was that by focusing on CofE ministers I would encounter a wide range of theological positions, excluding perhaps the very extremes, but a good representation of the main positions in this field. In addition, as the Church of England is the established church, its representatives are generally more visible in local communities than ministers of other denominations.

Parish priests are seen to embody the Christian faith in a local community and their decision to become ordained is commonly understood as an expression of a deep and committed Christian faith. Even so, the actual views and beliefs of parish priests are rarely noted beyond their congregation within their local communities or beyond. While archbishops, bishops and other senior officials in the Church of England have opportunities to make their views known within the institution and also within wider society, the voice of most parish priests is rarely heard (Gaston, 2015). I therefore decided to focus on parish clergy, rather than the upper echelons of the church hierarchy.

I chose to concentrate on clergy rather than lay members of the Church of England, as I anticipated that ministers were more likely to have well-considered beliefs as a result of clergy training and continuing ministerial development, and on-going reflection as part of their ministry and spiritual life. Equally importantly, I expected that clergy would be able to articulate their beliefs more easily than many lay people. Both these expectations were fully met, as interviewees showed themselves to be both reflective and articulate about their beliefs.

From a personal perspective, the Church of England is the tradition I have been part of since 1997; during this time I have held various voluntary roles in three different CofE congregations and also briefly worked in a diocesan office. I have encountered, worked closely with, and in a few cases become friends with several ministers and their spouses, and through these relationships have gained some insight into their journeys of faith. Over the years I have developed a deep sympathy for the demands and frustrations of ordained

ministry, and respect for those who follow a calling to such a role in spite of the sacrifices involved. From my non-conformist roots I nevertheless retain a belief in the priesthood of all believers, and therefore a somewhat critical perspective on the formalised role of ordained full-time ministers, reinforced in the case of CofE ministers by the status of their institution as the established church.

#### **1.4. Significance of the study**

Academic research is not just required to contribute to the body of knowledge in a field but needs to demonstrate significance and relevance, even applicability to particular problems (Blaikie, 2010). While I was considering PhD research and then developing a proposal, two events occurred that exemplified the significance and relevance of the subject.

In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI gave a lecture on faith, reason and the university at the University of Regensburg (Germany). During a section of his speech he quoted a critical remark about Islam with reference to forced conversion, made centuries earlier by a Byzantine emperor to a Persian dialogue partner. Initial media reporting took the quote out of context and gave the impression that it represented Pope Benedict's personal opinion. Unsurprisingly, many Muslim religious and political leaders strongly protested, mass demonstrations in several Islamic countries followed and various acts of violence against Christians were attributed to the Pope's speech. However, even when the full text of his lecture was released, showing he had used this statement as an example to illustrate a point and not as an expression of his opinion, protests did not abate. In spite of the explanation and an apology issued shortly thereafter there reportedly even were calls for the Pope's murder. This incident highlighted the potential dangers of expressing or even reporting critical or unwelcome opinions about other religions. It also drew attention to the problematic role of the media in reporting inaccurately, or at least imprecisely, on such a potentially sensitive subject.

This point was further illustrated by an incident in February 2008, when the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, gave a lecture at the Royal Courts of Justice on the subject of Islamic and English Law. Media reaction was swift and scathing, accusing him of proposing acceptance of the precedence of Sharia law over civil law for Muslims in the UK. Initial reporting ignored the subtleties of his position and there was widespread disagreement with his stance even within the Church of England. At the time, I was working in a communications role for the Winchester diocese and was very conscious of public reaction to this lecture. I also became aware of the deep frustration of parish priests who found themselves in a

position of having to defend the Archbishop from critics within and outside their congregations, when many did not agree with his position themselves.

Hans Küng (1991) famously stated that there would be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. Beliefs about other religions are socially significant because they inform behaviour and actions towards those of other religions in an interconnected world, a 'global village'. A better understanding of the factors that affect the formation of religious beliefs is likely to foster more tolerance and respect.

Beliefs about other religions are theologically significant within the Christian tradition because they inform attitudes and approaches towards those of other religions in the context of mission, evangelism and interreligious engagement. They also reflect other, deeper theological beliefs about the nature of God, and of human beings. Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963, p.133), an influential early thinker in the field, argued that 'any serious intellectual statement of the Christian faith must include, if it is to serve its purpose among men, some sort of doctrine of other religions'. Within the context of Christian theology there exists a lively academic debate on the theology of religions (Chapter 3); however, arguments made in support of the different positions often do not sufficiently acknowledge the factors involved in the development of beliefs about other religions.

CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions will inform various aspects of their ministry, including individual encounters and pastoral work, preaching and teaching, involvement in evangelism, mission and interreligious engagement, and wider social and community engagement. A better understanding of the perspectives of CofE ministers may help inform the wider institution in how best to train and support ministers in order to enable them to engage effectively with those of other religions, and to empower their congregations to do so, too.

### **1.5. Contribution of the study**

This research is focused on a subject that is located at the periphery of academic fields and that has therefore not received much attention. A search of relevant databases – the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), SocINDEX™ and EBSCO – using key words ('religious beliefs', 'beliefs about religion' and 'development' or 'formation') in various combinations located around 250 articles published in a range of journals as varied as *Journal of Youth Studies*, *International Migration*, *European Journal of Philosophy* and *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*. However, the majority of these articles did not relate to the content or development of specific religious beliefs, or

beliefs about other religions, but to the effect of religious faith on other beliefs, social attitudes or behaviours. Database searches are only indicative, as other studies may have used slightly different terminology. However, the results suggest that within the social sciences the development of specific religious beliefs, including beliefs about other religions, is not a major focus of research, with the exception of the development of children's understanding of more general religious and ethical concepts. This study therefore contributes to a relatively unexplored area of the social sciences.

The research explores the beliefs of a group of people who are rarely the focus of academic research. Although there are other groups of individuals who have not been the subject of much research, arguably CofE ministers play a unique role in British society (see 1.3.). Comparatively little is currently known about them, beyond Church statistics and media caricatures, and even less about these ministers' beliefs. Social research on CofE ministers has focused on psychological aspects, such as personality profiles (Musson, 2001; Francis *et al.*, 2007 and 2012), mental health issues (Randall, 2004; Turton & Francis, 2007), or job satisfaction (Francis & Turton, 2002). Other studies have focused on the experience of particular groups of ministers, such as female ministers (Nason-Clark, 1987; Aldridge, 1994; Robbins, 2001; Bagilhole, 2003), homosexual ministers (Nixon, 2008; Jones, 2011), or black ministers (Isiorho, 2003). This study explores CofE ministers' religious beliefs, specifically about other religions, and thereby contributes to a better understanding of a socially important group of individuals.

The main contribution of this study is the development of three models: the first is a theological framework, Ministers' Theology of Faiths (Chapter 10), which more adequately takes account of CofE ministers' theological perspectives on other religions than the prevailing framework in academic theology of religions, namely Alan Race's (1983) threefold typology (Chapter 3). The second model is a 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry, which identifies and explains how CofE's understanding of their ministry informs Ministers' Theology of Faiths. A third theoretical model draws together various strands of findings and themes in the data to illustrate the dimensions of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions (Chapter 11).

As part of the literature review this study also contributes a distinctive review of academic theology of religions (Chapter 3) and a critical analysis of official CofE documents relating to other religions and interreligious engagement (Chapter 4).

## **1.6. Position of the researcher**

In qualitative social research the crucial role of the researcher is widely acknowledged (Janesick, 1994; Blaikie, 2010). Disclosure of the researcher's background and position on the subject studied is required in order to increase transparency and allow for critical evaluation of their implications for the research. In this section I outline the influences I consider relevant to my perspective as a researcher, while acknowledging that my own story, just like that of any research participant, is 'partial, incomplete, and always in a process of re-telling and re-membering' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.ix).

I grew up in a Christian family very actively involved in a rural Pentecostal church, rooted in the Lutheran tradition and theologically conservative. This was balanced by a liberal grammar school education, which strongly encouraged critical thinking, and followed by a professional degree, where religious beliefs were considered mostly irrelevant, and potentially somewhat embarrassing. In my twenties and thirties involvement in churches from different Protestant traditions and my Masters degree in a college with a Roman Catholic tradition enabled me to engage with a wider range of theological perspectives. Living and working in a multicultural environment in London brought encounters and some familiarity with people from different religious backgrounds.

At the heart of this study are the narratives of CofE clergy recounting significant events and experiences relating to their beliefs about other religions. In the early stages of the research process I reflected on what I believed about other religions, what had influenced these beliefs and what theological position I held. Stories of significant encounters and experiences from my childhood and youth are included in Appendix A.

When I first embarked on this research, my beliefs about other religions were inclusivist (Chapter 3). Unsurprisingly, intensive engagement with the arguments for different theological positions, detailed consideration of the beliefs of the interview participants, and constant reflection on my own beliefs led me to review and revise my position several times during the research process and the writing of the thesis. Nevertheless, at the end of this process I would still describe my position as broadly inclusivist (3.6.).

## **1.7. Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is set out in three parts: Part 1 introduces the study and provides the background to the research. It includes a discussion of the terminology and central concepts in the field in

Chapter 2, an overview of the academic field of theology of religions in Chapter 3, and a review of CofE documents relating to other religions in Chapter 4.

Part 2 presents the original research with CofE ministers, which forms the heart of this study. Chapter 5 sets out the theoretical framework for the research design and methodology; their practical translation in data collection and data analysis are explained in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively.

In Part 3 the findings of this study are presented. Chapter 8 identifies common themes and features in interviewees' stated beliefs about other religions and Chapter 9 discusses interviewees' perceptions of significant influences on these beliefs. Chapter 10 offers two models of interviewees' theological frameworks relevant to their beliefs about other religions, namely Ministers' Theology of Faiths and a 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry. Chapter 11 draws together the findings for the three research questions in an explanatory theoretical model of the dimensions of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions; the thesis ends with conclusions in Chapter 12.

## 2. Christian theology of religions – concepts and definitions

### 2.1. Introduction

This study explores CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions, and investigates the frameworks and concepts ministers draw on in their discussions of other religions. In this and the following chapter, I consider the field of Christian theology that engages with the relation of Christianity to other religions, namely the theology of religions.

In a globalised, multicultural and multi-religious world, questions about how one's own religion relates to, or ought to relate to, other religions are pertinent to people of any religion. Race (1983, p.ix) describes the Christian theology of religions as reflection on 'the theological implications of living in a religiously plural world' from a Christian perspective. He continues: 'It goes without saying that there could equally be a response to the same pluralism from within other religious traditions'. There is, therefore, a case for Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and other perspectives, or 'theologies', of religions. However, this response to religious pluralism from other religions could take a different form to the Christian theology of religion, which is based on a specifically Christian perspective, as will become apparent. The frameworks, questions and concepts of Christian theology of religions may not always be relevant or appropriate as a basis for other religions' theologies, although some academics working in the field of interreligious studies or engaging in interreligious dialogue have drawn on and developed Christian frameworks for a wider use (Schmidt-Leukel, 2008; Vélez de Cea, 2011). While other religious traditions' theologies of religions, and the relevance and transferability of Christian theology of religions to other religions are subjects in need of further research, they lie outside the boundaries of this study.

Theological engagement with other religions has always been part of Christian theology and indeed goes back to the very beginnings of Christianity as described in the New Testament, particularly in the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of Paul. Newbigin (1989) writes:

The world into which the first Christians carried the gospel was a religiously plural world and – as the letters of Paul show – in that world of many lords and many gods, Christians had to work out what it means that in fact Jesus alone is Lord. The first three centuries of church history were a time of intense life-and-death struggle against the seductive power of syncretism. (Newbigin, 1989, p.157)

Historically, engagement with other religions took place in the context of apologetics, mission or evangelism, and formed a part of theologies in these fields (Braybrooke, 1983). Only in the past few decades the theology of religions has become a more distinct field, with an extensive body of literature.



The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and clarify central terms and concepts used in the theology of religions, and to consider the importance and relevance of the field within a Christian belief system.

## **2.2. Definitions of terms and concepts**

### **2.2.1. Religion**

Religion, Smart (1969) observed, has been a vital and pervasive feature of human life throughout history. And yet, the meaning of the term is complex and definitions abound. Smith (1998) points to a list of more than 50 definitions in the appendix of Leuba's *Psychological Study of Religion* published in 1912. Undoubtedly, numerous definitions have been added in more than a century since Leuba compiled his list. Noting that this multiplicity of definitions had led some to the conclusion that the term is so broad as to be nearly meaningless, Smith (1998, p.281) argues: 'The moral of Leuba is not that religion cannot be defined, but that it can be defined, with greater or lesser success, more than fifty ways'.

Religion is a relevant construct in many different fields, including anthropology, ethics, history, philosophy, politics, psychology, sociology and religious studies. Influential theorists of religion have included, amongst others, sociologist and social psychologist Émile Durkheim, sociologist and political economist Max Weber, historian of religion and philosopher Mircea Eliade, theologian and pioneer of religious studies Ninian Smart and cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (King & Hedges, 2014). The different definitions of the term 'religion' offered tend to reflect the paradigms and concerns of the respective fields they emerge from. For example, Geertz's famous definition of religion as a system of symbols (1966) is not concerned with questions of belief or faith, truth or virtue, the numinous, transcendent or divine. Instead, it focuses on religion's role as a source of existential concepts in social organisation, a fundamental anthropological concern. While avoiding an exact definition, Smart (1969) pointed to various dimensions shared by religions, namely doctrines, myths, ethical teachings, rituals, social institutions, and religious experiences, all of which are central concepts in the field of religious studies. Definitions by sociologists (e.g. Hamilton, 1995; Beckford, 2003; Dillon, 2014), psychologists (e.g. Fontana, 2003; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005) or philosophers of religion (e.g. Taliaferro, 1998) in turn reflect the preoccupations of their respective fields.

Furthermore, not just the exact definition of the term religion, but its validity as a concept has been questioned by some practitioners in different fields, either for describing specific

religious traditions or communities (Smith, 1998; Masuzawa, 2005), or as a description of a general aspect of human life (Asad, 1993, 2011; Hinnells, 2005; Fitzgerald, 1997, 2007), or both (McCutcheon, 1997, 2007; Beckford, 2003).

Within the field of religious studies a classic critique of the concept of 'religion' comes from Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962, p.50), who described its changing meanings throughout history, finally concluding that it was 'confusing, unnecessary, and distorting'. Instead, he proposed that the term 'faith' should be used to describe the personal aspects of belief, the 'inner religious experience or involvement of a particular person' (p.156), whereas the term 'cumulative tradition' should be used to describe the historical and institutional aspects, including buildings, texts, events, communal practice and worship, 'anything that can be and is transmitted from one person, one generation, to another, and that an historian can observe' (p.157).

Like critics from other disciplines, theologian Newbigin (1989) highlights the eurocentrism implicit in many discussions relating to religion:

In most human cultures religion is not a separate activity set apart from the rest of life...In practice all the life of society is permeated by beliefs which western Europeans would call religious, and in thought what we call religion is a whole worldview, a way of understanding the whole human experience. The sharp line which modern Western culture has drawn between religious affairs and secular affairs is itself one of the most significant peculiarities of our culture. (Newbigin, 1989, p. 172)

In spite of these and other challenges, the term 'religion' continues to be used widely, with various definitions, in the different fields of the social sciences and humanities, as well as outside academia (Ring *et al.*, 1998). Taliaferro (2009), in discussing various definitions of the term by philosophers of religion, notes that legislation in many countries refers to religion without necessarily providing a clear definition of what constitutes religion, or a religion, implicitly assuming that there is a general, if unspoken, consensus about the meaning of the term. Similarly, compilers of questionnaires addressed at the general public, whether from business, government or other parts of the public sector, seem to be confident that respondents will know what is meant when they are asked to identify their religion.

Leirvik (2014, p.1) labels religion, however defined, a 'chronically unstable category'. Unsurprisingly therefore, many general definitions in the wider field of religious studies are offered with substantial *caveats*. One example of a definition from *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions* begins as follows:

A concept which has been used to denote: 1 the class of all religions; 2 the common essence or pattern of all supposedly genuine religious phenomena; 3 the transcendent or 'this-worldly' ideal of which any actual religion is an imperfect manifestation; and 4 human religiousness as a form of life which may or may not be expressed in systems of belief and practice. (Goring (ed.), 1992, p.434)

The entry continues to note various limitations of these definitions as too evaluative, too general, or too limited and concludes that no single definition will suffice to describe the various ideas, traditions and practices to which the term can refer.

A similarly cautious note is also evident in a definition offered by Nye (2003) who describes one use of the term 'religion' as a tool for classification referring to particular traditions with different major texts (sacred books); foundational ideas, 'beliefs', and worldviews; particular histories and leaders; and very often a sense of having a distinct identity. He then, however, problematizes this use, pointing to difficulties of over-simplification regarding cultural, historical and geographical variations within the traditions, as well as geographical gaps, and the predominance of a western perspective. Similarly, when describing the use of the term religion as a 'broad category for describing a universal aspect of human life' (p. 13), he proceeds to note various limitations of this usage depending on different cultural contexts. Nye's definition is helpful in that it distinguishes clearly between the use of the term to describe a category referring to different religious traditions, the religions, and a category referring to a universally shared feature of individual and collective human life. In this study it is the former that is primarily relevant and it will therefore be the focus for the remainder of this section.

While theologians of religions acknowledge the challenges to the concepts of religion and religions, for the most part they nevertheless affirm their validity as categories. In setting out his framework for theological approaches to other religions, Race (1983, p.75) argues: 'There is validity in pointing out there must be something in common between religions in order for them to be recognized by the same term itself and be distinguished from other cultural dimensions'. Hedges (2010; King & Hedges, 2014) also offers a detailed defence of the term, arguing that it remains a meaningful category in spite of and while acknowledging its problematic aspects.

In the same way as academics in other fields, theologians of religions provide definitions of the term 'religions' according to the paradigms and concerns of their own field. While Schmidt-Leukel (2005) does not attempt to produce a formal definition of religion, stating that this task had proved impossible, he identifies what he considers significant properties of religions:

I do believe, however, that we can say that whatever else religions might be or do, they all affirm certain beliefs. Among these beliefs we find assertions about what exists or does not exist, value judgements, and also practical instructions... religions, at least the traditional ones, claim – each in its own way – to mediate a salvific knowledge or revelation of a transcendent reality. (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p.18)

Hedges (2010, p.77) similarly points to the importance of the transcendent as a dimension of religion, defined as aspects that ‘claim that the meaning or fulfilment of human life goes beyond the limits of the ordinary bounds of physical or phenomenal existence’. He proposes six factors, namely a belief in a spiritual power or being(s); an interest in the afterlife; guiding societal and/or ethical norms; a transformative effect; methods or procedures for prayer or meditation; and an explanation for the human and natural situation. Any belief system that evidences over half of these factors, he suggests, could be described as a religion.

While the definitions by Schmidt-Leukel and Hedges affirm commonality between religions, a different perspective is offered by Lindbeck (1984). He sets aside the more common concerns of his field with religious beliefs, experiences and practices, and reference to the transcendent or divine, and draws on anthropological and sociological concepts for the following definition:

A religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought...It is not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and the good (though it may involve these), or a symbolism expressive of basic attitudes, feelings, or sentiments (though these will be generated). Rather, it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings and sentiments. Like a culture or a language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities. (Lindbeck, 1984, p.33)

Lindbeck’s definition emphasises the differences between the religions, the particularities of each, and their potential incommensurability, reflecting a postmodern and postliberal approach (see 3.3.).

For an interdisciplinary study definitions from different fields are potentially relevant. For the purpose of this study, and whilst acknowledging the contested nature of the concept, I will use the term ‘religions’ as a label describing social groups who subscribe to world views or belief systems based on revelation of a transcendent reality or mediation of salvific knowledge, following Schmidt-Leukel’s description above, and in addition assume that identification with or membership of a particular religion has implications for individual purpose and values, personal and social morality, and is expressed through individual and communal practice. The subgroups or individuals associated with a particular religion will share at least some of the factors identified by Nye (2003), namely major texts (sacred

books), foundational ideas, 'beliefs' and worldviews, particular histories and leaders, or a sense of having a distinct identity.

At the same time, I recognise that the belief systems commonly described as religions respectively include a wide variety of sub-groups and individuals differing in their specific beliefs, religious practices and cultural contexts; indeed, each of the major religions will contain within it groups and individuals with mutually exclusive beliefs and practices. Any statement about a religion is therefore unlikely to be correct about all the sub-groups and individuals associated with it. I particularly acknowledge Fletcher's warning:

Despite their best efforts to maintain the lived complexity of religious diversity, theologians rely on conceptual categories that distinguish 'the religions' from one another. In doing so, they erase the diversity and complexity of the living persons who are actually engaged in the encounter. (Fletcher, 2005, p.79)

I also acknowledge that different religious traditions and non-religious world-views continually develop in a mutual exchange of ideas and practices, and that boundaries between them are fluid, and frequently contested (King & Hedges, 2014).

### **2.2.2. Faith**

Like the term 'religion', 'faith' also has various meanings depending on the context. Webster (1993, p.208) offers 'a very generalized definition of faith as human response to the presence and activity of the transcendent' and warns that the term defies simple definition as it is inherently polyvalent and always in need of contextualisation.

The entry for 'faith' in *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions* (Goring (ed.), 1992, p.170) includes references to a 'dispositional attitude', 'placing of one's trust wholly in God' and 'trusting in God for salvation'. Listing Augustinian, Lutheran, Catholic and Buddhist interpretations it concludes: 'Faith, variously defined as belief, trust, devotion and dependence is a universal feature of humankind's response to the presence of the divine in the midst of life'.

The meaning of the term 'faith' as a human response to the divine or transcendent is also reflected in a definition offered by Cantwell Smith (1980):

Faith is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing the world and of handling it; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension. (Cantwell Smith, 1980, p.113f)

All these descriptions refer to an individual, personal dimension of faith. However, the term 'faith' is also used in a very different way, namely as a synonym for the term 'religion' (Smith,

1998). In contemporary usage 'world religions' are sometimes described as 'world faiths', and 'interreligious dialogue' as 'interfaith dialogue'. This is particularly the case in a British context, where government documents and the media commonly refer to 'faith communities' to describe groups of people identifying with a particular religious worldview or group.

Accordingly, the Church of England in its documents relating to other religions uses the term 'Faiths', with a capitalized initial. The report *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005) offers the following definitions:

#### Religion

Refers to a set of beliefs and practices organised formally or informally and distinguished from other Religions in various ways. Christianity, Judaism and Islam for example have been content to know themselves as 'Religions'; Hinduism generally also, Buddhism less so. Increasingly 'Religion' has given way to 'Faith' as a less institutionally referenced word. Faith also increasingly encompasses sets of belief and practice which would not normally refer to themselves as religions, for example, Paganism.

#### Faith or Faith community (upper case)

The term used in the public sector and increasingly more widely to refer to a religion or to an activity characterised by religion, for example 'Faith Schools' for Aided schools, Faith Forum for a gathering of individuals representing different religious perspectives. The word tends to ignore differences within religions and tends to equate religions of widely differing sizes, histories and theisms. (CofE, 2005, p.89)

It then distinguishes 'Faith' from 'faith', which is defined as 'an attitude, quality or motivation amongst people who put their trust in God, however defined' (p.89). In spite of the slightly critical description of the term Faith, official CofE documents and publications mostly speak about other Faiths, rather than other religions (see Chapter 4). It should also be noted that this usage of the capitalised term Faith in CofE documents is quite different to that of the Roman Catholic Church, where 'the Faith' refers to the body of belief that constitutes Catholic theological orthodoxy (Goring (ed.), 1992, p.170)

During the writing of this thesis the question of whether to use the term 'religion', 'faith' or 'Faith' was long unresolved and I changed my terminology several times: I started out by using the term 'religion' as I approached the thesis from a theology of religions perspective. During interviews with ministers, although I used the term 'religion' in my questions, interviewees mostly used the term 'faith' in their responses. I therefore considered, due in part to my chosen research approach and methodology, to use the terminology of my interviewees and, for a time, used the capitalised term 'Faith', following the convention of

some CofE documents. However, in the writing-up stage of the thesis I decided to use the term 'religion', as the thesis is written as an academic document, for an academic audience, and 'religion' is the more widely-used term in the academic literature of this field.

### **2.2.3. Belief**

Unlike 'religion' and 'faith', the term 'belief' is initially part of everyday language, without specifically religious or theological associations. A belief is something that is held to be true but without proof, and sometimes implies a lack of assurance – to state that one believes something can suggest less certainty than to state that one knows it. A belief in someone or something expresses trust or confidence in them.

Beyond the use of the term in ordinary discourse, and as has been described previously for the term 'religion', various other perspectives – philosophical, anthropological, sociological, psychological and theological – all have contributed more specialised understandings that reflect the concerns of the respective disciplines. In most of these, religious beliefs are commonly treated as an important subset of beliefs in general; however, if religion is categorised as a distinct phenomenon (lat. *sui generis* – of its own kind) separate from other categories such as culture, religious beliefs are also treated as a category distinct from general beliefs. Many scholars in the fields of theology and religious studies traditionally have taken this *sui generis* approach to religious beliefs, although others have challenged it (McCutcheon, 1997).

Lopez (1998, p.22) observes: 'In the philosophical and religious European traditions, belief has rarely been discussed alone but is most often paired with another term to which it stands in a relationship of weakness or strength', giving examples such as knowledge and belief, belief and doubt, belief and faith. To these could be added others, such as belief and ritual, belief and practice, or belief and doctrine. Belief, then, however conceived and defined, or contested, remains a central concept in the wider humanities.

Morgan (2010) notes that the academic study of religion in the modern West has been shaped by the notion that a religion is defined by its followers' beliefs. However, drawing on the work of Needham (1972), Ruel (1982, 1997) and Asad (1993) he shows that this understanding has become increasingly contested as originating predominantly from a Protestant Christian perspective and often inapplicable or misleading in relation to non-Christian religious traditions. Both the importance of belief in a Christian context and its limitations outside were also acknowledged by Cantwell Smith (1962):

The peculiarity of the place given to belief in Christian history is a monumental matter, whose importance and relative uniqueness must be appreciated. So characteristic has it been that unsuspecting Westerners have...been liable to ask about a religious group other than their own as well, 'What do they believe?' as though this were the primary question, and certainly were a legitimate one. (Cantwell Smith, 1962, p.180)

Despite these reservations, a substantial body of literature relating to religious belief testifies to the continuing usefulness of the concept, at least in a Christian or post-Christian cultural setting. Lopez (1998) notes:

Belief appears as a universal category because of the universalist claims of the tradition in which it has become most central, Christianity. Other religions have made universalist claims, but Christianity was allied with political power, which made it possible to transport its belief to all corners of the globe (if not the universe), making belief the measure of what religion is understood to be. (Lopez, 1998, p.33)

It could be argued that the importance of beliefs is not only central to Christianity but also to other Western non-religious worldviews informed by Enlightenment values. Beliefs, what is held to be true, are the relevant criteria to identify, for example, as humanist or atheist.

Maclaren (1976, p.2) points out that Christian belief can refer to two different things, either the content of a statement, or the 'attitude, disposition, mental state involved in holding the belief'. This parallels the difference between 'belief that' and 'belief in' in everyday language. The first of these two meanings, the content of belief, relates to Christian theological statements about God, for example God's existence, the creation, the incarnation, the resurrection and the Trinity. The second of the two meanings, the holding of the belief, relates to a person's belief in God, or rather for Christians, belief in Christ, and becomes in effect the equivalent of 'faith'.

In the context of this study it is also of interest to note the definition of belief included in the CofE report *Presence and Engagement* (2005):

In the usual religious sense, a set of understandings or hypotheses considered to be coherent which describe a person's framework of reference in relation to God. However in public policy terms it is increasingly being used to differentiate a non theistic (for example humanist) set of beliefs from a theistic set which are referred to as 'religion' or 'faith'. Thus in the context of legislation on religious discrimination, a 'religion and beliefs' strand makes this distinction. (CofE, 2005, p.89)

Religious belief is here defined relating to content, as 'belief that', rather than as a personal attitude. The reference to the use of 'belief' in public policy as differentiating non-religious from religious worldviews is interesting, considering that belief traditionally has been



perceived as a Christian construct. It supports my suggestion regarding the importance of beliefs in both religious and non-religious Western worldviews.

This definition also highlights the individualisation of religious belief in the current cultural context, at least in Christian and post-Christian cultures. Religious beliefs are the framework of reference of a person, not of a church, or denomination, or community. Okholm and Phillips (1996), with a certain degree of exasperation, write:

Simply put, the spectre of historicism has corralled religious claims into the private sphere, isolated from political and social discourse...Religious beliefs amount to little more than matters of personal taste, on a par with one's preference for ice cream or movies. (Okholm & Phillips, 1996, p.9)

In this study I use the term 'belief' to refer to the content of what is believed, both in a general sense and in a religious sense. What do ministers hold to be true regarding their own and other religions and those who are part of them, and regarding aspects of Christian theology relating to other religions? I explore ministers' beliefs about religions as a subset of their beliefs in general and in connection with their religious beliefs. I understand these beliefs as socially constructed, as will be explored in the chapter on research design and methodology (Chapter 5). The focus on the content of beliefs does not imply that I consider ministers' belief in God, as personal faith, irrelevant; however, it is not the focus of this study.

While people's beliefs are held internally and therefore not directly accessible to others, and sometimes even not fully to themselves, stated beliefs are generally valid indications of actual beliefs. It could be argued that beliefs are made evident by actions rather than words. It is possible, even likely, that people give only a partial or distorted version of their actual beliefs and occasionally intentionally lie when they speak about their beliefs; however, people's actions may not be an expression of their true beliefs either, due to circumstances beyond their control and other contextual factors. While individuals' statements need to be critically examined and evaluated, even problematized, my underlying assumption is that what people say they hold to be true generally is a good indication of what they actually do hold to be true, and an equally valid indication of their beliefs as their observed actions. It is, in any case, the data available to me as a researcher from interviews, which is my chosen method of data collection. A different research approach and methodology would contribute different but also partial and flawed data. Therefore, in spite of the limitations acknowledged, I consider the beliefs expressed by participants during interviews as valid data that contributes to a fuller understanding of the questions investigated in this study.

The terms 'religion', 'faith' and 'belief' have been discussed and their use in this study clarified because they are important concepts in the field of theology most relevant to this study, namely the theology of religions.

#### **2.2.4. Theology of religions**

A theology of religions in its widest sense describes engagement from a religious perspective with the reality of religious plurality, that is, the existence of different religions in the world. It has been suggested that it is in fact a 'theology of religious pluralism' (Dupuis, 1997; 2002); however, this term has not become widely established. Schmidt-Leukel (2008) proposes a definition that reflects this broad understanding of the field:

'Theology of religions', in this wider sense, deals with the self-understanding of one's own religion in relation to other religions, and with the understanding of these other religions in relation to the self-understanding of one's own. Therefore it is rooted, on the one hand, in the beliefs and doctrines of one's own tradition and, on the other hand, is based on the concrete knowledge of and acquaintance with other religions. (Schmidt-Leukel, 2008, p.85)

In keeping with the different meanings of the term 'religion' described above (2.2.1.), the theology of religions (plural) is focused on the implications of the existence of different religious traditions, while the theology of religion (singular) addresses the phenomenon of religion as a universal human experience, from a Christian perspective (Kärkkäinen, 2003); both are closely linked and mutually inform each other.

Cantwell Smith (1963, p.132) sets out the purpose of a theology of religions as 'how does one account, theologically, for the fact of man's religious diversity?'; he then moves on to a much narrower description and suggests: 'Another way of viewing it is to phrase a question as to whether or how far or how non-Christians are saved, or know God'. This narrower characterisation makes it evident that a theology of religions is always rooted in a specific religious tradition and its particular concerns, and this is also implicitly acknowledged in Schmidt-Leukel's (2008) reference to the 'beliefs and doctrines of one's own tradition' mentioned above. However, his stated requirement of 'concrete knowledge of and acquaintance with other religions' for a theology of religions is debatable: Karl Barth, for example, developed an extensive theology of religions without much knowledge about or engagement with other religions (Pinnock, 1996a).

This study is concerned with the religious tradition relevant to CofE ministers, and therefore the Christian theology of religions. Hedges (2010) defines this as follows:

At its most basic level, it involves constructing an interpretation of how Christianity relates to other religions, what the nature of these other religions is, and what may happen to followers of other religions soteriologically (to do with salvation). This may involve an exploration of other religions, or it may happen from what are seen as internal Christian tenets. (Hedges, 2010, p.16)

Hedges's definition, unlike Schmidt-Leukel's, does not necessarily require knowledge or personal experience of other religions, as it is possible, although perhaps not desirable, to arrive at a conclusively argued position through a theoretical theological approach. Cantwell Smith's and Hedges's definitions both point to the soteriological dimension of a Christian theology of religions. In most theological frameworks in this field the question of salvation is an important factor in differentiating between different approaches (see Chapter 3).

The Christian theology of religions is deeply rooted in theological, philosophical and biblical reflections on the nature of God. Strange (2008) points out:

Because of the organic, systemic, connectedness of Christian doctrine, a truly accurate description of any example of 'exclusivism' is formed and fashioned within a particular tradition-specific framework recognizing that the theology of religions is a parasitic discipline dependent on other *a priori* theological commitments. (Strange, 2008, p.37)

Although Strange discusses one particular approach, namely exclusivism, his point equally applies to other approaches. His description of the theology of religions as a parasitic discipline is perhaps unnecessarily negative: another biological term, namely symbiotic, may give a better description of the way in which it is informed by and in turn informs other theological disciplines, such as soteriology, ecclesiology, missiology and doctrines of the nature of God, of creation and of sin.

The theology of religions has developed as a discrete field since the 1980s, although its beginnings can be traced back much earlier, to the middle of the 19th century, for example in work by Frederick Maurice, Rowland Williams, and Friedrich Max Müller (Hedges, 2001). Particularly influential were the writings of several Protestant thinkers from the beginning of the 20th century, such as John Farquhar, Ernst Troeltsch, William Hocking and Hendrik Kraemer (Kärkkäinen, 2003). None of these important contributors to the field is generally described as a 'theologian of religions', which underlines that the central questions of the theology of religions were asked in several other fields. Race (1983) suggests that the theology of religions developed from philosophical and theological engagement with historical studies or comparative religion. Many of the writers mentioned above had extensive personal experience of other religions that inspired a response through their academic work.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council from 1962-65 led to the publication of several influential documents relating to this field, particularly *Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)* (Pope Paul VI, 1965). The work of Vatican II involved and inspired numerous Catholic theologians, for example Jean Daniélou, Raimon (Raymond) Panikkar and Karl Rahner (Kärkkäinen, 2003).

The theology of religions continues to flourish, with scholars from different Christian traditions contributing; many currently working in the field also engage beyond its boundaries, in related academic fields or interreligious dialogue, or both. An academic field that has become of particular interest in this regard is that of interreligious studies.

### **2.2.5. Interreligious studies**

The academic field of interreligious studies has developed comparatively recently, mainly since the late 1990s (Leirvik, 2014). The European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies (ESITIS) was established in 2005, the online *Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* has been published since 2009.

Leirvik (2014) places the field between conventional religious studies and confessional theology and offers a description with a particular emphasis on the relational aspect:

...the *object* of study is interreligious relations in the broadest sense, including – I would suggest – the relations between religion and non-religion. Rather than researching one particular tradition, interreligious studies investigates the dynamic encounter between religious (and non-religious) traditions and the space that opens or closes between them. (Leirvik, 2014, p.10, italics in original)

Leirvik suggests that the relational aspect with regard to the researcher lies in the interdisciplinary nature of the field, drawing on ‘a combination of cultural, analytical, legal, social science-, religious studies- and theological approaches’ (p.10). He also argues that in order to be meaningful, interreligious studies require dialogue between different traditions, adding a third relational dimension.

A focus on relationality and interdisciplinarity as essential aspects of interreligious studies is also evident in a definition offered by Hedges (2013):

Interreligious Studies...is about studying the dynamic encounter and interaction between [religions]. This may involve hermeneutics, dialogue, historical encounters, or other areas; moreover there is normally an interest in the meaningful growth, enrichment, and benefit gained in this. ... It may, therefore, be seen, in some ways, as an interface between a more traditionally secular Religious Studies discipline, and a more traditionally confessional theological discipline. It is certainly a multidisciplinary enterprise employing historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, philosophical, and other tools. (Hedges, 2013, p.1077)

In recent years, new departments, courses and professorships of interreligious studies have been instituted at universities in several countries including Great Britain, the Netherlands and the United States. During the next decade, interreligious studies may increasingly supersede the theology of religions, with its narrower focus, as both its object of study and interdisciplinary modus are more closely aligned with general trends in academia. In addition, scholars of interreligious studies frequently engage with contemporary social issues of mutual concern to people of different religious and non-religious worldviews, such as social cohesion, peace building and environmental concerns (Hedges & King, 2014), which are politically, economically and socially desirable and therefore more likely to attract funding. However, interreligious engagement and dialogue is neither new nor exclusive to interreligious studies; most theologians of religions have been actively involved in this area, at least to some extent.

The subject of this study, namely the beliefs that inform CofE ministers' encounters with those of other religions, and the events, factors and frameworks that in turn inform these beliefs, as well as its interdisciplinary approach, place it into the field of interreligious studies. However, this study is focused on the perspective of one particular religious group and does not meet Leirvik's (2014) requirement of dialogical engagement with other traditions. It is, however, informed by an 'interest in the meaningful growth, enrichment, and benefit' of encounters between religious others (Hedges, 2013, p.1077). Overall, I consider that this study makes a contribution to interreligious studies, as well as other related fields, including interreligious engagement.

#### **2.2.6. Interreligious (interfaith) dialogue or engagement**

The phrase 'interreligious dialogue' or 'interreligious engagement' encompasses a wide field:

The dialogue between religions has taken various forms, from meetings between religious leaders in a common display of solidarity and friendship to collaboration between members of different religions in grassroots projects, and from intense discussion and debate between religious scholars to interreligious prayer and spiritual exchange. (Cornille, 2008, p.1)

Cornille's examples illustrate different types of dialogue identified in an influential framework proposed by Sharpe (1974), who distinguished four different types of dialogue, respectively named Discursive, Human, Secular and Interior Dialogue, noting that in any encounter any or all of these may be involved simultaneously. Discursive Dialogue involves 'meeting, listening and discussion on the level of mutual competent intellectual inquiry' (p.82); Human Dialogue refers to the personal encounter between individuals, 'man is meeting man' (p. 83); Secular

Dialogue is focused on 'social and political action for the amelioration of man's lot on earth' (p.85); while Interior Dialogue refers to a sharing of the mystical or contemplative aspects of the traditions.

Race (2008) notes that Sharpe's framework continues to provide the parameters for describing interreligious dialogue, and points to the similarities in the framework set out in the Vatican document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991):

- a) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.
- b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
- c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.
- d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute. (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991, Section 42, italics in original)

Interreligious dialogue or engagement thus encompasses a wide-ranging field; its lowest common denominator could be described as the intentional involvement of at least two people from different religions in a constructive joint activity.

In contemporary use the term 'dialogue' has perhaps lost some of its broader application as set out by Sharpe and is used in a more narrow sense for what he describes as 'discursive dialogue', and the Vatican documents as 'dialogue of theological exchange', while 'engagement' is used for other types of dialogue which are less focused on verbal exchanges. Sometimes the terms 'interreligious relations' or 'interreligious encounter' are also used as alternatives. However, the use of all four terms in the literature largely seems to be a matter of personal preference.

Similarly, the terms 'interfaith' and 'interreligious' are generally used interchangeably, at times even within one article (e.g. Race, 2008; Leirvik, 2014) or by one organisation (e.g. World Council of Churches, 1986, 2002). Sometimes a preference by UK authors for the former and by US authors for the latter is observable, and a tendency by practitioners to use 'interfaith', while academics prefer to use 'interreligious'; however, there are many exceptions either way.

In line with my use of 'religions' in preference to 'faiths', I predominantly use the term 'interreligious engagement' to describe activities and encounters involving individuals from different religions; however, depending on the context other terms are also used.

Hedges (2010) argues that the field of interreligious engagement and the field of theology of religions are inseparable, two sides of a coin:

The two should be seen as intimately interrelated, the theology of religions is the *theoria* that informs the *praxis* of interreligious dialogue, while interreligious dialogue is the *praxis* that informs the *theoria* of the theology of religions. While they can be practised alone, one without the other is to some extent meaningless, even impossible. (Hedges, 2010, p.13)

Yet while the link between the two fields may be considered desirable, and an involvement in both is perhaps a prerequisite for contemporary academic theologians of religions, the link does not always exist for others involved in either field: for example, some of the ministers interviewed for this study had no involvement in interreligious engagement but nevertheless expressed clear positions on their theology of religions. Conversely, it seems likely that not all participants in interreligious grassroots projects have much interest in the theology of religions. Whether this 'missing link' makes their respective theology or engagement meaningless is debatable, it certainly does not make them impossible.

Ministers' actual interreligious engagement was not a specific focus of this study; however, it was explored as a relevant aspect of the development of their beliefs about other religions during interviews. As a result, interviewees discussed their engagement and experiences in this field, which varied widely: some considered interreligious dialogue critical in the formation of their beliefs about other religions while others declared an absence of any experience in this area (see Chapter 9).

## **2.3. Importance and relevance of theology of religions**

### **2.3.1. Socio-political considerations**

An initial consideration in the field of Christian theologies of religions is to present a justification for the importance and relevance of this field, to give reasons why this area of theology deserves attention. These reasons include socio-political as well as theological considerations.

Globalisation has resulted in people of different religions encountering each other on their travels, trading and working with each other, living in the same cities and neighbourhoods and using the same public spaces, services and institutions. Many share their lives yet more

closely with someone of another religion: they may be colleagues working in the same office, play on the same sports team, be house- or even roommates, become friends, partners, spouses, have children together and become part of each other's families. This development has particularly affected countries in Europe and North America, which are preferred destinations for immigrants and refugees from other parts of the world. Most major cities in the Western world in the past few decades have become multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious communities. Religious buildings of a range of traditions can be found even in smaller towns; public buildings such as hospitals, airports and universities have multi-religious prayer rooms, or offer separate facilities for members of different religions. In the UK, as in many other Western countries, children learn about a range of religious traditions as soon as they enter primary education, and are frequently more familiar with their various festivals, stories and rituals than their parents' generation.

A globalised media, distributed via the worldwide web, makes accessible information about news and events from any part of the world. The religious texts of all the world religions and many smaller ones besides are easily available, alongside commentaries about these texts and a wide range of other books about different religions, from academic texts to popular introductory books.

All these factors have led to a greater awareness of and knowledge about other religions, not just amongst scholars but amongst the general public. They have also resulted in a greater need for frameworks to understand, engage with and respond to cultural and religious diversity, and the challenges it presents to individuals and communities.

A crucial reason for the importance of theologies of religion can be found in the role religions are seen to play in social and political conflicts. Knitter (2002, p.7) notes that for many people 'it is an axiom that religion leads to conflict, backwardness, superstition and hatred'. As a theology of religions expresses a particular perspective on other religions, it is seen to influence the way followers of a religion relate to those of other religions, or none (Fletcher, 2005).

Knitter's (2005a, p.ix) claim that 'we agreed that there is a causal link between claims of religious superiority and calls to religious violence' needs to be treated with some caution; there is certainly no necessary causal link. However, in the light of a long history of religiously inspired violence, including numerous recent examples both in the UK and abroad, a connection seems plausible, and is certainly made by many critics of the religions. Arguably, religious extremism and violence are far more frequently reported in the media than the



religions' contributions to peace-making, community cohesion and educational, social and medical provision, resulting in a somewhat distorted picture. The old adage 'no news is good news' also seems to hold in reverse: 'good news is no news'. Nevertheless, it is all too evident that at least some types of theology of religions can inspire undesirable, even destructive behaviours, with potentially deadly consequences. This link between the theology of religions and its practical outworking in the lives of its adherents, for good or evil, makes it socially, culturally, economically and politically significant. In addition, for those who belong to a religious tradition, in this case Christianity, the theology of religions is theologically significant in the intra- and interreligious sphere.

### **2.3.2. Theological considerations**

Religion and the religions are an essential and fundamental aspect of human life and as such demand to be addressed and accounted for from a theological perspective. As Christian theology affirms God as creator of the world, the existence of different religions calls for a theological explanation. While existence is not necessarily proof of divine intention, as demonstrated by the existence of evil in the world, an account of the origins, the nature and the functions of religions, namely a theology of religions, is nevertheless desirable.

Cantwell Smith (1963) set out a claim for the necessity of a theology of religions for Christian apologetics in general, declaring:

I would simply like to suggest that from now on any serious intellectual statement of the Christian faith must include, if it is to serve its purposes among men, some doctrine of other religious ways. (Cantwell Smith, 1963, p.133)

Christian theology, he argues, is deficient, even unfit for purpose, if it is formulated without reference to the wider religious context. Building on Cantwell Smith's well-known statement, Race (1983) maintains that a coherent theology of religions is not just required for apologetic purposes but is indeed essential for Christian self-understanding:

Implicitly, the Christian theology of religions realizes that Christian theology cannot develop much further in the latter part of the twentieth century without giving conscious recognition to the fact that other communities of living faith, vastly different from the Christian, now exist alongside it. Ultimately, therefore, the encounter between Christianity and the other faiths is essential for Christian self-understanding. (Race, 1983, p.x [sic])

Race draws attention to the context of the late 20th century, yet Christianity has always existed in a multi-religious environment (2.1.); and this is equally the case for other religions, as Singh (2005, p.62) points out: 'Religious pluralism as a fact of human existence is as old as

the history of humankind; the founders of almost all the major world religions were born and lived in pluralistic situations’.

While there were periods in history when many European Christians might not have personally encountered people from other religions, Newbigin (1989) argues that the context of Western Christianity has nevertheless long been pluralist in a wider sense, through engagement with mystical traditions predating Christianity and with rationalist thought based on classical Greek and Roman philosophies. Indeed, it could be argued that even today it is non-religious rather than other religious worldviews that pose the main challenge to a Christian worldview in Western cultures, and several ministers interviewed for this study expressed this view. In spite of this caveat, Race’s argument about the importance of the theology of religions for Christian self-understanding nevertheless can be accepted in the context of ever-increasing globalisation and its implications (2.3.1.).

Beyond the intrareligious theological context, the theology of religions can be considered equally important in an interreligious context, in actual engagement with the religious other, through evangelism, mission or interreligious engagement.

The symbiotic relationship of the theology of religions with other theological disciplines has already been mentioned (2.2.4.) and a number of writers observe that a theology of religions is central to a theology of mission and indeed to the strategic and tactical approach to mission (Thomas, 1969; Cragg, 1977, 1986; Braybrooke, 1983; Strange, 2002).

Likewise, Christian churches and individuals are increasingly required to respond to missionary efforts directed at them by followers of other religions. Race (2008, p.5) notes that other religions offer either competing or comparable pathways of transformation and argues that it is ‘the salvific or transformative potential in other religious ways which compels Christians to be interested in religious others, and therefore in the need for a theology of religions’. Schmidt-Leukel (2008) even asserts a duty for theologians of religions to actively respond to the claims of other religions:

If through interfaith encounter religions become fully aware of their respective claims, they have the moral and intellectual obligation to reply to each other’s claims and consider whether these might be true or not. This is the central task of any theology of religion. The price of refraining from this challenge is simply to deafen one’s ears and harden one’s heart against the witness of one’s neighbour. (Schmidt-Leukel, 2008, p.86)

While many of Schmidt-Leukel’s fellow theologians of religions seem to agree with the necessity of a reply to their religious neighbours’ claims, for some this reply is a partial disagreement with, or even a total repudiation of these claims. Race’s assertion of the salvific

or transformative potential of other religions is also not accepted by all his colleagues (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, the importance of the theology of religions in engagement with the theology of other religions is indisputable.

The theology of religions informs interreligious dialogue and, more generally and perhaps indirectly, any engagement of Christian individuals and groups with those from other religions, for example in joint social or community projects, or regarding practical issues such as the use of church facilities by members of other religions. A theology of religions articulates the values and beliefs that underlie interreligious engagement in all its forms.

There is therefore a strong case for the importance of the Christian theology of religions: for the self-understanding of individual Christians, the churches and the Christian tradition in general, for interreligious engagement and for its significance for wider society. In the next chapter I will consider and discuss different theological approaches to other religions.

### 3. Approaches in Christian theology of religions

#### 3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I have discussed some of the terminology used in the field of theology of religions, and placed it into its wider context. The purpose of this chapter is to identify central questions, concepts and discussions in the field. Specifically, it introduces the predominant framework in the theology of religions, namely Alan Race's threefold typology proposed in 1983, considers developments and critiques of his framework and examines different theological approaches based on it.

The different theological approaches in academic theology of religions will provide the framework for evaluating official CofE theological documents relating to other religions in the next chapter, and then, in the third part of the thesis, theological statements about other religions made by the CofE ministers interviewed as part of the study. As will be seen, many of the same questions and arguments formulated in the theology of religions in a systematic way are also addressed and articulated by ministers throughout the interviews, although frequently in a more unsystematic or incomplete way, and without necessarily using the terminology of the field (see Chapter 10). While the theological approaches discussed in this chapter are most obviously relevant to my third research question relating specifically to frameworks, they nevertheless can be taken to underlie and inform ministers' engagement with other religions in general. The theological beliefs about other religions held by individual ministers influence how they perceive and interpret their experiences, as much as these experiences in turn form and affect the theological beliefs they hold (see Chapters 8 and 9).

The discourse of the theology of religions draws on that of related theological fields as well as the philosophy of religion, and is not clearly demarcated. Nevertheless a strong central discourse has developed around a framework first set out by Race in his influential work *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (1983). Schmidt-Leukel (2005, p.13) notes that 'over the years, these terms have become pretty much a standard part of the professional discourse' and Hedges (2008) points out that even its critics employ it, albeit with reservations or variations. A variation of Race's framework proposed by Schmidt-Leukel (2005) and alternative frameworks proposed by Thomas (1969), Knitter (2002) and Kärkkäinen (2003) are discussed in Appendix B.

### **3.2. Alan Race's threefold typology**

Race's original framework employs three basic categories, named exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, to describe different approaches in Christian theology of religions. Similar terminology – exclusion, inclusion and pluralism - had previously been used by Bishop (1969) to describe attitudes to other religions, although with a different focus, namely on the future destiny of the religions in relation to Christianity. In Bishop's model, exclusivists were those who expected that their own religion would eventually replace or assimilate all other religions; inclusivists expected the emergence of a not yet existing universal religion, which would replace all other religions including their own; pluralists expected the continuation of different religions, without either assuming the superiority of their own tradition nor an underlying unity between the religion, although hopefully with improved relations between them (Braybrooke, 1992).

The critical factor in assigning different approaches to a category in Race's framework is the characterisation of the person of Christ, in particular with reference to the doctrine of the incarnation, namely 'that God was personally and uniquely present in Jesus of Nazareth in a sense which cannot be said to be true of any other human being, or founder of a religion' (Race, 1983, p.113). This, he argues, is 'generally thought to be the distinctive mark of Christianity and the touchstone of its 'doctrine of other religions'' (p.7). Underlying these different approaches are different understandings of the nature of Scripture and of revelation. Race does not explicitly identify his own pluralist position at the outset; however, in his discussions of the different approaches it is evident where his sympathies lie, and towards the end of his book he concedes that he considers pluralism 'the most positive Christian response to the encounter between Christianity and the world faiths' (p.135).

Race defines exclusivism as counting 'the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions, including Christianity, can be understood and evaluated' (p.11). It is notable that in his discussion of exclusivist positions, using as examples the work of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Hendrik Kraemer, the question of salvation does not arise. Instead, the focus is on the distinction between, on one hand, the unique self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and, on the other hand, all religions, described as human attempts to know God apart from God's self-revelation, including at least some forms of Christianity. Race here does not actually formulate a definition of exclusivism in terms of Christianity being the only religion leading to salvation.

The next category, inclusivism, retains the claim of the uniqueness of Christ as the self-revelation of God, but holds it in tension with the equally compelling claim of God's grace operating in other religions. Race describes inclusivist approaches in Christian theology of religion as:

...both an acceptance and a rejection of the other faiths, a dialectical 'yes' and 'no'. On the one hand it [inclusivism] accepts the spiritual power and depth manifest in them, so that they can properly be called a locus of divine presence. On the other hand, it rejects them as not being sufficient for salvation apart from Christ, for Christ alone is saviour. To be inclusive is to believe that all non-Christian religious truth belongs ultimately to Christ and the way of discipleship which springs from him. (Race, 1983, p.38)

Here the issue of salvation arises, yet it is not the critical criterion in identifying a position as inclusive; instead the twin issues of divine presence and religious truth in the religions are central. Race also points out that, in parallel with exclusivists such as Barth, many inclusivist theologians consider that salvation for those of other religions is through the person of Christ, not through Christianity or the Christian church, and that universal salvation is a possibility.

Emphasising how widely different inclusivist approaches vary, Race discusses writings by Catholic theologians Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, Raimon (Raymond) Panikkar and Hans Küng – the latter two later moved to pluralist positions (Panikkar, 1987; Küng, 1987) - and Protestants John Farquhar and John Robinson. He points to commonalities in their positions, noting that 'inclusivism proceeds on the basis of commitment to two equally binding convictions: the universal will of God to save, and the uniqueness of the revelation in Christ' (p.54). Other common themes in inclusivist theologies of religions he identifies are the notion of 'fulfilment', and the attempt to establish some empirical connections between Christianity and other religions.

Race defines his third category, pluralism, as follows:

It is the belief that there is not one, but a number of spheres of saving contact between God and man. God's revealing and redeeming activity has elicited response in a number of culturally conditioned ways throughout history. Each response is partial, incomplete, unique; but they are related to each other in that they represent different culturally focussed perceptions of the one ultimate divine reality. (Race, 1983, p.77)

Race posits pluralism as a necessary response to the requirements of historical consciousness and the moral and theological requirement for tolerance and dialogue. He considers the main difficulty pluralist theologies have to address to be the charge of relativism, namely that 'if all faiths are equally true, then all faiths are equally false' (p.78). He then discusses approaches

proposed by Paul Tillich, John Hick, John E. Cobb and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, also referring back to early contributors from related fields including Ernst Troeltsch, W.E. Hocking and Arnold Toynbee.

While Race touches on the question of the salvific potential of other religions, it is not the central criterion in his original framework. The focus is instead on the different understandings of the uniqueness of Christ with regard to the self-revelation of God in history; the issue of salvation follows on from this primary consideration of the incarnation.

Since the publication of Race's original threefold typology in 1983, his model has been widely used and developed, but also much critiqued. This will be discussed further in the next sections.

### **3.3. A fourth category: particularities or particularism**

One important development has been the emergence of a fourth category, namely particularism or particularities, as a distinctive additional category. In a book co-edited by Race, *Christian Approaches to other Faiths* (Race & Hedges, 2008), the threefold typology has been extended by a fourth category, even though Race himself apparently had some reservations about particularism as a separate category and considered particularist approaches postmodern variations of exclusivism or inclusivism (Hedges, 2010).

Nevertheless, in *Christian Approaches to other Faiths* Hedges, Race's co-editor, suggests the following defining attributes of particularist approaches:

(1) each faith is unique, alterity [difference, otherness] is stressed over similarity, as seemingly common elements in religious experience or doctrine are regarded as superficial; (2) it is only possible to speak from a specific tradition, there can be no pluralistic interpretation; (3) the Holy Spirit may be at work in other faiths, requiring them to be regarded with respect and dignity; (4) no salvific potency resides in other faiths, though they are somehow involved in God's plans for humanity but in ways we cannot know; (5) particularity is based in a post-modern and postliberal worldview; (6) the orthodox doctrines of Trinity and Christ are grounding points from which to approach other faiths. (Hedges, 2008, p.112f)

Hedges (2010) acknowledges that there is a wide and varied range of theological positions with particularist aspects, some of which are contradictory. They can be found in the writings of a number of eminent theologians in the field, particularly from the mid-1980s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, beginning with George Lindbeck (1984) and including Joseph DiNoia (1992), S. Mark Heim (1995), Alister McGrath (1996), Rowan Williams (2000) and Gavin D'Costa (2000), although not all of these self-identified as particularists at the time, or at all, or have changed their position since.

The contributions of particularist scholars led some academics to suggest that the central controversy in the contemporary debate in the theology of religions is no longer between exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist positions, but between approaches 'seeking sameness or defending difference' (Fletcher, 2005, p.77). Fletcher argues that exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism all share an expectation of sameness among people. The reason for this is that as Christian frameworks each approach takes Jesus Christ as the norm for all human becoming and relatedness to God. This assumption of sameness, she argues, does not take account of social scientific data of actual religious practices, which indicate substantial difference, or particularity, of different religions, nor does it withstand the real-life encounter with religious others. An alternative that accounts for difference is offered by particularist approaches that compare different religions to cultural-linguistic systems, each with their own stories, categories and concepts. As a result, however, a real connection between and common basis of different religions is lost:

In adopting different paradigms, distinct communities know and experience reality in different ways. While a given community is bound together by the same story, the boundaries of story preclude understanding across difference, because persons are shaped so thoroughly by their particular story. This specificity and particularity of content makes the comprehensive frameworks of the religions incommensurable to one another. (Fletcher, 2005, p.74)

Hedges (2010, p.9ff) concurs with Fletcher in considering the fundamental issue in the contemporary debate to be this 'impasse' between similarity and difference. He points out that while the debate in the field of theology of religions historically, and particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, focused on exclusivism against 'more open approaches' to other religions, this is no longer the case. One reason for this is that all the major denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist churches, have adopted generally more inclusivist stances, and exclusivist stances have become 'a fringe belief'. Even evangelicals, traditionally supporting exclusivist approaches, have increasingly shifted towards inclusivist, particularist or pluralist stances. Hedges acknowledges that many 'ordinary' Christians, by which he presumably means people who are neither academics nor ordained, or at least theologically trained, are exclusivists, and attributes this to 'a misunderstanding or lack of awareness as to what their church teaches, combined with the fact that, for many, they have never really considered the issue' (p.11). This stance, he argues, will become increasingly unviable in a globalised world, where multi-religious communities become the norm.

Hedges makes a strong case for the inclusion of particularities as a fourth category in the typology; however, some of his suggestions as to why ordinary Christians remain exclusivists



could be queried. As most Christians now live and work in multi-religious environments, or at least regularly encounter other religious traditions in the media, it seems unlikely that they should never have considered the issue at all, although they may not have given it the same extensive thought as academics working in the field. At least some lay people may be well aware of the official statements of their churches or their representatives, but in fact disagree with them. While the focus of the academic field of theology of religions may well have moved to the discussion between pluralist and particularist viewpoints, this may not, or at least not yet, be the case in the wider church.

Particularist approaches to the theology of religions have been challenged (Hick, 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Pinnock, 1996b; Hedges, 2010, 2014) and some former exponents, for example D'Costa and McGrath, have moved away from their previous particularist positions (D'Costa, 2000, 2009; McGrath, 1996, 2011). Yet this approach remains an established perspective in the theology of religions, acknowledged in most recent discussions, and will therefore be considered below (3.5.2.) as one of the possible approaches in the field.

### **3.4. Critiques of Race's typology**

Race's original framework has been challenged on a number of counts. Some of the criticism results from a lack of clarity in the definitions of the different categories in his original proposal, leading to different understandings and uses of the terms thereafter. Schmidt-Leukel (2005) points out that as each of the category names is used with various meanings in fields other than the theology of religions, this often leads to confusion and misunderstanding. Exclusivism, he notes, does not represent more exclusive truth-claims than other approaches, as any proposition excludes the truth of its logical opposite, and is therefore exclusive. Instead, exclusivism in Race's framework refers to the exclusive, in the sense of unique, salvific potential of one religion in relation to other religions. Pluralism, on the other hand, does not simply describe the fact that a multitude of religions exist, or suggest a socio-political theory that encourages the accommodation of ideological, religious and cultural diversity. Instead, in the context of the theology of religions, pluralism refers to the belief that all religions offer equally valid paths to salvation, or at least a relinquishment of a claim to the superiority of one's own religion. In fairness to Race (1983), however, he fully acknowledged the difficulties of categorization and nomenclature when proposing his typology.

Schmidt-Leukel (2005) identifies several major objections to the typology, including an inconsistent structure, and the number and type of categories. He provides an extensive

response to these objections on the basis of his reinterpretation of the typology as a normative classification (Appendix B). However, as his use of the typology represents a significant departure from the one originally proposed by Race it has also been critiqued (Hedges, 2008). While some of the criticisms directed at Race's typology may not apply to Schmidt-Leukel's version, they may indeed apply to Race's original framework. One example is Markham's (1993) challenge that the original typology conflates three different questions, namely the conditions for salvation, whether the major world religions are all worshipping the same God, and the truth about the human situation. A similar critique is offered by Tilley (1999) who differentiates questions regarding salvation and truth. Considering the definitions of different approaches Race offers in his original typology (3.2.), their criticisms seems justified.

Hedges (2008, p.18ff) deals with what he considers the main criticisms of the typology under the following headings: (1) the typology misconstrues the diversity of religions, (2) more or less options exist, (3) the categories are incoherent, (4) it cannot cope with the varieties of positions that exist, and (5) the terms are polemical. The first of these addresses a central objection, namely that Race's typology has a misplaced focus on salvation. Although Hedges disagrees with the objection, he accepts the premise that Race's typology is focused on the subject of salvation. However, as pointed out in the account of Race's original typology (3.2.), in his original framework the criterion for categorization is not salvation but the understanding of the incarnation, that is, how the uniqueness of Christ with regard to the self-revelation of God in history is understood. The shift in focus to the implications of the incarnation for the eternal destiny of humankind occurs in later applications of the framework by others, such as for example by Kärkkäinen (2003), Schmidt-Leukel (2005) or Fletcher (2005). Here the distinguishing criterion for categorization is the salvific potential of religions, that is, whether salvation can be found through other religions.

One noteworthy and fundamental critique of Race's framework is from a feminist perspective: Ursula King (1998, p.46) suggests that the categories are not just 'too narrow, static and insufficiently differentiated to capture the organic, fluid and dynamic reality of religion at a personal and social level' – concurring with Hedges's fourth category of criticisms above – but that they are 'thoroughly androcentric'. This, however, may be a reflection of the 'marginalization, invisibility and exclusion of women' (p.42) in the wider field: 'Proof for this is found in every single book on interfaith dialogue, religious pluralism, the theology of religions, or the 'wider ecumenism' of global interreligious encounter' (p.42). Her critique of Race's framework is thus part of a wider critique of the field.

The comparative absence of women's representation in the theology of religions may, however, result from a historical dearth of contributions from female scholars: Kate McCarthy (2009, p.76) notes that 'to date, women have done very little writing on this subject'. Similarly, Jeannine Hill Fletcher (2008, p.136) acknowledges that although a number of notable female scholars such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Diana Eck have reflected theologically on other religions as part of their work, in the past 'few feminist theologians have constructed a systematic theology of religions'. While suggesting that a series of feminist responses have emerged more recently, pointing particularly to the work of Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki (2003) and Pamela Dickey Young (1995), she nevertheless concludes:

While having feminist concerns, the theology being offered is not necessarily substantially transformed and might be shared by non-feminist theologies of religions across the spectrum of pluralist theologies. (Fletcher, 2008, p.146)

Hedges (2010) also acknowledges the comparative scarcity of female voices in the mainstream of the field, but highlights the growing contribution of female scholars from diverse backgrounds and with widely different perspectives. Feminist critique of and contribution to the field of theology of religions is continuously developing, and would be a fascinating area for further exploration. However, it is basically non-existent in CofE documents on other religions, and is also mostly absent in the interview data. Although this study does not take a feminist perspective, I will draw on some key themes of feminist theology – a liberationist reading of salvation and the criterion of women's well-being (Fletcher, 2008) – when discussing findings from the data (Chapter 10).

### **3.5. Different approaches in the theology of religions**

#### **3.5.1. Central questions of the theology of religions**

In the previous chapter, several definitions of the theology of religions are mentioned (2.2.4.). Although these are phrased variously, they express very similar views on what central questions the theology of religions addresses.

Cantwell Smith (1963, p.132f) asks two questions: 'how does one account, theologically, for the fact of man's religious diversity?'; and 'whether or how far or how non-Christians are saved, or know God'. The former addresses the origins of the religions, where the religions come from; the latter combines two questions and addresses their nature, whether God is known, or revealed, in these religions, and their function, whether these religions lead to salvation.

Hedges's (2010, p.16) definition refers to three questions: firstly, 'how Christianity relates to other religions'; secondly, 'what the nature of these other religions is'; and thirdly, 'what may happen to followers of other religions soteriologically'. Again, the different questions address different aspects of the religions – the second question explicitly addresses the nature of the religions, and the third their function regarding salvation. The first question, how Christianity relates to other religions, could be understood to refer to the origins of the religions; whether any or all religions or just Christianity originate from God. Alternatively, it could relate to their nature, asking how Christianity and the religions compare with regard to divine presence and truth.

Hick (1995) points out that Race's threefold typology can be applied to claims regarding both salvation and truth. This, of course, implies that different questions are asked, about the salvific potential of the religions regarding the former claims, and about the presence of divine truth in the religions regarding the latter.

Many scholars, however, focus more narrowly on the issue of salvation as the central question addressed by the theology of religions. D'Costa (1986, p.4) declares that 'the central theological question...is whether salvation is possible outside Christianity'. Tilley (1999, p.323) identifies the 'fundamental soteriological' question on the basis of which different approaches are categorised in Race's typology as: 'How can those who know not Christ be saved if salvation is only in Christ?'. Moyaert (2011) suggests:

The theology of religions starts with a specifically Christian question: How are other religious traditions related to the Christian mystery of salvation? ...Actually the question of salvation splits into two: the question of the *possibility* of salvation of non-Christians and the question of the concrete *means* of salvation. (Moyaert, 2011, p.13)

While the theology of religions asks a range of questions, different frameworks tend to focus on just one of the questions in categorizing different approaches (Appendix B). Indeed, if the categories within one framework are defined in relation to different questions, the framework becomes inconsistent and confusing; which has been a critique of Race's original typology (see 3.4.). Tilley (1995) also suggest that some questions addressed in the theology of religions are, in fact, philosophical questions:

The third problem [in modern philosophy of religion] is that of religious diversity. 'Since so many religions say so many different things, how can they all, or any of them, be rationally credible?' This philosophical problem is often conflated with a Christian theological problem of religious diversity, 'Can people be saved if they do not believe in the name of Jesus?' Much confusion in theology and philosophy of religion has resulted from not keeping the first, epistemological question separate from the second, soteriological question. (Tilley, 1995, p.157)

Table 1 sets out a range of questions that might be asked within the theology of religions, and the answers that might be given by different approaches. It does not attempt to present a complete list but merely indicates the range of possible questions.

**Table 1: Possible questions and answers in the theologies of religions**

	Questions	Exclusivism	Inclusivism	Pluralism	Particularism
<b>Origin of religions:</b> What are the implications of the existence of different religions?	Are the different religions intended by God?	No	Yes	Yes	We cannot know
	Do other religions have human origins?	Yes	Yes	Yes	We cannot know
	Does Christianity have human origins?	Yes or No	Yes or No	Yes	No
<b>Nature of religions:</b> Is there divine presence and truth (revelation) in the religions?	Is divine revelation and truth found in other religions?	No	Yes to a limited extent	Yes	We cannot know
	Does Christianity have a unique position regarding divine revelation and truth?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Function of religions:</b> What is the salvific potential of the religions?	Do other religions lead to salvation?	No	No	Yes	No
	Does Christianity lead to salvation?	Yes or No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Can people of other religions and non-Christians be saved?	Yes or No	Yes through the work of Christ	Yes through their own religion	We cannot know

As evident in Table 1, depending on the exact question asked, the responses of a particular approach can agree with varying other approaches – and also vary within the same approach. For example, if the question is asked whether Christianity through the incarnation has a unique position regarding divine revelation and truth, then exclusivism, inclusivism and particularism respond affirmatively, while pluralism responds negatively. Conversely, if the question asked is whether divine revelation and truth are found in other religions, exclusivism would respond with *No*, while inclusivism and pluralism would respond with *Yes*, and particularism would consider the question not answerable from outside the religions concerned, grouping the approaches in a different way. This shows how important it is to define clearly what the issue under discussion is, to avoid a mistaken assumption of agreement or disagreement on an issue, when the participants in the discussion are in fact responding to different questions. It also shows that it is not always possible to deduce from a person’s response to one question what their response to another question will be.

Just as the categories in different frameworks (Appendix B) are defined in response to different underlying questions – regarding the origin, or the nature or the function of the religions – the definitions of the approaches in Race’s typology also differ depending on what the underlying question or criterion is.

### **3.5.2. Definitions of the different approaches**

In order to establish what questions different definitions of the four approaches – exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism and particularism – address, I compiled an overview of definitions of the four approaches offered by scholars with different theological perspectives (Appendix C). Some strongly identify themselves with a particular approach in the texts these definitions are taken from; others take a more distanced position in explaining an approach they may not, or not fully, identify with themselves. Occasionally scholars identify themselves with one approach while some of their academic colleagues describe them as belonging to another. In addition, unsurprisingly and reassuringly, many scholars in the field shift positions over time – it would be disheartening indeed to find individuals untouched by decades of engagement with the subject. Any identification of a scholar with a specific position therefore needs to be considered provisional.

The definitions evaluated include Race’s from the original 1983 typology, and two different developments of Race’s categories by Schmidt-Leukel (2005) and Hedges (2008). Two distinct definitions for each approach by Hick (1995; 1996c) provide a good example of how the definition depends on what question is addressed – in this case regarding salvation and truth respectively. As Race, Schmidt-Leukel, Hedges and Hick all take a pluralist stance, additional definitions from a range of other scholars were included to broaden the range and add balance. Strange (2008) identifies with exclusivism, as do McDermott and Netland (2014) who address questions of both salvation and truth in their definitions. D’Costa’s 1986 definitions are informed by an inclusivist perspective, although his approach has changed several times since. Pinnock (1996a) also identifies with inclusivism, while Cheetham (2008) presents an inclusivist approach without explicitly identifying with this perspective. Geivett and Phillips (1996a), Tilley (1995; 1999) and DiNoia (1992) represent a particularist perspective, and definitions by Cobb (1990) and McGrath (1996) can be seen to express particularist tendencies although neither is considered a particularist. In any case, the particular positions of individuals, at the time of writing their definitions or currently, are not critical for the purpose of comparison. Rather, at issue is the inclusion of a broad range of perspectives to give a sense of the nuances between and within different approaches.

Comparison of the definitions shows that they do not only vary in the questions they address, but that in some cases the definitions for the same category actually contradict each other, for example definitions of exclusivism by Hedges (2008) and Schmidt-Leukel (2005) regarding the salvation of non-Christians. In the texts from which these definitions are taken, the exact question is often not explicitly stated but has to be extracted from the context, or from the definition itself.

One of the difficulties of discussing the implications of the different approaches, and the arguments for and against them, is that some arguments are only relevant to specific questions and definitions and can confuse the issue in the context of a different question or definition. For example, an exclusivist response to the question of the salvific potential of other religions does not necessarily apply to questions of divine presence and truth in other religions, or the ultimate outcome for non-Christians. As a result, individuals may identify with one category for one question, and with a different category for another question – this actually applies to my own position, as I will describe below (3.6.), and was also the case with many of the ministers interviewed (Chapters 8-10).

With this *caveat* in mind, I will next consider some of the arguments for and against the different approaches. Knitter (2002, p.50) benevolently couches this in terms of the special ‘insights’ that the different approaches offer, and the ‘questions’ they have to answer; many of these arguments are, however, put in rather more robust terms in the scholarly debate.

### **3.5.3. Arguments for and against exclusivism**

One of the strongest arguments in support of an exclusivist theology of religions is based on an appeal to Scripture. Strange (2008, p.38) points to the ‘strongly exclusivistic tenor of the Bible’ and this has also been acknowledged by supporters of other theological approaches (e.g. Race, 1983; Knitter, 2002). Frequently quoted passages supporting exclusivist views include: ‘There is salvation in no one else [than Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’ (Acts 4: 12) and: ‘Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”.’ (John 14: 6). This argument from Scripture clearly relies on the acceptance of the Bible as divinely inspired and ultimately authoritative; where this underlying assumption is not accepted, the argument loses its force.

Many proponents and opponents of exclusivism also agree that the historical or traditional position of the Church, as expressed for example at the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon,

and the writings of many of the early Church Fathers can mostly be described as exclusivist, in the sense of affirming the unique salvific role of Jesus Christ and consequently the uniqueness of Christianity as mediator of this salvation (e.g. Race, 1983; Strange, 2008; Hick, 2009). However, it has also been argued that many Church Fathers could be considered inclusivist (Cheetham, 2008; Hedges, 2010) as will be discussed in the next section (3.5.4).

While initially claims of uniqueness were centred on the person of Jesus and his role as saviour, over time the focus shifted to the Church, the religious institution that had developed over the centuries. This development reached a peak in the assertion put forward by Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (d. 258) that 'outside the Church there is no salvation' (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), excluding not just followers of other religions but all non-Catholics from salvation. The Roman Catholic Church's claim to uniqueness was formalised at the Council of Florence in 1442 (Sullivan, 1992) and remained central to its teaching until the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, when 'many acknowledge that in terms of our threefold typology, Roman Catholic teaching shifted from the exclusivist paradigm into the inclusivist paradigm' (Strange, 2008, p.40). However, alongside this official exclusivist, ecclesiocentric position, which for the most part resulted from and reflected differences and divisions within wider Christianity, a more inclusivist strand in the Catholic tradition also persisted and found expression particularly in the missionary work of the Catholic Church, for example in the Jesuit missions to South America and China (Race, 2008; Cheetham, 2008).

The founding fathers of the Protestant traditions generally took an exclusivist approach to the theology of religions. Amongst the five *solas*, the formulations of the fundamental beliefs of the Protestant Reformation, it is in particular *Solus Christus* – 'Christ alone' (or *solo Christo* – 'by Christ alone') that makes explicit the exclusivist claim that Christ is the only mediator between God and humankind and the only source of salvation (Strange, 2008).

Knitter (2002, pp.50ff) suggests that other particular insights offered by what he describes as the 'Replacement Model' are its recognition of the reality of evil and sin, the limitations of humanity in dealing with them, and therefore the need for divine help. Exclusivist approaches maintain the central role of Jesus Christ in delivering divine revelation and salvation.

Finally, some exclusivist approaches that consider all the religions, including Christianity, as human creations and therefore potentially corrupted and corrupting, offer a necessary warning against the potential 'dark side' and dangers of the religions, and their possible negative effects on their followers and others.

Although a self-declared pluralist, Race (1983) acknowledges:



As it has developed, the exclusivist theology of religions has come to represent the most clear-cut of all the theories in this field. It involves no complicated theory about the nature of religious experience, it appeals to what for many is a self-evident biblical witness, it gives a central function to the person of Christ; the internal logic of the argument appears consistent and coherent; and, finally, it is the position which corresponds most closely to what has generally been held to be orthodox Christianity through the centuries. (Race, 1983, p.24)

Nevertheless, representatives of other approaches have questioned exclusivist theologies on several counts. While the strongly exclusivist tenor of the Bible is widely acknowledged, this is not accepted without challenges. Hick (2005), for example, warns against a selective use of scripture:

But those who use scripture, whichever scripture it may be, to prove their point, in practice use it selectively, highlighting what supports their point of view and tacitly leaving aside what does not. We all do that either consciously or unconsciously. My own hunch is that our basic point of view comes first and then selects its appropriate scriptural backing and theological interpretation. (Hick, 2005, p.9)

Also, it is argued that alternative interpretations of the relevant passages are not only possible but better represent current biblical scholarship (Race, 1983; Ward, 1991; Hick, 1996b). Knitter (2002, p.56f) points out that while the Bible is the primary source for Christians, it does not mean it is absolute or exclusive – other sources, particularly the sacred scriptures of other religions, equally need to be considered. A similar critique of selectiveness regarding sources and interpretations, and a lack of historical awareness, is also directed at exclusivist claims regarding the writings of the Church Fathers (Race, 1983; Hedges, 2010).

The assertion of a link between religion and violence has already been mentioned (2.3.1.) and Gross (2005) argues that this applies especially where claims to exclusive truth are made:

The result of exclusive truth-claims is not religious agreement but suffering. The track record of religions that claim exclusive and universal truth for themselves is not praiseworthy or uplifting...There seems to be a cause-and-effect link between claims of exclusive truth and suffering; or to say it more strongly, the main result of exclusive truth-claims has been suffering, not salvation. (Gross, 2005, p.80)

A causal link between exclusive truth claims and suffering suggested by Gross and others is highly debatable (2.3.1.). More challenging, however, are questions regarding the morality of exclusivist positions. The belief that salvation is limited to those who express explicit faith in Christ is condemned as both immoral (Hick, 1996b) and in contradiction to the universal love and grace of God (Pinnock, 1996b). This is one of the main challenges to exclusivism. It should be noted, however, that exclusivist positions do not necessarily require a limit on salvation and some exclusivists also accept at least the possibility of universal salvation (Griffiths, 1997).

### 3.5.4. Arguments for and against inclusivism

The consensus from both supporters and critics of exclusivist approaches is that the New Testament emphasises and affirms the uniqueness of Jesus Christ's person and works, and consequently the unique role of Christianity (see 3.5.1.). However, there is also evidence of more inclusivist perspectives in the New Testament. This passage illustrates the two central tenets of inclusivism:

This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all —this was attested at the right time. (1. Timothy 2: 3-6)

In several passages describing Jesus' interactions with non-Jews he acknowledges their faith, often in contrast to the lack of faith shown by Jewish religious leaders. Examples are Jesus praising a Canaanite woman's faith (Matthew 15: 28a) and responding to a Roman centurion asking for his slave to be healed by saying: 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.' (Luke 7: 9b). Likewise, the Apostles explicitly recognise the faith of Gentiles. A passage recounting the Apostle Peter's encounter with Cornelius, a Roman centurion described as devout and God-fearing, has Peter declare: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right.' (Acts 10: 34-35). Another example is the Apostle Paul's sermon in Athens (Acts 17: 22-31). Inclusivist theologians consider these passages as providing a foundation in Scripture for an inclusivist theology of religions.

Similarly, church history does not solely support exclusivist approaches: Race (1983) suggests that two concepts underpinning inclusivist approaches can be found in the teachings of several early church fathers. The first concept is that of the partial revelation granted to other faiths, expressed in the Logos theology of the second and third century, in which Christ is identified with the divine Logos and whatever truth and goodness is found in other religions are partial reflections of this. Cheetham (2008, p.66) argues that this use of a Greek concept exemplifies how Christians throughout the ages 'have been actively involved in situating or incarnating the Christian message within the different cultural and intellectual contexts in which they find themselves', which he considers an indication of an intellectual and cultural inclusivism or appropriation.

The second concept underpinning inclusivist approaches suggested by Race is that of the presence of the Spirit of God to teach or prepare other faiths to receive the gospel, evident for example in the teachings of Clement of Alexandria who described Greek philosophy as a

stepping stone towards Christianity. Race (1983) also points out that Clement was aware of both Brahmanism and Buddhism and affirmed the presence of divine truth in both Eastern religious traditions, as well as in Greek philosophy.

Both these concepts are also evident in Rahner's (1975) model of the 'anonymous Christian', and consequently in Roman Catholic doctrine after the Second Vatican Council. The concept of partial revelation is evident in the following passage from *Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)* (Pope Paul VI, 1965):

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14: 6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. (Pope Paul VI, 1965, §2)

The second concept, the preparation of other religions for the gospel, is referred to in one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)* (Pope Paul VI, 1964):

(128) Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. (Pope Paul VI, 1964, Chapter II: 16)

Inclusivists therefore see strong support for their positions in the Christian tradition, including some of the early Church Fathers and in the established teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. As the passage from *Lumen Gentium* shows, inclusivist approaches also successfully deal with what is often seen as one of the major weaknesses of exclusivist approaches, namely that they are essentially unfair, and in contradiction with God's universal love and will to save. This argument is also put forward by inclusivists from other Christian traditions:

Inclusivism relieves us of those dark features of the tradition that suggest that (at worst) God plays favorites or (at best) inexplicably restricts his grace, so that whole groups are excluded from any possibility of salvation. (Pinnock, 1996a, p.101)

The particular insights offered by inclusivist approaches – the Fulfillment model (Knitter, 2002) – are firstly acceptance of the presence of truth and grace in other religions through the work of the Holy Spirit everywhere, in the hearts of all people and all religious communities; secondly, the critical importance of dialogue with the religious other for Christian life and practice; and thirdly, the acknowledgement of non-negotiable features in all

the religions, 'certain convictions or values or beliefs located in the heart of hearts of all religious persons that they simply are not able to put on the table of dialogue for possible questioning... that define the identity of the religious person' (Knitter, 2002, p.102).

Inclusivism has been widely acknowledged as the 'mainline model' (Pinnock, 1996a, p.101), the mainstream position in most Christian denominations; nevertheless, there are various challenges to inclusivist approaches. From an exclusivist perspective, inclusivism relies on a selective reading of Scripture, with implications for numerous theological issues: it is seen to undermine central Christian concepts such as the need for repentance and conversion, faith in Christ, baptism and the necessity of obeying the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18-20) to preach the gospel to all people.

Inclusivism is seen to subvert free will or free choice: exclusivists and particularists argue that although the presence of God's love and grace is pervasive, it can be met by human beings with repentance or rebellion (Geivett & Phillips, 1996b). Salvation is freely offered but not imposed on those who do not accept it. The issue of free will is also highlighted in criticisms from pluralist perspectives; for example, Rahner's (1975) concept of the 'anonymous Christian' memorably led Küng (1977, p.98) to comment: 'It would be impossible to find anywhere in the world a sincere Jew, Muslim or atheist who would not regard the assertion that he is an "anonymous Christian" as presumptuous'. Hick (1980, p.68) rejected as paternalistic the notion that 'honorary status [is] granted unilaterally to people who have not expressed any desire for it'.

A number of pluralist criticisms of exclusivism are equally addressed at inclusivism: Hick (1996d) questions whether inclusivism sufficiently acknowledges the distinctive religious lives of non-Christians, and the evidence of salvation in the form of moral goodness in their lives. Knitter (2002, p.103ff) queries whether the inclusive Fulfillment Model really does allow for equal dialogue, as it retains the centrality of Jesus; he also doubts whether an absolute commitment to a particular religious truth, in this case the uniqueness of Jesus, is necessary, or even possible. Some pluralist critics consider that inclusivist, like exclusivist, approaches do not sufficiently take account of historical evidence and historical criticism. Race (1983, p.68) suggests that inclusivist approaches pre-judge the issue of religious truth and that this 'is tantamount to an unjustified theological imperialism'. As with exclusivism, the truth claims made by inclusivist approaches are seen by some pluralists to result in human suffering:

We might avoid much human suffering caused by religious claims of unique and universal relevance, for I contend that their potential to cause harm and suffering, rather than any possible intellectual error, is the main problem with exclusive, or even inclusive, claims about religious truth. (Gross, 2005, p.79)

While an intrinsic link between inclusivism and 'attitudes and practices of domination' has been challenged (Clooney, 1990, p.75), the concern about the moral implications of non-pluralist perspectives is at the heart of the pluralist enterprise.

### **3.5.5. Arguments for and against pluralism**

The main argument for pluralism probably is that of moral and spiritual equivalence between individuals belonging to different religions, as proposed by John Hick. Hick (1996c) argues that all the world religions encompass a basic ideal of love and compassion and require their followers to treat others as they would wish to be treated, in effect a version of the Golden Rule. He considers that although each tradition has its great saints and sinners, ordinary believers in all the religions generally try to live up to the ideal more or less successfully, with no noticeable differences between the religions overall. Similarly, but on a larger scale, societies or civilizations reflecting particular religions consist of a mixture of good and evil aspects with no distinct moral superiority of any world religion evident. Hick therefore concludes that all the world religions, including Christianity, are human responses to the Divine whose presence is experienced through different forms of religious experience. He defines salvation as 'an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centredness...to a radically new orientation centred in God and manifested in the 'fruit of the Spirit'' (1996c, p.43). Salvation is therefore possible and present in all religious traditions; the question of the ultimate eternal fate of individuals is not dependent on their specific religious affiliation.

Underlying Hick's approach is a critical realist epistemology, which posits that although an absolute reality exists, it is perceived and interpreted within particular conceptual frameworks. He therefore proposes to use the term 'the Real' rather than 'God', which he considers too closely associated with an anthropomorphic model. This pluralist concept of God underpins a multiplicity of authentic religious experiences, which precludes exclusive claims from any religion. Knitter (1987, p.x [sic]) therefore concludes: 'The infinity and ineffability of God-Mystery demands religious pluralism and forbids any one religion from having the "only" or "final" word'.

Another central argument offered by proponents of pluralism is the ever-growing awareness of the historical and cultural limitations of all knowledge and beliefs, and consequently a hesitation to judge truth-claims originating in a different culture or religion on the basis of one's own. Kaufman (1987) argues:

If we understand human historicity in the sense I am urging here, Christian faith (like every other faith) will be seen as one perspective, one worldview, which has developed in and through a long history alongside other traditions, many of which are vying for the attention and loyalty of us all today. (Kaufman, 1987, p.9)

While exclusivist and inclusivist approaches tend to be supported by reference to Scripture and Christian tradition, this does not usually form a major part of the argument for pluralist positions, with some exceptions. Passages seen to point to a pluralist strand in the Bible include: 'I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.' (Matthew 8: 11) and 'Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.' (1 John 4: 7). However, many pluralists do not attempt to argue on the basis of Scripture, as they do not accept traditionalist assumptions on revelation and the authority of Scripture (Hick, 1996c).

As Christianity had its beginnings in a religiously diverse environment, some pluralist theologians perceive 'the recognition of potential authentic practice outside of the Christian revelation' (Race, 2008, p.14) from the beginning of Christianity. Hedges (2010, p.111) also sees pluralism as firmly rooted in Christian tradition, arguing that 'the pluralist option of radical openness to religious Others is not a watering down or betrayal of Christian witness but, rather, a demand necessitated by Jesus' example and Christian tradition'.

Other pluralist theologians, however, consider that there is little evidence of pluralist perspectives throughout most of church history, and that theological engagement was predominantly between different Christian traditions rather than with other religions. Although Schmidt-Leukel (2008, p.88) points to Christian minorities in countries such as India and China, and to the work of individuals such as Nicolas of Cusa, Herbert of Cherbury and Matthew Tindal as attempts to interpret religious diversity 'which point in a pluralist direction', he notes that:

...by and large religious pluralism became an elaborated option in the Christian theology of religions only after the rapid improvement of knowledge about other religions from the late nineteenth century onwards and in particular through increasing dialogical encounters with people from other faiths. (Schmidt-Leukel, 2008, p.89)

Critics of pluralist approaches consequently consider one of the main weaknesses of pluralist theologies to be a lack of support in Scripture and church tradition. Cheetham (2008, p.64) queries whether a theology of religions can be considered as being 'properly Christian' if its propositions are not rooted in Scripture, and a similar point is made by Griffiths (1997).

Another challenge to pluralism is addressed at Hick's claim of the moral and spiritual equity between religious believers, and equal transformative power of the religions. Pinnock (1996a, p.61) suggests, highly controversially and questionably, that 'blessings such as universal human rights, the demythologizing of the state, the care of the sick and the poor, the importance of preserving the earth...' are mostly a fruit of the Christian gospel, while Eastern religions result in 'stagnant', and Islam in 'intolerant' societies. He also argues that the virtue and piety of individuals does not constitute any proof of the truth of their beliefs. Moreover, different beliefs will reasonably produce different behaviours – for example, the belief that a person's suffering is the result of their karma may justifiably produce an indifferent response to their suffering that nevertheless will be perceived as unethical from the perspective of a different belief. More fundamentally, the argument of moral equity between the religions assumes a universally valid moral framework, which postmodernism has comprehensively challenged (McGrath, 1996).

These disputed assumptions of universal or shared features in the religions are also challenged on another count, namely that they do not sufficiently take account of the differences:

...it is not clear that the pluralist position offers a way of appreciating the persistent differences. In a sense, many of the pluralist constructions still maintain a Christ-centred approach, seeking the sameness on the basis of the central element of one's own faith...While helpful in making the connections across different traditions, the pluralist construction does not really allow for the distinctiveness of other faiths. (Fletcher, 2005, p.65)

Another common criticism against pluralism is the danger of relativism: if all the religions are equally true, they can also all be seen to be equally false (Race, 1983; Fletcher, 2008). As a consequence, Christian beliefs may be abandoned altogether. Arguing for a re-evaluation of central Christian concepts in the light of modern historical consciousness, Kaufman (1987, p.12), for example, suggests that theologians may 'feel forced to conclude (as some have in recent years) that such central Christian symbols as "God" or "Christ" must be given up entirely, other images or concepts being given categorical status in their stead'. Such suggestions lead critics of pluralist approaches to view them as contradictory to the Christian gospel:

Religious pluralism, put in the most general terms, is committed to two fundamental, if general themes. The first is that no religion is true. The second is that everyone will do very well in the long run. Universal pessimism about getting anything religious right and universal optimism about everyone's ultimate fate join hands and march from the academy into the world at large. Put this way, it is a wonder the view is not more popular than it is. *Believe what you like and all will be well* has great potential as the Ungospel of the Future. (Yandell, 2004, p.192)

While many pluralist theologians of religions nevertheless still firmly consider pluralism a part of the Christian tradition, some philosophers of religion place religious pluralism not just outside Christian theology but outside the religious sphere altogether, and consider it a philosophical theory (Byrne, 2004).

Pluralist theologians who accept the account of pluralism as a philosophical meta-system do not necessarily consider this mutually exclusive with religious practice in a particular religious tradition that serves to provide the context for the process as of personal transformation (Hedges, 2010). Several pluralist CofE ministers interviewed for this study serve as real-life examples for this view.

Some scholars from other religious backgrounds, however, regard the fact that many pluralists still define themselves as Christian with some suspicion:

The stereotype of pluralists as relativists who do not make claims of superiority is inaccurate but nevertheless reinforced by some pluralists...pluralists do make claims of superiority, at least about their pluralist position....Like inclusivists, pluralists privilege their home position and consider it better than other religions, at least in some regards. Pluralist Christians may be more humble than inclusivists Christians and qualify the absolute truth claims of their home tradition. Nonetheless, the fact that the aforementioned pluralists [Knitter, Hick, Cobb, Panikkar, Eck] remain Christians seems to presuppose a view of Christianity as somewhat superior to other traditions in some regards, which does not preclude the acceptance of other traditions as superior in other regards. (Vélez de Cea, 2011, p.465)

It is worth noting that some of the individuals described as Christians in Vélez de Cea's critique consider themselves dual believers (Knitter, 2009) or, in the case of Panikkar, can at least be described as practising across religious traditions.

An even stronger challenge regarding the implications of pluralism as a philosophical meta-system is that it constitutes an 'act of intellectual colonization....[which] posits its own religious meta-system as an explanation and meta-narrative over and against all others' (Hedges, 2010, p.130). Related to this are concerns about the power dynamic underlying pluralist positions as a standpoint 'largely developed and propagated by a white, male, intellectual, Christian elite' (Hedges, 2010, p.133) and therefore potentially culturally imperialist or oppressive. This challenge is particularly offered from feminist and particularist perspectives: McCarthy (2009, p.75) argues that 'the effort to define a Christian theology of religions remains almost completely a Western, and masculine, academic enterprise'.

Similarly, McGrath (1996) points out:

The belief that all religions are ultimately expressions of the same transcendent reality is at best illusory and at worst oppressive – illusory because it lacks any substantiating basis, and oppressive because it involves the systematic imposition



of the agenda of those in positions of intellectual power on the religions and those who adhere to them. (McGrath, 1996, p.207f)

Pluralists refute charges of Western imposition (Knitter, 2005b); yet these and other challenges to pluralism inspire the particularist perspective, which will be considered next.

### **3.5.6. Arguments for and against particularism**

There are substantial variations within each of the three approaches discussed so far, yet the fourth, particularism, covers an especially broad range of positions; consequently, the arguments for and against these positions sometimes apply only to some formulations. What particularist approaches have in common is, at least theoretically, a postmodern perspective on universal categories, that is, a denial of universal truths, principles and structures (Knitter, 2002; Hedges, 2008). They affirm the diversity and particularity of the religions, and of religious experience, truth and salvation (Jantzen, 1984; Heim, 1994; McGrath, 1996).

Particularist approaches sit more comfortably within the predominant contemporary cultural discourse than any of the other positions. Nevertheless, many particularist theologians do not subscribe to the relativist ontology underlying postmodern thinking outside the Christian tradition but hold a critical realist paradigm. Like pluralist approaches, particularist approaches can function as both philosophies and theologies of religions.

Knitter (2002) suggests that particularist approaches – the ‘Acceptance Model’ – aim to provide a better balance between universality and particularity than the other approaches manage, and to ameliorate their respective weaknesses:

It [the acceptance model] does so not by holding up the superiority of any one religion, nor by searching for that common something that makes them all valid, but by accepting the real diversity of all faiths. The religious traditions of the world are really different, and we have to *accept* those differences – that, you might say is the one-line summary of this model. (Knitter, 2002, p.173, italics in original)

The special insights particularist models offer include a conscious acceptance of the tradition-specific nature of their own position and perspective and, equally, an acceptance of others’ ‘otherness’. Both these insights underpin all engagement and dialogue with religious others. A full commitment to the central tenets of one’s own religion is retained, yet at the same time differences can be seen as potential sources of learning and enrichment for one’s own tradition (Knitter, 2002).

These insights of particularist approaches, however, come at a price. Knitter (2002) warns that the insistence on the incommensurability of the religions can act as a ‘prison’ rather than a ‘prism’:

It's one thing to identify language as that which influences and colors all that we see and know; it's quite another to describe language as that which determines all that we see and know and prevents us from seeing it differently. It's one thing to see religion as the perspective from which we always view everything else; it's quite another to announce that we are stuck in that perspective or that the perspective can never change, let alone change profoundly. (Knitter, 2002, p.224)

Hick (1996a) also suggests that due to their focus on difference, particularist approaches do not take sufficient account of the common ground between at least some of the world religions. Taken to their extremes, particularist approaches can become isolationist, inward-directed and solipsistic: Lindbeck (1984, p.128) admits the danger that they can appear as 'self-enclosed and incommensurable intellectual ghettos'.

The emphasis on the incommensurability of the religions may lead to relativism: each religion can only be understood and experienced from within the tradition and is therefore immune to any criticism - regarding truth claims or religious practice - from outside the tradition; consequently all truths are equally to be accepted (Knitter, 2002, p.225). The insistence that religious experience is ultimately determined by the language of one's religion makes the choice between religions become 'purely arbitrary, a matter of blind faith', what Lindbeck (1984, p.128) describes as the 'fideistic dilemma'. Finally, Hedges (2010, p.155) points out that particularist approaches do not allow for a comparative approach, for exploration of multiple religious belongings or identities, or for inculturation for Christians in the context of another 'culture-socio-religio-philosophical system'.

Having described various approaches in the theology of religions, and arguments given for and against them, I will explain in more detail my own position, briefly stated in Chapter 1 (1.6.).

### **3.6. Personal reflection**

I have suggested that the same category labels – exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism and particularism – are applied to different, although linked categories, relating variously to the origin, nature and function of the religions (3.5.1.). I will reflect on my own position by offering responses to different specific questions asked in the theology of religions.

Regarding the origin of the religions, from a philosophical perspective I consider that all religions, including Christianity, are human responses to God, however understood in the different religions; both the particular understanding of the nature of God and the appropriate human responses to God are socially constructed. However, this does not exclude the possibility that one, or more, religions have a better understanding of the nature

of God, and a more appropriate response to God, than others. Social constructionism does not exclude the possibility of God's self-revelation through various channels, for example nature, and also the religions. Therefore, although the religions are human constructs, it is theoretically possible that God reveals Himself in none, one, some or all of the religions – and, indeed, that God is revealed to a greater or lesser extent in different religions. This is essentially a particularist perspective, rooted in a postmodern stance.

Theologically, humanity's pursuit of God expressed in and through the religions can be explained as a result of human beings being created in the image of God, as spiritual beings, with a graced nature, as Rahner suggests (1975; Duffy, 2005), and therefore with an inclination to pursue truth, goodness and beauty, to worship, to seek encounter with the divine mystery. In this sense, as a universal human response resulting from divinely created human nature, the religions are intended by God, rather than explicitly as ways of salvation, and particularly salvation in a Christian sense of reconciliation with God. Human nature is both fallen and graced, and the religions reflect both human sinfulness and divine grace, revelation and truth.

Regarding the nature of religions, whether there is divine presence and truth in the other religions, I therefore consider the answer to be yes – but possibly in varying, and perhaps in some religions to a very limited degree. From a philosophical perspective, following Hick (1989), the criteria by which divine presence and truth in a religion ought to be judged are ethical, connected to the human good. To the extent that a religion sustains the good of individuals and communities it evidences divine presence and truth. This, of course, poses the question of what exactly constitutes human good. I would suggest that different religions may well pursue or prioritise different valid aspects or forms of human good, and thus can learn from each other and, equally, mutually challenge each other on this basis, as suggested by Hedges (2010). However, while there may be different forms of human goods, there are nevertheless many that are shared, which result from basic biological and social human needs and experiences: all human beings need food and shelter, suffer pain, must face death; equally humans everywhere need love and acceptance, seek justice and desire freedom. A fair amount of common ground exists on what constitutes human good.

From a theological perspective, I take an inclusivist approach rooted in a Trinitarian theology (Davie, 2009a) to the question of divine presence and truth in the religions – namely that the triune God has left a witness, that the Word of God is active and that the Spirit blows where it wills, at all times and in all places, including all the religions.

Does Christianity through the incarnation have a unique claim to divine revelation and truth? From a philosophical perspective, I agree with particularist approaches: we can only speak from within our own tradition to affirm our belief in God's unique revelation through Christ in Christianity; we are not in a position to affirm or deny God's revelation and truth in other traditions. However, from a theological perspective, following a Barthian (1957) approach, as a Christian I believe the answer to be a qualified yes: through the incarnation God is most fully revealed in Christ. Consequently, Christianity has a fuller, or perhaps deeper, understanding of the nature of God. However, this does not mean that Christianity as a religious tradition or its various institutions always exhibit God's presence and truth fully; indeed history clearly shows that the truth and grace of God are frequently limited and suppressed by human sinfulness present in the Christian tradition, its institutions and in Christian individuals. The claim to superior revelation and truth in Christianity therefore does not imply a claim to moral superiority of individual Christians or the Christian tradition in general. The crossing of the theological Rubicon, the 'move away from insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity toward a recognition of the independent validity of other ways' (Knitter, 1987, p.viii) unhelpfully conflates two issues: insistence on the finality of Christ and insistence on the superiority of Christianity.

Questions concerning salvation depend on its definition: salvation in the sense of reconciliation with God through Christ is integral to the Christian tradition alone, and therefore requires theological answers from within the Christian tradition. A different definition of salvation – for example as human flourishing – would allow for a broader, philosophical answer, in parallel with questions of truth and divine presence (see Chapter 10).

Regarding salvation, I take a Barthian (1957) stance: I do not consider that any religion, including Christianity, is salvific in itself but that salvation comes solely through Christ. However, I consider that salvation is available to all who seek it, from any religion and also perhaps of no religious affiliation, as God's salvific purpose and action in the world is not limited to any of the religions. Pinnock (1996b) describes this stance as 'non-restrictive exclusivism'; similar perspectives are also found in both inclusivism and pluralism. While universal salvation is therefore possible, it is not necessary, as this would contradict human freedom. I consider it both unwarranted and presumptuous, however, to make a judgement about any individual's eternal destiny. The main challenge of pluralism to other approaches, particularly exclusivism, is the fate of non-Christians who form the majority of humanity;

however, as has been shown, neither exclusivism nor inclusivism precludes universal salvation, or at least salvation of individuals outside Christianity.

I do not accept that an understanding of the incarnation as a unique event limited to one particular person, in one particular place, at one particular time constitutes evidence of a lack of divine love or justice. Rather, I would argue that it is exactly this understanding of the incarnation that best reflects the uniqueness and the embodied nature of being human, with its temporal and spatial limitations, which concepts such as the cosmic Christ do not adequately address.

My position then could be described as philosophically predominantly particularist, theologically as predominantly inclusivist, and on salvation as non-restrictive exclusivist and qualified universalist. However, as aspects of my position have shifted several times during the years of writing this thesis, I fully expect that they may well shift again in the future – as has indeed been the case for many of the scholars working in this field.

Having considered different frameworks and approaches in the theology of religions in this chapter, I will review the theological approach of CofE documents on other religions in the next chapter.

## 4. The Church of England and other religions

### 4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the scholarly debate in academic theology of religions. In this chapter I examine theological approaches to other religions in official CofE documents, in order to establish the institutional context of CofE parish ministers, including participants in this study.

A search for the term 'religions' in the CofE website's document library produced about 260 search results. This assortment of documents ranged from formal multi-author reports to short briefing notes; some were draft documents, some produced by external bodies, and some gave no indication of author, date or even purpose. Many had little relevance for this study, and it was therefore necessary to define criteria for the documents to be examined.

This review considers documents published for and since the 1988 Lambeth Conference. Advisers and advisory committees on 'inter Faith matters' became part of institutional structures in the early 1970s (CofE, 2009a). The Second Vatican Council's ground-breaking document *Nostra Aetate* (Pope Paul VI, 1965) had proved influential well beyond the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church and inspired a new approach to reflection on interreligious dialogue in the Anglican Communion (CofE, 2001). The publication in 1988 of *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* (Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), 1994) and its commendation by the 1988 Lambeth Conference signalled a change of perspective on other religions and the beginning of more sustained interreligious engagement in the Church of England, making this year a fitting starting point for this review.

The criteria for what are considered official CofE documents in this review are firstly authorship or approval by a formally established body of the Church of England or the Anglican Communion, and secondly availability to the general public. Reports adopted by General Synod, as the deliberative and legislative body of the Church of England, and documents formally published on behalf of the Church of England and subsidiary bodies such as the Archbishops' Council, the Inter Faith Consultative Group or the Presence and Engagement Task Group all meet the first criterion. In addition, publications by the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON) on behalf of the wider Anglican Communion have been included. However, publications by ecumenical bodies, such as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, or Churches Together in England, or by interreligious bodies, such as the Inter Faith Network of the UK, are not included. Although

some of these documents were produced with substantial contributions from CofE representatives, their purpose is to establish the common ground between members of these bodies, rather than offer a specific Anglican position.

Speeches or writings by individual members of the clergy, including Archbishops and Bishops, are considered to represent their personal opinions, even though they may inform the Church of England's position, and public perception of it. However, two documents by Davie (2009a, 2009b) are included, as they were written on behalf of the House of Bishops and made available as a theological resource to all members of General Synod with the formal approval of the House of Bishop's Theological Group.

The criterion of accessibility to the general public was more difficult to define, as most public documents can eventually be tracked down with enough time and determination. However, the point of this criterion was to establish what information an ordinary person attempting to discover the Church of England's position on other religions would find reasonably easily. In this digital age, enquirers are most likely to first search the CofE website for information. Inclusion on either the pertinent pages of the CofE website ([www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)) or the linked Presence and Engagement website ([www.presenceandengagement.org.uk](http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk)) was therefore the initial criterion for establishing accessibility. Detailed overviews of both websites are included in Appendices D and E. In order to ensure relevant documents only available in printed form were included, the bibliographies of the electronically available documents were checked and two such documents identified, namely *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (ACC, 1994) and *The Mystery of Salvation* (CofE, 1995). Both documents are widely available in libraries or for purchase.

The following documents met the three criteria of publication since 1988, authorship or approval by a formally established body of the Church of England or the Anglican Communion, and availability to the general public:

1. *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988 - The Reports, Resolutions & Pastoral Letters from the Bishops including Appendix 6: Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* (ACC, 1994)
2. *Multi Faith Worship? Questions and Suggestions from the Inter Faith Consultative Group* (CofE (Inter Faith Consultative Group), 1992)
3. *The Mystery of Salvation: The Story of God's Gift* (CofE (Doctrine Commission of the Church of England), 1995a).
4. *Communities and Buildings: Church of England Premises and Other Faiths* (CofE (Inter Faith Consultative Group), 1995b)

5. *Room for Religion: Shared Facilities for Religious Use* (CofE (Inter Faith Consultative Group), 1998)
6. *Sharing One Hope? - The Church of England and Christian-Jewish Relations: A Contribution to a Continuing Debate* (CofE (Inter Faith Consultative Group), 2001)
7. *Presence and Engagement: The Churches' Task in a Multi Faith Society* (CofE (Inter Faith Consultative Group), 2005)
8. *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue – an Anglican Theology of Inter Faith Relations.* (NIFCON), 2008)
9. *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully* (CofE (Presence and Engagement Task Group), 2009a)
10. *Learning Pathways: Equipping Ministry in Multi Religious Contexts* (CofE (Presence and Engagement Task Group), 2009b)
11. *A Church of England Approach to the Unique Significance of Jesus Christ* (Davie, 2009a)
12. *The Witness of Scripture, the Fathers and the Historic Formularies to the Uniqueness of Christ* (Davie, 2009b)
13. *Use of Closed Church Buildings for Worship by Bodies other than the Church of England: Excerpt from 'Pastoral Measure 1983: Code of Recommended Practice – 5<sup>th</sup> edition* (2009) (CofE (Standing Committee of the General Synod), 2009c)
14. *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation: Report to General Synod (GS Misc 956)* (CofE (House of Bishops Task Group), 2010a)
15. *Generous Love for All: Presence and Engagement for the New Quinquennium* (CofE (Presence and Engagement Task Group), 2011)

The primary aim of this review is to identify the Church of England's theological position on other religions. I therefore focus on passages in these documents that express particular theological perspectives with reference to the frameworks and terminology of academic theology of religions (see Chapter 3.).

However, when reviewing the documents I also identified some common features and themes in the documents, and discuss these in section 4.3. In section 4.4. I comment on aspects of the Church of England's landmark document on interreligious engagement, *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005), which were reflected in the interview data.

#### **4.2 Theological approaches to other religions in official Church of England documents**

The Church of England's theology of religions at the time of the 1988 Lambeth Conference is described in the section report 'Christ and People of Other Faiths' (pp.92-99) in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988* (ACC, 1994).



The report begins with an affirmation of Christian beliefs about God; it declares the relationship between God and humanity embodied in the person of Jesus ‘the fundamental paradigm of God’s relationship with the world’ (p. 92). While not seen to establish a doctrine of universal salvation, several passages of Scripture (Ephesians 1: 10; 1 Corinthians 15: 24-28) are offered as a ‘corrective to an uncritical reading of certain “exclusivist” passages in the Bible’ (p.92). It continues: ‘Anything which is “exclusively” true of the incarnate Lord is true of one who is precisely the most “inclusive” reality, the divine life rejoicing in itself and seeking to share itself’ (p.93). Paragraphs confirming the universal significance of Jesus Christ and the universal presence and work of the Holy Spirit can be seen to express an inclusivist theology of religions and this position is further clarified in a passage stating:

People sometimes fear that to affirm the presence of any encounter with God outside of Christianity is to imply that any truth to be found there may, in its own right, be ‘saving truth’. We wish to affirm that the only ‘truth’ which has saving power is *God*. The incarnate Lord said, ‘I am the truth’. It is this truth alone which saves. Since the only truth to which we are prepared to ascribe saving power is God, there is a sense in which no human knowledge has saving power at all. This means that such questions about the ultimate salvation of non-Christians are perhaps not possible of a definitive answer on the part of the Church. (CofE, 1994, p.95, italics in original)

The report distances itself from exclusivist theology (p.93) and with its affirmations of the unique role of Christ also rejects central aspects of pluralist theologies, affirming instead a broadly inclusivist theology of religions.

The authors of ‘*Multi-Faith Worship*’? (CofE, 1992) take a slightly different position and acknowledge:

In modified form, each of the three approaches [exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism] just outlined are represented among the authors of this booklet. Our attempts to achieve a consensus upon the central theological, and especially Christological, issues which arise have to a significant degree failed...a full consensus on such issues is never likely to be reached. (CofE, 1992, p.19)

This statement explicitly recognises the existence and likely continuation of different positions on the theology of religions within the Church of England and accepts their validity, affirming that contradictory views can be held in good faith, and for good reasons.

In spite of authors’ different theological approaches, the following passage nevertheless expresses a broadly inclusivist position:

Yet, properly understood, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as saviour of the world need not preclude, and indeed might well be seen to indicate, his universality...Our starting point, then, should be an open-hearted loyalty to Jesus Christ which honours both his uniqueness and his universality, and does not play one off against the other. (CofE, 1992, p.20)

*The Mystery of Salvation: The Story of God's Gift* (CofE, 1995a) describes the questions regarding salvation raised by other religions as follows:

What is the place of these religions in a Christian understanding of salvation? Is their inclusion ruled out a priori? Or can they be salvific, in any sense of that word? And if we consider that they can be, within a Christian understanding of the content of salvation, then are we imposing our content on something that these religions would define in various different ways? What is their doctrine of salvation, if they have one at all? Whom would they include within this, and under what criteria? (CofE, 1995a, p.20)

The report's authors add further questions following from personal experience with people of other religions and recognition of their moral qualities, such as: 'Can the God of Love, revealed in Christ, reject such people whom we admire?...Can the quality of their lives be separated from their religious beliefs?' (p.25). These questions focus particularly on the religions' function pertaining to salvation, their salvific potential, thus reflecting a central concern of the theology of religions.

The authors again acknowledge that theologians within the Church of England hold a variety of positions on the doctrine of salvation (p.144). They also emphasise that their report offers specifically Christian definitions of salvation, and their implications for people of other religions.

Race's (1983) typology is introduced and the three different approaches – exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism – briefly explained, without favouring or rejecting any one. A review of the worldwide context of mission, both historically and contemporary, is followed by theological responses to the encounter with other religions from a range of different theological perspectives. The authors conclude:

All three views, exclusivism, inclusivism ... and pluralism, are present today within the Church of England, and also increasingly related to experience within Britain. But the difference may be that those in the 'exclusivist' area are less willing to be influenced by experience, positive or negative. They may be just as friendly and accepting of people of other faiths at a human level, 'loving your neighbour as yourself'. But theological presuppositions will determine attitudes finally. (CofE, 1995a, p.158)

The authors discuss various biblical passages and their possible interpretations from different theological perspectives, again without a commitment to or rejection of any one. Having defined and critiqued the terminology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism further, the authors declare:

Both as individuals and as a Commission, we find ourselves moving beyond any of these three positions; indeed, it may be that our statements can be found to give support to all three at various points...readers might see in what follows a position

that could be labelled ‘an open and generous exclusivism’ or ‘a Christocentric inclusivism’, or ‘trinitarian pluralism’, and may all be right. (CofE, 1995a, p.171)

Although drawing on the terminology of Race’s framework, the authors explicitly avoid identification with any of the three positions. This document again acknowledges and validates the presence of theological perspectives from different approaches within the Church of England.

A similar approach is also evident in *Communities and Buildings: Church of England premises and other Faiths* (CofE, 1995b), where the authors note the practical implications of different theological perspectives:

The very comprehensiveness of the Church of England makes for vigorous debate and disagreement on some fundamental issues including the question of relations with people of other faiths. There will be members of the Church of England in any town or city who would wish to help those of other faiths to establish a community, teaching, and worship centre. Because they understand Hindus, Muslims and others as spiritual allies in a world mostly indifferent to the claims of God, they see nothing wrong in redundant church buildings being made available to become temples or mosques. Other members of the Church of England understand the uniqueness of Christ and Christian faith in the providence of God differently. For them this would exclude the use of a church, devoted to the worship of God through Jesus Christ, for any other purpose, and in particular for worship in or through any other name. (CofE, 1995b, p.23)

Similarly, *Generous Love: the truth of the gospel and the call to dialogue* (NIFCON, 2008)

accepts the diversity of theological perspectives within the Anglican tradition:

Tradition and reason are deployed in Anglicanism through the lived experience of Christian discipleship in a very wide range of different contexts, and this variety has contributed to the marked pluriformity of Anglican theological approaches to inter faith issues. (NIFCON, 2008, p.7)

Nevertheless, many passages in this document express an inclusivist perspective:

So we come to know our neighbours of different faiths... as those who seek, as we do, to orient their lives towards the One who is the source of all life... We will maintain our presence among communities of different faiths as we celebrate Jesus as the way, the truth and the life for us and for all people. (NIFCON, 2008, p.15)

The authors affirm that God has created and loves all people and ‘wishes all to enjoy that fullness of life in his presence which we know as salvation’ (p.1); and that consequently Christians are required to love and respect all. Many interviewees in this study expressed a similar understanding of salvation, and of the requirement to love and respect all (see Chapter 10).

The Trinitarian mission of God is described in three patterns, namely ‘Celebrating the presence of Christ’s body’ (p.9f), ‘Communicating the energy of the Spirit’ (p.11f) and

'Practising the embassy and hospitality of God' (p.13f). The concept of hospitality to the religious other is referenced in subsequent CofE documents, for example *Generous Love for All: Presence and Engagement for the New Quinquennium* (CofE, 2011), and also by a few interviewees (10.1.).

The aim of *A Church of England approach to the unique significance of Jesus Christ* (Davie, 2009a) is to establish how the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is understood in the Bible, in the Creeds and the Chalcedonian Definition, the historic formularies of the Church of England - the *Thirty Nine Articles*, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Ordinal* - and in recent material from the Church of England and the Anglican Communion (p.1).

In his discussion of Biblical passages Davie (2009a) juxtaposes a traditional exclusivist position with challenges from a more inclusivist perspective:

It has often been believed in the history of the Church that those who have not consciously put their faith in Jesus and/or become part of the Church through baptism are lost forever and this belief still continues to be held by many Christians today. The strength of this belief is that it takes seriously the witness of the New Testament that Jesus is the sole source of salvation and the obligation laid upon the Church to seek to bring as many people as possible to faith and baptism so that they may become part of God's new community and begin to enjoy now a foretaste of the salvation that will be fully revealed at the end of time.

However, this belief seems not to take sufficiently seriously the biblical witness to the LORD's desire to bless all nations and his sovereign freedom to save those outside the visible people of God. It also fails to take into account the evidence of the grace of God at work outside the Church uncovered by the Church's missionary activity. (Davie, 2009a, p.28)

The main focus of the document is on the understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and the implications of Trinitarian theology for other religions. Davie refers to *Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue* (CofE, 1984) and to *The Mystery of Salvation* (CofE, 1995) and notes:

What we see in these statements is the conviction that the traditional Christian belief in the Trinitarian nature of God and in the incarnation of God in Christ provides the proper basis for a Christian engagement with those of other faiths. We see this same conviction in the reports on interfaith relations produced by the 1988 and 1998 Lambeth Conferences and in the report *Generous Love* produced by the Anglican Network for Inter Faith Concerns for the Lambeth Conference of 2008. (Davie, 2009a, p.59)

Davie claims a broad theological consensus within the Anglican Communion for the past thirty years and concludes:

The Church of England, and Anglicans more generally, have also taken the traditional doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation as their basis for interfaith dialogue, holding that Jesus is the source of salvation for all people everywhere

(whether they are yet aware of the fact or not), but also holding that Christians are called to be God's instruments in bringing people to explicit faith in Christ and to membership of his Church. (Davie, 2009a, p.66)

This is effectively an inclusivist position, even referring to Rahner's concept of the 'anonymous Christian' (3.5.4.), although Davie does not use the terminology, or refer more widely to the frameworks of academic theology of religions.

In a summary of this document, entitled *The witness of Scripture, the Fathers and the historic formularies to the uniqueness of Christ* (Davie, 2009b), the author reaffirms this position. He notes that although there have been a variety of views on the issue, documents produced on behalf of the Church of England, including reports to the Lambeth Conferences, show 'a consistent theological approach' (p.5), which he formulates as follows:

This approach affirms the belief that God is at work amongst those of all faiths and none, but also holds that this does not mean that the Church should abandon its belief in the uniqueness of Christ or that it should cease to undertake mission and evangelism amongst those of other faiths. (Davie, 2009b, p.5)

Davie's summary document (2009b) prompted a Private Member's Motion asking the House of Bishops to report to General Synod on their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ in Britain's multi-faith society. The resulting report, *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* (CofE, 2010a), addresses the question of how to proclaim the uniqueness of Christ 'among people who are already committed to faith, usually as an adherent of one of the great world religions' (p.1). Highlighting some central passages of Davie's report, the authors affirm:

It is its faith in this God that is also the basis for the Church of England's engagement with people of all religions and none. It believes that the God it confesses is the source of salvation which is offered to all people everywhere (whether they are yet aware of the fact or not), and the ultimate source of the values that it shares in common with them. But it also holds that, in obedience to the commission given by Jesus to his disciples (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8), all Christians are called to act as God's instruments in bringing people to explicit faith in Jesus Christ and to membership of his Church through baptism. (CofE, 2010a, p.4)

This passage again affirms a broadly inclusivist position, and the commitment to evangelism with the aim of conversion to Christianity is likely to sit uneasily with a pluralist theology of religions. When reviewing the history of the Church of England's missionary activities the report's authors again emphasise that 'a consistent feature of the life of the Church in England has been the desire to share faith in Christ with those of other religions' (p.4).

The authors offer guidelines for good practice for 'engagement as Christians with individuals and communities of other faiths' (p.13) - interreligious dialogue in all its forms, as well as evangelism - and make the following crucial observation:

A distinction may helpfully be drawn between theology of religions on the one hand and theology of inter faith relations on the other. Theologies of religions are important in offering a framework for thinking about the relations under God between religions as a whole and are often the unarticulated but formative backdrop to the way in which attitudes are shaped. (CofE, 2010a, p.14)

The document overall is focused on the mission and ministry of the Church with regard to sharing the gospel with people of all religions and none, and it only very briefly touches on questions of the theology of religions. The frameworks and terminology of academic theology of religions are not used beyond a brief passage quoted from *The Mystery of Salvation* (CofE, 1995).

The review of these official CofE documents indicates a broadly inclusivist theology of religions; nevertheless the existence of both exclusivist and pluralist positions within the Church of England are frequently acknowledged and their theological and moral validity accepted. Beyond this theological thread, I also identified several other features common to many of these documents.

### **4.3. Common features and themes in Church of England documents on other religions**

#### **4.3.1. Special position of Judaism**

Judaism holds a special place in the Church of England's interreligious engagement, both chronologically and emotionally. Inspired by the approach of the Roman Catholic Church, it was the first of the world religions that the Church of England engaged with from a perspective of interreligious dialogue, rather than mission and evangelism.

Several official CofE documents engage specifically with Judaism: *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* (CofE, 1994) in its initial stages only considered Judaism and Christianity, engagement with Islam was only added in the later stages of producing the document. *Sharing One Hope? - The Church of England and Christian-Jewish relations: a contribution to a continuing debate* (CofE, 2001) and two other documents not included in the review, *Christians and Jews: A New Way of Thinking* (Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith Relations, 1994) and *Land of Promise - An Anglican exploration of Christian attitudes to the Holy Land, with special reference to 'Christian Zionism'* (NIFCON, 2012) also contributed to the Church of England's engagement with Judaism.

The particular emotional link between Christianity and Judaism is widely acknowledged:

For Christians, *Judaism* can never be one religion among others. It has a special bond and affinity with Christianity...A right understanding of the relationship with Judaism is fundamental to Christianity's own self-understanding. (CofE, 1994, p.302)

This link is seen to ensue from Jesus' Jewish roots but also from a shared hope for the realisation of God's kingdom in both religions.

Over time, however, as the Jewish community in the UK is numerically small, and for some decades has been overtaken in size by other religious traditions, the emphasis in CofE documents has changed and engagement with Islam has moved into the foreground.

#### **4.3.2. Increasing importance of engagement with Islam**

In more recent documents, the focus of interreligious engagement has moved from Judaism to Islam. The document *Staying present and engaging faithfully* (CofE, 2009a), for example, contains 35 references to 'Islam' and 'Muslim' and only 5 to 'Judaism' and 'Jew', or 6 to 'Hinduism' and 'Hindu'.

Christianity and Judaism share a particularly problematical history, yet the emotional aspects of Christianity's engagement with Islam are also acknowledged to be difficult. *The Truth shall make you Free* (ACC, 1994, p.98) admits: 'Islam has long been seen - especially in the Middle Ages - as a negative counter-force to Christianity'. Although affirming positive aspects of Islam and recognising the presence of religious tolerance in some Muslim societies, cautiously formulated concerns about the implications of fundamentalist Islam for Christians in other parts of the Anglican Communion are raised:

Today, as sometimes in the past, many of our Christian brothers and sisters face an aggressive and exclusivist Islam, threatening the very life of the Church in many lands...[although] modern 'Islamic fundamentalism' is no more the whole story of Islam than the Crusades are of Christianity. (ACC, 1994, p.98)

Similarly, *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* (ACC, 1994, p.307) expresses concern for religious minorities in Islamic societies. However, it also highlights aspects of Muslim religious practice that offer a challenge to Christians, including devotion in ritual and personal prayer, and the sense of fellowship amongst the community of believers (p.304).

#### **4.3.3. Lack of engagement with non-Abrahamic religions**

In all the documents reviewed there is a notable absence of theological engagement with the non-Abrahamic religions. *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988* (ACC, 1994) briefly notes that the Conference did not have opportunity to review dialogue with Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism but urges further involvement in this area. However, no

official CofE document has since been produced that explicitly addresses these world religions.

#### **4.3.4. Focus on practice and lack of theological engagement**

Rather than focusing on the theology of religions, many of the documents reviewed prioritise the principles and practical aspects of interreligious engagement, by the institution of the Church of England and its individual members. Several address specific subjects such as multi-faith worship or the use of Church property by other religious groups; others address the Church of England's interreligious engagement in general. The theology of religions underpinning this engagement is only briefly referred to in many of these documents.

The focus on practice is also evident in the scarcity of references to academic theology of religions. Documents refer to each other, and occasionally to Roman Catholic theological documents such as papal encyclicals, but rarely engage with academic theological writing. This disconnection seems to be mutual, as academic theology does not seem to have engaged much with these CofE documents either. A search of the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) Religion Database produced only two published articles referring to *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005), probably the central CofE document on interreligious engagement (Jagessar, 2009; Sudworth, 2009). The focus on practice may be linked to the acceptance of the range of theological positions within the Church of England (4.2.) and result from an aspiration to make the documents acceptable to and useful for the widest possible audience within the Church of England.

Academic theology of religion may also be considered not essential to the actual practice of interreligious engagement. In a personal conversation, the then Church of England's National Advisor on Inter Faith Relations observed that in his experience ministers tended to approach their engagement with people of other religions in the same way, namely with respect of the other and a desire to build relationships, whatever their theology of religion and the ultimate aim of their engagement. This view may be one reason for the lack of theological engagement by practitioners observed in several documents: the authors of *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005) emphasise the need for sustained theological and scriptural reflection to underpin the ministry and mission of local churches in multi-faith contexts, yet note:

We found it harder than we had expected to encourage Consultation participants to engage explicitly with these issues rather than with the 'practical' issues and language of resourcing or socioeconomic and political analysis. We also found that



although there is some quite excellent material available to resource study and reflection, it is not widely known. (CofE, 2005, p.79)

Subsequently, the authors of *Staying present and engaging faithfully* (CofE, 2009a) comment:

The seeming weakness in theological and scriptural reflection in relation to churches in a multi religious context noted in the 2005 report to Synod appears not to have changed greatly and it seems that little ongoing theological reflection relevant to multi Faith contexts of the local churches' ministry and mission is currently provided within the great majority of dioceses in any systematic way. (CofE, 2009a, p.26)

Ministers' practical rather than theological focus with regard to other religions and interreligious engagement, and a lack of engagement with existing resources was also evident in this study (see Chapter 9).

#### **4.4. Presence and Engagement**

The report *Presence and Engagement: The Churches' Task in a Multi Faith Society* (CofE, 2005, p.18) presents the findings of a 'comprehensive national survey of the situation of Anglican churches in multi faith contexts'. This 90-page landmark report to General Synod underpins the Church of England's approach to interreligious engagement and the work of the Presence and Engagement Task Group. It is also the only one of the documents reviewed in this chapter that all Leicester interviewees had read or were at least aware of (10.1.), indicating that parish ministers in multi-faith contexts consider it pertinent to their ministry. Consequently, some aspects of the document relevant to this study are discussed here.

The report is not principally a theological document; it is nevertheless framed and underpinned by theological considerations:

The word 'presence' points to our incarnational theology and the word 'engagement' to our pentecostal theology, asking the question: 'in what ways is the Spirit calling churches and individuals to engage with the new diversities?'. (CofE, 2005, p.5)

As *Presence and Engagement* is focused on the work and ministry of parish churches and ministers, it does not explicitly address questions of the theology of religions. The only mention of the terminology of theology of religions is in passing:

There are many more frequently used entry points [to the discussion of the Church's ministry and mission in a multi-faith context]: of inter Faith relations and dialogue – the commonalities and the differences in belief and practice; from the perspective of our common humanity across religious traditions; from a salvation classification – universal, inclusive, or exclusive; from a concern with public policies on diversity and cohesion; from human rights and equalities concerns; or from an academic interest in the contribution of Faith to social capital. (CofE, 2005, p.13)

In this passage universalism rather than pluralism is posited as an alternative to inclusivism or exclusivism as possible responses to the question of salvation, making this a somewhat ambiguous reference to the theology of religions.

The document's theological focus is predominantly on ecclesiological questions, rather than the theology of religions: it considers the implications of the presence of substantial numbers of people from other religions for the work of the parish churches. The struggle of local churches to maintain a presence in multi-faith contexts is acknowledged; nevertheless the fundamental principle of national representation is affirmed:

Nevertheless, the Church of England has continued to understand itself to be called to be present corporately in all the localities of the country. At the heart of this self understanding is the parish church, a Christian community called to be present and to engage actively with all who live in the neighbourhood irrespective of their Faith or none. This comprehensive presence and duty of engagement with all via the shared charge for the 'cure of souls', has continued to be a foundational distinction of the Church of England and an underpinning of its relationship with the State. The obligation to engage with all and sundry in a neighbourhood, whether through the occasional offices, through pastoral care or by promotion with others of the common good, has been a constant source of re-call out of mere presence towards renewed engagement and rediscovery of the real presence of Christ amongst those who seem to be 'other' to the churches. (CofE, 2005, p.11)

This passage powerfully expresses the self-understanding of the Church of England, which was also central to interviewees' understanding of their ministry (see 10.3.).

The main focus of the report is on the viewpoints and perceptions of local churches in multi-religious parishes, observing and reporting rather than interpreting their experience. The process of data collection included regional consultations, analysis of the 2001 Census data and a parish questionnaire. The census data was used to identify two groups of parishes, firstly the 863 parishes where more than 10% of the population belong to any other religion, 'Presence and Engagement parishes', and secondly the 556 parishes where either 10% of the population belong to one other religion or 25% belong to any other religion, the latter forming the population for the parish questionnaire.

The Diocese of Winchester at the time of the 2001 Census was one of a minority of dioceses (9 out of 44) that did not have at least one Presence and Engagement parish. The Diocese of Leicester on the other hand had 26 such parishes (11.1% of its parishes) (p.28), of which three were among the twenty parishes nationally with the highest proportion of people from other religions, including the parish with the highest proportion (80.5%) nationally (p.29).

The report emphasises the diversity of faith communities, including Christianity, pointing out that they 'are diverse not only in ethnic terms, but also in their religious understandings and

traditions, in their cultures and languages as well as in their geographic origins' (p.32). It notes that diversity is often accompanied by separation of communities into distinct geographical areas. While appropriate on a national level, the concept of a multi-faith society is therefore frequently incorrect on a local level, where often just one or two significant faith communities are represented in an area (p.37).

The report also explores clergy's experience in multi-faith parishes, what clergy describe as 'enabling' and 'disabling' factors for their ministry, and what they consider would make a difference to their experience. Only a minority of the ministers who participated in the research had felt called to serve specifically in a multi-faith context, yet the majority – in most dioceses over 80% – hoped to continue in this kind of ministry (p.65), even though many felt that they did not have an effective support network, particularly in dioceses with few multi-faith parishes.

Amongst the enabling factors, ministers identified the commitment, vibrancy and growth of their congregations, as well as supportive clergy relationships and their involvement with the wider community. One of the most cited disabling factors was the lack of engagement by their congregations, in addition to more practical factors such as a lack of resources and excessive workloads. The only religious group explicitly identified in this context was the Muslim community, which some clergy felt was particularly closed in nature and dominant in their parish (p.68). These topics are also reflected in the data collected for this study (see Chapters 8-10).

*Staying present and engaging faithfully* (CofE, 2009a) was produced to update General Synod on developments since publication of *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005). The impact of the 7/7 bombings in London is described as having increased anxiety 'across all sectors of society about religion, including the place of Christianity in general and the Church of England in particular in our national life' (p.4). The authors observe 'homogenisation of public discourse about religion' (p.5), showing itself in reluctance or inability to differentiate or acknowledge differences between religions. They note a general climate of anxiety even – or especially – in areas where other religions are not physically represented and attitudes are solely formed through the media, which 'in general increases the levels of anxiety by its limited vocabulary and its insistence upon conflictual approaches to reporting' (p.5), leading to increased intra- and interreligious tensions as well as tensions between religious communities and wider society. This view of the media was widely shared by interviewees in this study (9.5.2.).

The report draws extensively on *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue* (NIFCON, 2008), to which several members of the Presence & Engagement Task Force contributed. Interreligious engagement is firmly located within a Trinitarian theology, and supported by the Anglican principles of Scripture, tradition and reason. However, the critical role of contextual and lived experience is also emphasised. It does not address the questions of the theology of religions - the origin, nature and function of the religions (see Chapter 3) - but gives an Anglican perspective on the role and mission of the Church.

*Generous Love for All: Presence and Engagement for the New Quinquennium* (CofE, 2011) is a further update to General Synod on developments in the Church of England's increasing interreligious engagement in a period of sustained growth in religious diversity in England. The report highlights as 'perhaps the most significant new development' (p.3) the Near Neighbours programme, which aims to bring together local people in religiously and ethnically diverse communities through social action and interaction, in order to build relationships and improve local neighbourhoods (Church Urban Fund, 2016). Managed by the Church Urban Fund, the programme is facilitated by the four national Presence and Engagement Centres in London, Leicester, Bradford and Birmingham and receives a large amount of government funding. Several Leicester-based interviewees were involved with the programme.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have reviewed official CofE documents relating to other religions and to interreligious engagement. I have established that the prevalent theological approach is inclusivist, although exclusivist and pluralist approaches are both acknowledged and accepted as valid, whilst particularist approaches are not explicitly discussed. Rather than the frameworks of academic theology of religions, these documents draw on a Trinitarian theology in informing the Church of England's theological perspective on other religions.

I have also pointed out several common features of these documents, which are reflected in the beliefs and theological positions of the CofE ministers interviewed for this study (see Chapters 8-10). Similarly, I have highlighted aspects of *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005) relevant to the study and reflected in the interview data.

The theological perspectives and themes relating to other religions and interreligious engagement identified in official CofE documents form the institutional context for the research participants.

Having thus established the scholarly and institutional context in the first part of this thesis, in the next part I will present the qualitative study at its heart.

## **5. Research Design and Methodology**

### **5.1. Introduction**

In the first part of this thesis I explored the background and context of the study. In this second part, the technical aspects of the research are set out: Chapter 5 describes the research design and methodology underlying this study, Chapter 6 discusses sampling and the process of data collection and Chapter 7 addresses data analysis. In the final part, the research findings and conclusions will be presented.

This chapter addresses theoretical aspects of research design, while the subsequent two chapters describe how these were translated into practice. I discuss key aspects of the research design, including the underlying research paradigm, namely constructivism, with its associated ontological and epistemological assumptions, the abductive research strategy, and the methodology used, namely constructivist grounded theory. I also reflect on research quality, the role of the researcher, and on ethical considerations, introducing an additional perspective that has informed my approach, namely a 'loving epistemology' as proposed by Laible (2000). In my discussion of these theoretical aspects the focus is on their applicability and implication for this particular study, rather than a more general discussion of the merits or shortcomings of various approaches.

This study is based on qualitative research. Beginning with the Chicago School in the 1920 and 30s but particularly since the 1970s, qualitative research has become part of standard practice in the social sciences, accompanied by extensive debate of its merits and disadvantages (Vidich & Lyman, 2000; Blaikie, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (1994, xi), in the preface to their influential *Handbook of Qualitative Research* wryly acknowledge: 'We discovered that the very term *qualitative research* means different things to many different people'. This also applies, they concede, to the terminology associated with this field, such as paradigm, epistemology, interpretive framework, and research strategy. While researchers may find fairly consistent use of terminology and established research strategies and methodologies for quantitative research, they encounter a bewildering range of these for qualitative research. This chapter draws on several different perspectives on qualitative research to reflect on theoretical and methodological frameworks for this study.

### **5.2. Qualitative Research**

Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.2) offer an 'initial, generic definition' of qualitative research, suggesting that it is 'multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to

its subject matter'. The multi-method focus means that qualitative researchers use a wide range of interconnected methods in an attempt to gain a better understanding of their research subject. Qualitative research, they suggest, may be described as a *bricolage*.

The French word *bricolage* can be translated as 'home improvement, tinkering, DIY; (derogatory) rush/makeshift job' (www.french.about.com, 2016). However, this term has been used metaphorically in a wide range of contexts including the arts and music, information technology, philosophy and educational studies. In the context of qualitative research, *bricolage* indicates the use of various research tools, strategies, methods and empirical materials in the research process, and if necessary, the development of innovative and original approaches:

If new tools have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. The choice of which tools to use, which research practices to employ, is not set in advance. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2)

In this study, various aspects of *bricolage* are evident, in particular the innovative combination of different research tools for data collection as well as the use of various data sources and materials (see Chapter 6).

This multi-method approach does, however, come with two caveats: Firstly, triangulation, the use of multiple methods, 'is not a tool or a strategy of validation' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2). This means that it does not deliver definite proof of findings, or makes them replicable; instead its purpose is to add rigor, breadth, and depth to qualitative research. Secondly, there are boundaries that researchers do well to respect in order to prevent the 'home improvement' turning into a rather ramshackle 'makeshift job'. Thus, Denzin and Lincoln warn of synthesizing research paradigms, as their different ontological and epistemological assumptions are grounded in particular worldviews that may be mutually exclusive. Where exactly these boundaries should be drawn, however, is part of the ongoing debate amongst qualitative researchers. One researcher's creative combination of research methods may well be another's 'botch job'. These two caveats make explicit some of the tensions inherent in qualitative research. The question of research quality is discussed in more detail below (5.3.).

The interpretative, naturalistic approach Denzin and Lincoln (1994) specify as a central feature of qualitative research is explained as follows:

This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2)

These aspects of qualitative research briefly outlined here will be further explored in the context of the research paradigm underlying this study (see 5.4.).

Contrasting qualitative and quantitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.4) note that qualitative research does not seek to measure in terms of 'quantity, amount, intensity or frequency' but instead focuses on processes and meanings. They also emphasise the socially constructed nature of reality, the profound connection between researcher and subject, and the influence of circumstances on qualitative enquiry. These features of qualitative research are evident in this study in various degrees: it is clearly framed as qualitative research, both in its underlying assumptions and in the processes employed. The study explores and seeks to understand the meaning research participants assign to particular experiences and other factors relating to their beliefs. Data collected from research participants is understood as jointly constructed in a particular, unique context. Various types of data are collected using different tools, purposely developed to address the questions this study explores. In later sections of this chapter (5.4.-5.7.) these key features of qualitative research are considered in more detail; first, however, I will address the question of research quality.

### **5.3. Quality of qualitative research**

#### **5.3.1. Theoretical considerations**

A central aspect of any research project is the question of how to ensure the quality of the research outcomes. However, what exactly constitutes quality in qualitative social research, and how, or indeed whether, it can be judged, has long been debated amongst researchers.

In the natural sciences, traditionally the concepts of validity and reliability were central to discussions of research quality. An example used to illustrate these is a thermometer dipped into boiling water: A thermometer giving a reading of exactly 82°C on several occasions can be considered reliable but is unfortunately invalid. A second thermometer giving five different readings close to 100°C is less reliable but more valid (Silverman, 1993). The concepts of validity and reliability were taken up by some social researchers as relevant for qualitative research and redefined in this context: for example, Hammersley (1992, p.67) defines reliability as 'the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions', and validity as the 'accuracy with which a description of particular events...represents the theoretical category that it is intended to represent and captures the relevant features of these events', that is, whether an account correctly represents the social phenomena it describes.



However, the usefulness of these concepts for establishing the quality of qualitative social research has been controversial. Seale (1999) points out that various political perspectives, including Marxist, feminist and critical theorist perspectives, maintain that the quality of research should not be judged with reference to the establishment of universal laws or ostensibly objective truths but with regard to its political effects, namely its capacity to emancipate or empower an oppressed group. Yet while political sensitivity is desirable, even necessary, in a qualitative researcher, a research quality criterion of political emancipatory effectiveness is more controversial, primarily due to the absence of a general consensus on exactly what political aims are desirable, and more generally, whether emancipation is a universal good or rather rooted in a Western worldview. Seale warns:

The danger of prioritizing particular political goals in research is that these also come to dominate researchers' interpretations of the social world being investigated. Convinced by prior reasoning that oppression exists, that it takes particular forms and that it is universally undesirable, some qualitative research proceeds to 'discover' matters that someone who does not share the same political views would not find. (Seale, 1999, p.12)

Other critiques of research quality criteria rooted in a scientific approach have come from postmodern perspectives, influenced by the work of Foucault on the connection between power and knowledge, and the role of the former in controlling and defining the latter. Postmodern deconstructions of the authority of research texts present a challenge to researchers who now work in 'conditions of chronic, radical doubt' (Seale, 1999, p.19).

Drawing on the work of Hammersley (1992), Denzin and Lincoln (1994) identify four basic positions on adequate criteria for the evaluation of research quality: The first, positivist position, proposes the criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity as equally relevant for all social inquiry, quantitative and qualitative. In contrast, the second, postpositivist position argues that distinctive criteria for qualitative research are necessary. This position includes a wide range of suggested criteria, as will be discussed below. The third, postmodern position maintains that the very nature of qualitative research and of the world it endeavours to explore implies that there can be no valid criteria to judge the quality of the research. Denzin and Lincoln however note that some researchers working from this position nevertheless draw on criteria proposed from the fourth, poststructuralist position, namely 'subjectivity, emotionality, feeling and other antifoundational factors' (1994, p. 480).

Hammersley (1992) compiles a list of proposed postpositivist quality criteria, which include the production and development of theory, the novelty of claims, the consistency of claims with empirical observation and the inclusion of representative examples, the credibility of the account to both readers and those studied, the transferability of findings and the reflexivity

of the account. However, he then proceeds to disagree with several of these, arguing that they do not actually constitute quality criteria but are means of producing and evaluating data. Instead, he proposes just two criteria, namely validity and relevance. Validity is judged by whether claims are plausible, given existing knowledge, and credible, based on the evidence offered. Relevance is evaluated with regard to the importance of the topic in the context of societal values and to the contribution to the literature, or knowledge in the field.

Another suggested list of criteria comes from Lincoln and Guba (1985), who propose to replace internal validity with credibility, external validity with transferability, reliability with dependability and objectivity with confirmability. Constructivist researchers have used this set of proposed criteria under the heading of trustworthiness. This is complemented by another set of criteria under the heading of authenticity, proposed in a later work by Guba and Lincoln (1989, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.114), which includes the criteria of 'fairness, ontological authenticity (enlarges personal constructions), educative authenticity (leads to improved understanding of constructions of others), catalytic authenticity (stimulates to action), and tactical authenticity (empowers action)'. Critical theorists, on the other hand, have focused on action, praxis and the historical situatedness of findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The discussion of whether and how the quality of qualitative research should be judged is ongoing and provides useful prompts for qualitative researchers in pursuit of high quality research. At the same time it can leave them bewildered as to what criteria are most relevant to their project. Seale (1999) advises that while researchers should engage in philosophical and methodological reflection as part of their practice, the 'craft' of research does not require a commitment to a particular philosophical or methodological position on research quality but can draw on various contributions, and use practical strategies to improve the quality of research, including triangulation, member validation and accounting for contradiction.

Different forms of triangulation include investigator triangulation, namely using different researchers, data triangulation, using different data sources, and theory triangulation, involving the testing out of several hypotheses on a data set (Flick, 2007). All these remain common strategies in qualitative research; however, the term triangulation is now most commonly applied to methodological triangulation, namely the combination of research methods and tools. Member validation involves seeking the input or feedback of research participants on research tools, findings and analysis. Looking for, and explaining, negative instances that contradict emerging theory, ideas or claims is another effective strategy for

improving research accounts. While none of these three analytic strategies can produce positive confirmation of research findings and claims, they all can serve to test researchers' claims, provide additional evidence and thereby enhance the credibility of research (Seale, 1999).

### **5.3.2. Implications for this study**

Having considered some of the philosophical and methodological debate on the quality of qualitative social research, what then are the implications for this study? What quality criteria were pursued and what strategies adopted?

For this study, Hammersley's (1992) proposed criteria of validity and relevance hold a particular appeal, as they are practice-focused and pragmatic. Although challenging, they are not overambitious regarding the potential of research to empower and emancipate. There is a clear understanding that the audience for much academic research initially is the academic community in the field. While some academic research will eventually transcend this boundary, much research will contribute mostly to the development of the field and only indirectly to wider social change, and this is especially the case for doctoral research. Nevertheless, Hammersley argues that the quality criteria used must be intrinsically linked to the purpose of the research, which he defines as follows:

My own view is that the function of research is to provide information that is both true and relevant to some legitimate public concern. On the basis of that definition there are two obvious criteria in terms of which research findings should be judged: truth (or validity) and relevance. (Hammersley, 1992, p.68)

He clarifies that the truth claim relates to a correspondence theory of truth where the correspondence involves 'selective representation' rather than a positivist 'reproduction of reality' (p.69), and as such does not conflict with this study's constructivist research paradigm.

The criterion of validity relates to whether claims are plausible and credible. Plausibility is judged on the basis of existing knowledge, which could be interpreted as a requirement for research to be informed by the literature in the relevant field. Credibility is judged on the basis of the evidence provided. The amount and kind of evidence required depends on three factors: the plausibility and credibility of the claim, the centrality of the claim made, and the type of claim. Where a claim varies from existing knowledge, and is therefore less plausible, more and stronger evidence is required. The core claim of an argument requires more evidence than marginal claims. The more complex a type of claim is, the more evidence is

required to support it. Types of claims may include - in order of complexity - definitions, descriptions, explanations and theories (Hammersley, 1992, p.70ff).

For this study validity was pursued through placing the research accounts into the context of relevant academic literature and official CofE documents on the subject, through the inclusion of transcript materials in the main text and the appendices (Appendices P and Q), through careful and detailed description of the research process in order to allow the reader to follow the researcher's steps and thought processes, and through the use of practical analytical strategies.

The criterion of relevance is assessed in relation to the audience of a piece of research. For an audience of fellow researchers in a field one aspect of relevance is the importance of a topic to a substantive field, reflecting societal values and circumstances. Another aspect is the contribution to the literature the research makes, where confirmation of existing knowledge is less valuable than a novel contribution and theoretical developments. Relevance with regard to other audiences, such as practitioners in a field, is less relevant to a doctoral thesis, which at least initially is firmly directed at an academic audience. However, Hammersley's (1992, p.68) requirement of relevance to 'some legitimate public concern' remains pertinent. The wider relevance of this research has already been established in Chapter 1 and its contribution to the field will be discussed in the final chapter.

In this study, I employed all three practical strategies for enhancing the quality of research suggested by Searle, namely triangulation, member validation and accounting for contradiction. Triangulation of methods and tools involved analysis of documents, focus group research and individual interviews, using prompt cards and a questionnaire; triangulation of data involved two groups of interviewees in different geographical areas. Various forms of member validation were employed throughout the research: contributions from the initial focus group research informed the design of the interview questionnaire and prompt cards, which were then discussed with a further focus group; data from the first round of interviews was discussed in the second round of interviews; and research findings were informally discussed with experts in the field and individual ministers. The search for contradictions within the data was an integral part of the analytic process, as an assumption of paradox is a central strand of the argument: each individual was expected to hold varying, possibly inconsistent or even contradictory positions. Data contradictory to developing theory is discussed as part of the findings.

## 5.4. Research Paradigm

### 5.4.1. Theoretical considerations

Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a research paradigm as follows:

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as for example, cosmologies and theologies do. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107, italics in original)

A paradigm consists of the researcher's ontological, epistemological and methodological premises, addressing respectively questions about the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge and the nature of the relationship between reality and knowledge. In the context of social research, Blaikie (2010) describes these as follows:

Ontological assumptions are concerned with the nature of social reality. These assumptions make claims about what kinds of social phenomena do or can exist, the conditions of their existence, and the ways in which they are related. Epistemological assumptions are concerned with what kinds of knowledge are possible – how we can know these things - and with criteria for deciding when knowledge is both adequate and legitimate. (Blaikie, 2010, p.92)

Methodological assumptions concern the ways in which the kind of knowledge that is possible about the assumed social reality can be discovered or constructed.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) name positivism, postpositivism, various critical theories and constructivism as some of the influential paradigms that have historically informed social inquiry. Blaikie (2007) offers a slightly different list of various classical and contemporary research paradigms, reflecting more recent developments in social research. The scope of this chapter does not allow for a full exploration of the different paradigms, however, as this study is framed by a constructivist paradigm, some key aspects of this are set out below.

### 5.4.2. Constructivism

In Guba and Lincoln's (1994) model a constructivist paradigm is characterised by relativist ontology, transactional and subjectivist epistemology and hermeneutic and dialectical methodology. The relativist ontology implies that:

...realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experimentally based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110)

The transactional and subjectivist epistemology points to the joint creation of data by researcher and research participants. Both reality and knowledge are socially constructed; the division between ontological and epistemological assumptions disappears. The hermeneutic and dialectical methodology refers to techniques of interpretation and the processes of comparison and contrast employed.

The discussion of research paradigms may seem somewhat abstract and removed from a particular research project. Yet a paradigm is not merely a philosophical construct, rather, it has significant implications for the conduct of research and for the interpretation of the findings. Blaikie (2007) notes that research paradigms address the question of whether and how the methods of the natural sciences can be applied to the social sciences and therefore affect all aspects of the research process. The question of how the constructivist paradigm informs the research strategy for this project will be addressed next.

## **5.5. Research Strategy**

The term research strategy is used in different ways by different authors. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) use it to describe the design of a study, defining the purpose of the study, the questions to be answered, and the way to obtain these answers:

A strategy of inquiry comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world. Strategies of inquiries put paradigms of interpretation into motion. At the same time, strategies of inquiry connect the researcher to specific methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.14)

Their examples of research strategies include case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, biographical and historical methods and action research. Similarly, Denscombe (2010) gives an overview of research strategies including surveys, case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and action research.

When developing my research strategy for this study I found a framework proposed by Blaikie (2010) particularly helpful and I will therefore discuss this in more detail. Blaikie defines a research strategy as a set of procedures for answering research questions. Here, research strategies are more closely related to research paradigms, sharing particular sets of ontological and epistemological assumptions. What Denzin and Lincoln (1994) and Denscombe (2010) respectively label research strategies, Blaikie names research methodologies, which in turn use specific methods of data collection and analysis. Although research paradigms and strategies are closely linked, he uses the term paradigm for a wider philosophical perspective and worldview, while a research strategy relates to how different

research paradigms are translated into approaches to social enquiry. Occasionally this division can seem slightly artificial, as Blaikie himself acknowledges (2007); however, distinguishing between the research paradigm and research strategy in this way allows social researchers to focus on their particular research questions while drawing on the wider philosophical debate to inform their approach where useful.

Blaikie describes four different research strategies, namely inductive, deductive, retroductive and abductive strategies, each taking a distinct approach to enquiry and therefore appropriate for different research questions. However, it may be appropriate to combine these strategies within a particular research project in order to address different research questions. Each strategy can be associated with a range of methodologies.

In an overview of the aims and processes of the four strategies, Blaikie (2010) clarifies their underlying logic as follows: The aim of an inductive strategy is a description of characteristics and patterns. It begins with data collection and analysis and generates descriptions that are related back to the research questions, producing generalizations from the data. A deductive strategy on the other hand begins with a question that needs to be explained, for which a theory is constructed, and tested through the collection of appropriate data. A retroductive strategy explores regular phenomena through the construction of a hypothetical model which is tested as a description of such regularity. It is aimed at discovering underlying structure or mechanisms. An abductive strategy takes a different approach from the other three strategies and is only applicable in social science research. Its aim is 'to describe and understand social life in terms of social actors' meanings and motives' (Blaikie, 2007, p.68). Expanding on this description, he explains:

This research strategy involves constructing theories that are derived from social actors' language, meanings and accounts in the context of everyday activities. Such research begins by describing these activities or meanings and then deriving from them categories and concepts that can form the basis of an understanding of the problem at hand. (Blaikie, 2007, p.89)

Blaikie calls the categories and concepts the researcher produces from the social actors' lay accounts a 'technical' description; the concept of abduction describes this move from lay to technical accounts.

The choice of research strategy is guided by the research questions that direct and delineate the research. The questions asked in this study relate to individuals' beliefs, the factors they identify as influences in their development and the frameworks they drawn on in their explanations for these beliefs. An abductive research strategy as described by Blaikie provided a suitable framework for addressing these research questions, in a process involving

the description of research participants' accounts, followed by critical analysis in order to derive theoretical concepts, and finally the development of a theoretical model grounded in their accounts.

An abductive research strategy is premised on the following six principles (Blaikie, 2010): Firstly, access to any social world is via the accounts that the people who inhabit it give of their own actions and that of others. Secondly, these accounts are given in the language of the participants and are based on their own concepts, meanings and explanatory theories. Thirdly, much social life is routine and therefore lived in a largely unreflective manner. Fourthly, only when this routine is disrupted, by the researcher's enquiry or other external events, are social actors compelled to consciously seek or construct meanings and interpretations. Fifthly, the researcher is required to develop procedures that facilitate this process of reflection and construction. Finally, the researcher is required to draw together the different pieces of information in order to develop an understanding of the different meanings and begin to answer the research questions. Blaikie (2010) notes:

The Abductive research strategy incorporates what the Inductive and Deductive research strategies ignore – the meanings and interpretations, the motives and intentions, that people use in their everyday lives, and which direct their behaviour – and elevates them to the central place in social theory and research. (Blaikie, 2010, p.89)

The abductive strategy contains two distinct stages: the first is descriptive, where social actors' activities or meanings are described, the second is explanatory, where categories and concepts are derived from these descriptions in order to facilitate understanding of the research problem. An optional third stage could involve enhancement of these theoretical constructs through introducing additional data within the abductive research strategy, or a shift to a different research strategy, asking different but related research questions, in order to address different aspects of the research problem (Blaikie, 2007, p.101f).

Blaikie (2010) notes that an abductive research strategy is usually associated with idealist ontology, but may alternatively be underpinned by subtle realist ontology. Idealist ontology is based on the assumption that reality consists of representations that are the creations of the human mind and that social reality is made up of shared interpretations that social actors produce and reproduce as they go about their everyday lives. Idealist ontologies may or may not assume the existence of an external reality independently of socially constructed realities. Subtle realist ontology on the other hand assumes that an independent, knowable reality does exist independently of social scientists but that cultural assumptions prevent direct access to it.



Both idealist and subtle realist ontological assumptions are closely associated with a constructionist epistemology, which, unlike empiricism, does not consider that knowledge is discovered from observation using the human senses, nor, unlike rationalism, considers knowledge as generated by reasoning unconnected to this reality. Instead, constructionism sees knowledge as resulting from human beings giving meaning to their experience of the world they encounter. Distinguishing constructivism, where this construction of meaning is undertaken by the individual, and social constructionism, where the construction of meaning is social and collective, Blaikie (2007) considers social constructionism the most relevant form for social enquiry. Both social actor, the research participant, and social scientist, the researcher, conceptualise and assign meaning to their experience.

As a consequence, the researcher fulfils a central function in the research process. The implications of the abductive research strategy for the role of the researcher are further discussed in the next section.

## **5.6. Person and role of the researcher**

Frequently, qualitative researchers have a very limited idea of where they should start, how they should proceed, and where they expect to end up. They have to accept opportunities when they open up and they will want to follow leads as they occur. They see research as a learning process and themselves as the measuring (data-absorbing) instrument. They will want to allow concepts, ideas and theories to evolve and will resist imposing both preconceived ideas on everyday reality and closure on the emerging understanding. Qualitative data gathering is messy and unpredictable and seems to require researchers who can tolerate ambiguity, complexity, uncertainty and lack of control. (Blaikie, 2010, p. 215)

There are two distinct aspects to the significance of the researcher: one is the actual person of the researcher, 'our historical, cultural and gendered ways of being' (Blaikie, 2007, p.23), aspects of the person that cannot be influenced, changed or controlled. The other relates to the specific role a researcher takes on in a particular project. There is an element of choice in this and researchers can take on different roles for different pieces of research.

Punch (2005) points out that a number of factors which have considerable effects on qualitative research are frequently not explicitly acknowledged or accounted for in research accounts. These include the researchers' age, gender, status, ethnicity, personality and background, the institution they are part of and their geographical location vis-à-vis their research object.

A constructionist epistemology implies that data is uniquely co-constructed between the researcher and the research participant. For example, had the interviews for this study been carried out by a male researcher in his twenties, rather than a female researcher in her

forties, the resulting data would likely have been different in at least some regards, even when using exactly the same research tools. This does not necessarily mean that the quality of the data would have been better or worse; at the same time it definitively would have been different. The influence of the researcher as a person also has implications for the role, or stance, the researcher takes for a particular study or piece of research.

Blaikie (2007) describes three basic choices researchers make regarding their relationship with research participants and their own role in the research, namely being an outsider or an insider, an expert or a learner, and researching on, for or with people.

The first choice, outsider versus insider, relates to whether, at one extreme, the researcher will approach the research as an uninvolved observer of the social situation or whether, at the other extreme, the researcher will become immersed into the social situation and attempt to gain an inside perspective. The second choice, expert or learner, describes another continuum between two extremes: the expert approaches the research on the basis of existing theory, data and previous research findings, while the learner attempts to be guided by research participants' concepts and frameworks. Generally, these two choices concur in the role of outsider expert and insider learner, however, not usually at the extreme ends of the spectrum: most social researchers locate themselves on more intermediate positions.

The third choice relates to the location of the initiative for research. If the researcher initiates research and participants merely respond, research is carried out *on* people. Research carried out *for* people places the initiative with an external client, the researcher acts as a consultant. Research *with* people is carried out on behalf of and for the benefit of the participants; the researcher takes the role of facilitator. Again, these descriptions are indicative and other relationships between researcher and participants may exist.

The research strategy and methodology used in this study required a researcher's role located towards the insider learner position, however, the demands of critical analysis and questioning required for academic research balanced this with a need for critical distance to research participants, and with the need to engage with existing theory and data. As PhD research the initiative for this project was clearly with the researcher, and as such constitutes research *on* participants, in spite of aspirations to carry out research *for* participants (5.8.2.).

Philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1990) emphasises that if meaning is to be conveyed, speaker and listener - interviewer and interviewee - participate in a process of communicative action,

that is, a process of mutual deliberation and argumentation. In discussing the role of reconstruction and interpretation in the social sciences he argues:

If we compare the third-person attitude of someone who simply says how things stand (this is the attitude of the scientist, for example) with the performative attitude of someone who tries to understand what is said to him (this is the attitude of the interpreter, for example), the implications of the hermeneutic dimension of research for methodology becomes clear. (Habermas, 1990, p.26)

One implication of this hermeneutic dimension of research is that interpreters of utterances, in this case researchers, 'relinquish the superiority that observers have by virtue of their privileged position' (p.26), since as participants in communicative action they become equal in status to those whom they try to interpret, in this case their research participants.

Understanding is a reciprocal process. In addition, the interpreter-researcher has to contend with the possibility, even probability, that the interviewee does not share the same underlying assumptions, customs and experiences and therefore speaks from a different context. Habermas therefore argues that understanding meaning requires participation, not merely observation.

These considerations regarding the role of the researcher, which are closely connected to the research paradigm and strategy, also inform the research methodology, which will be discussed next.

### **5.7. Methodology: constructivist grounded theory**

Much contemporary social research is carried out using a methodological approach informed by the principles of grounded theory. Developed in the late 1960s by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, for the study of complex social behaviour, the purpose of grounded theory is to generate theory from data. It involves a cycle of data collection and analysis until theoretical saturation is achieved, that is, until new data confirms the theory rather than adding new elements. Data collection follows the principle of theoretical sampling, which means that sampling at each stage is guided by the analysis of the preceding stage.

According to Punch (2005), the strengths of a methodological approach based on grounded theory include a systematic but flexible overall research strategy, clear guidance on the research process and a disciplined and organized approach to data analysis. He also points out that this is a particularly useful methodological approach in new areas where no suitable theories for verification exist. For these reasons grounded theory has been used widely for research in the social sciences and there is a large body of published research using this

approach. Charmaz (2009, p.127) describes some of the strategies of grounded theory as 'standard practice in qualitative enquiry'.

The strengths of grounded theory made it initially a very attractive methodology for this research project. Blaikie (2007, p.100) notes that grounded theory is 'the most explicit exposition of a practical method that comes close to what is designated here as the Abductive RS [Research Strategy]'. However, he also points to a disparity, namely that in grounded theory as proposed by Glaser and Strauss the researcher constructs categories by assigning thematic labels to organise the data, while classical abductive research strategies require the researcher to derive a technical description from the concepts and meanings in social actors' lay language. In practice though, this difference may not become apparent, if the researcher draws on social actors' concepts for the thematic labels and categories.

On engaging more deeply with this method I soon developed other concerns about using classical grounded theory as proposed by Glaser and Strauss for this study, which concerned three aspects in particular, namely the stated purpose of the method, the underlying epistemological assumptions and also practical implications.

Firstly, the main purpose of classical grounded theory is the generation of theory, in the sense of an explanatory and predictive model. However, the central purpose of this study is to gain understanding about CofE ministers' own perspective of their beliefs about other religions, in the context of their institution and the wider social context (1.1.). I had fundamental doubts about the feasibility of a predictive model, which would link particular factors of influence with particular beliefs. I considered this to require simplification of a highly complex construct, namely a particular belief, to such a degree that it would render the model in effect meaningless. I wondered whether, to a lesser degree, this would also apply to an explanatory model.

Secondly, classical grounded theory assumes that theory can emerge from the data without being substantially affected by the researcher. Glaser (1992) claims:

It has a fresh start, open to the emergent. One does not begin with preconceived ideas or extant theory and then force them on the data for the purpose of verifying them or rearranging them into a corrected grounded theory. Grounded theory is done without this burden and excess baggage. (Glaser, 1992, p15)

However, the social constructionist perspective underlying my research strategy is based on the assumption that every researcher inevitably approaches any research project and data with preconceived ideas and theories, as made explicit in my description of the researcher's stance above.

Finally, on a practical note, classical grounded theory requires theoretical sampling, a cycle of data collection and interpretation until theoretical saturation is achieved. The examples given by Glaser and Strauss often involved teams of researchers and substantial budgets. The prospect of an open-ended process, with an unpredictable sample size, did therefore cause me some concern in the context of a PhD thesis with a single researcher, and limited time and resources, even though I was aware that much published research using grounded theory does not fully achieve the ideal of theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation.

The first two of these concerns, and several others, have been widely discussed in the literature. Seale (1999, p.95) points out that classic grounded theory reflects a particular institutional and historical context in which social scientists felt obliged to 'pay homage to principles of rigour defined by a scientific community'.

In a fundamental critique of grounded theory, Thomas and James (2006) question the validity of grounded theory's claim to produce theory, pointing to confusion about the intended meaning of the word within qualitative enquiry:

...theory can, broadly speaking, be seen as being about (a) inspiration involving patterning or accommodation ...; and (b) explanation and prediction. In its former, looser, sense it is principally about bringing ideas together, while in its latter, tighter form it adheres to positivist and functionalist expectations about explanation. (Thomas & James, 2006, p.772)

They point out that what classic grounded theory method describes as theory does not have a valid claim to the explanatory and predictive function of theory in the natural sciences, based on 'generalization following systematic and extensive data collection, and the testing of the generalization for the purposes of verification or falsification' (Thomas & James, 2006, p.772). Therefore, they argue, theory produced by grounded theory does not offer explanation but instead enables understanding and offers a tool to map out a problem area.

Equally, the authors challenge the notion of theory emerging from the data unhindered by *a priori* assumptions, by preconceived ideas, theories, and categories:

The interrelationship between interpreter and interpretation is indissoluble; there is no ground, no hidden truth residing somewhere in the data ready to inscribe itself, just as there is no Lockean tabula rasa in the researcher waiting to be engraved. (Thomas & James, 2006, p.782)

Not only do they deny the possibility of the researcher approaching the data without preconceived ideas or existing theory but they go further to argue that a researcher's *a priori* assumptions make a study worthwhile and possible in the first place.

Taking into consideration these concerns, classical grounded theory no longer seemed an entirely suitable method for this study. However, in the decades in which grounded theory has been used in social sciences research, many variations have been developed, which have addressed these concerns and fit more comfortably with the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying much contemporary social research, including my own.

Charmaz (2009) has proposed a revised contemporary methodology, namely a constructivist version of grounded theory, which she describes as follows:

It assumes a relativist epistemology, sees knowledge as socially produced, acknowledges multiple standpoints of both the research participants and the grounded theorist, and takes a reflexive stance toward our actions, situations, and participants in the field setting – and our analytical constructions of them. (Charmaz, 2009, p.129)

The constructivist epistemology leads to a significant difference to classic grounded theory regarding the researcher's role. It acknowledges that researchers' views and perceptions, attitudes, social context and personal circumstances shape all aspects of the research process, as do other external factors, such as geographical and historical factors (Charmaz, 2009). Constructivist grounded theory sees data as mutually constructed through the interaction between the researcher and the participants, and separate from neither. Resulting from this central role of the researcher in the construction of data and categories in analysis is the critical necessity of reflexivity throughout the research process:

Granted, the grounded theorist renders these data but they arise in situations under particular conditions and therefore affect the resulting analysis. Thus, constructivist grounded theorists see the representation of data – and by extension, the analysis – as problematic, relativistic, situational and partial. (Charmaz, 2009, p.138)

Constructivist grounded theory as a methodology thus shares ontological and epistemological assumptions with an abductive research strategy and addresses some of the conflicts arising with classical grounded theory described above.

By emphasising the importance of grounding data from individuals in the wider social context, Charmaz is careful to distance herself from forms of constructivism that subscribe to what she describes as radical subjectivism and individual reductionism. While the researcher's task in constructivist grounded theory is to try to understand research participants' perspective on their beliefs, purposes, motivation and actions, the task goes beyond this, and also includes the attempt to 'locate participants' meanings and actions in larger social structures and discourses of which they may be unaware...We look for the

assumptions on which participants construct their meanings and actions' (Charmaz, 2009, p.131).

The foundational tenets of constructivist grounded theory made this methodological approach eminently suitable for this study. In the next two chapters the practical application and outworking of the chosen research strategy and methodology for this study are described. First though the remaining part of this chapter is given to a consideration of ethical issues associated with this research project.

## **5.8. Ethical considerations**

### **5.8.1. Standard ethical requirements**

Social science research generally takes place within the ethical frameworks set out by the relevant professional and scholarly associations of different fields, and by the researchers' institutional review boards. Christians (2005) points to four guiding principles found in most associations' codes of ethics, which are informed consent, absence of deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy of data. These are rooted in the three core ethical principles for research involving human subjects set out in the 1978 Belmont report, namely respect for persons, beneficence and justice.

Social research in the UK commonly follows the guidelines of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), set out in the *ESRC Framework for Research Ethics* (Economic and Social Research Council, 2010). The six key principles of ethical research set out in this framework are: integrity, quality and transparency of research; informed consent of researchers and participants; confidentiality of information and anonymity of respondents; voluntary participation; avoidance of harm; and independence of research.

As this research project was carried out under the supervision of the University of Winchester, it had to comply with its internal code of conduct for research, whose ethical requirements include voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and concern for the welfare of participants. In addition, compliance with the Data Protection Act was required. Completing the ethics declaration form helped consider the ethical implications of some aspects of the research in advance and provided a useful starting point for reflecting on the ethical implications of the study. At the same time, the possibility of additional ethical issues emerging during the research also became apparent. Alongside the general ethical principles set out above, it was likely to be useful to draw on additional frameworks to enable reflection on ethical issues and implications of the research.

### 5.8.2. Julia Laible's 'loving epistemology'

There are numerous publications on ethical aspects of research from different philosophical perspectives, reflecting different paradigms and also a range of particular academic fields (e.g. Homan, 1991; Mauthner *et al.*, 2002; Christians, 2005). However, in the early stages of my PhD research I read an article by Julia Laible (2000), advocating the concept of a 'loving epistemology', which I found inspiring and helpful in considering ethical issues related to my research.

According to Laible (2000, p.690) there are three key requirements of a loving epistemology: Firstly, it puts ethics before ontology and epistemology, which Laible points out is similar to feminist standpoint epistemologies that place 'an ethic of care at the centre of the research process'. Secondly, a loving epistemology considers some forms of knowledge production as better than others. She proposes to determine this through the adoption of criteria developed by Hill Collins (1998), namely whether research produces knowledge that speaks truth to people about the reality of their lives, equips them to resist oppression and moves them to struggle. Thirdly, a loving epistemology requires what she calls 'traveling' (sic), namely entering the subjects' world, identifying with them, journeying alongside them.

In considering Laible's proposal it is necessary to take into account the context in which it was presented. The term 'loving epistemology' was coined for a keynote address to the Campus Ministers' Association, and discussed in the context of the Christian faith she shared with her audience. Following her sudden death shortly afterwards, this address was published in an academic journal although it clearly was not written as an academic paper. Had she lived, she very likely would have further refined both the concept and her arguments before presenting them to an academic audience.

With this proviso, there are several aspects of the loving epistemology that merit consideration. Laible expressed concerns about carrying out research on others different from ourselves due to an imbalance of power. This stemmed from her own experience of working with participants from a different cultural context where she found herself faced with the negative impact of her own cultural assumptions. Her concern is undoubtedly valid although it does not necessarily justify a general assumption that there are ethical problems with research with participants who are different from the researcher. Capper (2000) points out the problem that this assumption raises:



If you believe all research conducted with others different from ourselves is unethical, then since everyone is everyone else's Other, and everyone is different from us in some way, that means research on or with anyone is unethical – all research is unethical. (Capper, 2000, p.695)

No research is without power inequities, and all research has positive and negative consequences for all involved, researchers and participants. Any attempt to avoid this altogether is futile; instead research should be acknowledged and conducted as 'openly problematic' (Capper, 2000, p.696).

Considering my own research, the balance of power between researcher and participants was highly ambiguous. While my role as academic researcher carries some power, participants equally held power from several sources. The position of CofE minister is associated with a certain amount of prestige and power that can be considered at least equivalent to that of a PhD research student. Many of the participants were older and very experienced in their roles and as such were likely to speak from a position of 'expert'. Most importantly, as participation was voluntary, the research was entirely reliant on participants' agreement. Taking these points into account I considered that the balance of power in this research project was tipped in favour of the research participants.

While I therefore did not accept Laible's assumption of power inequities favouring the researcher, at least for this particular research project, I still found her proposed loving epistemology an inspiring and useful concept in considering the ethical implications of my research.

The first principle of a loving epistemology is the central importance of ethical considerations. Practically all academic research is subject to general principles of ethical research such as informed consent, absence of deception, confidentiality, and accuracy of data, as mentioned above. However, my understanding of a loving epistemology is that these are basic requirements that the researcher should seek to exceed through an active commitment to participants' wellbeing and constant attentiveness to the potential implications of the research for participants. It is in effect a prioritisation of the principle of beneficence.

At the same time, this commitment to participants' wellbeing does not equate to an abandonment of criticality. It does not require the researcher to approve of or agree with the research participants as individuals, their actions, their opinions or interpretations. Instead it will inform situations where different, and possibly conflicting, interests need to be weighed up against each other. It may, for example, require the researcher not to pursue particular questions, or not to use and publish particular data in the interest of the research

participants. However, this course of action needs to be explicitly acknowledged in reporting on the research, in order to maintain its integrity. It is evident that this approach relies on the individual ethical judgement of the researcher, which thus becomes part of the research and subject to critical questioning.

The second principle of a loving epistemology involves a preference for research that produces knowledge that liberates and empowers participants. I interpreted this as a responsibility to pursue research whose purpose, process and outcome was or will be useful for participants, rather than just for the researcher, the academic research community, or other external parties. While the principle of justice requires a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research (Christians, 2005), this approach prioritises participants' benefits; however, it does not imply that the research cannot also benefit the researcher, or other parties.

Putting this principle into practice involved the attempt to formulate research questions whose answers were of interest and possibly even valuable to participants, collecting the data in a way that was constructive and inspiring for them, and a commitment to making the results available to participants, and others who may benefit from the research. Discussing the formulation of research questions, Agee (2009) notes:

Part of the process of developing questions in qualitative research is being reflective about how the questions will affect participants' lives and how the questions will position the researcher in relation to participants. This ethical aspect of question development is often ignored, but is a central issue when a researcher proposes to study the lives of others, especially marginalized populations. (Agee, 2009, p.439)

For this research I asked participants questions about beliefs and attitudes, personal relationships and significant experiences, and issues of personal and professional integrity and identity. The research questions had the potential to draw out conflicting constructs and beliefs, therefore proving uncomfortable or difficult for participants. This could be considered as falling short of the aspirations of a loving epistemology, even though it was interesting data for the purposes of the research. However, I believe that providing the opportunity for my research partners to reflect critically on their beliefs, and, if they wished, to acknowledge tensions and conflicts, contributes to their self-knowledge – knowledge which is useful to participants and therefore in accordance with a loving epistemology.

Thirdly, a loving epistemology requires the researcher to enter the subjects' world, to identify with them and journey alongside them. This could be interpreted as an extension of the principle of respect for the person but goes much further than treating research participants as 'autonomous agents'. I understood this as a requirement to listen empathically and to

constantly reflect on the implications of the research for my own journey and my own beliefs. It required an openness to have my own assumptions, interpretations and values challenged, and to acknowledge contradictions and tensions in my own beliefs and attitudes.

I listened to many stories: some related to aspects of participants' private lives, some held emotional significance for them, some related to issues of personal and professional integrity and identity amidst the pressures and constraints of their professional role and as individuals. Many of these stories inspired and required reflection, some posed a challenge, and a few gave rise to an emotional response. Sharing a small part of the research participants' journeys affected my own journey.

### **5.8.3. Ethical issues in the study**

While I aspired to reflect the principles of a loving epistemology in my research and was successful in some ways, other aspects of my research may have fallen short of its requirements, and perhaps of the more general principles of ethical research.

Although participation was voluntary, the method of recruiting some research participants via social contacts involved a certain amount of persuasion. Most people are willing to please and will respond positively to a request for help by a friend or a colleague. It is highly probable that some of the participants in this research would not have agreed to participate if I had approached them directly; indeed, very few volunteered in response to a general call for participants. While I judged the amount of persuasion involved to be acceptable, this approach to the recruitment of participants could be considered an area of ethical weakness.

In order to attain informed consent, participants were issued with an information sheet that gave an outline of the aims, purposes and methodology of the project. In spite of the information given to participants there remains a question about how informed their consent could be, given that the methodology, rooted in constructivist grounded theory, was necessarily unspecific about exactly what was actually researched, as research questions were refined and developed during the research.

Research tools were designed to elicit personal responses and draw out inconsistencies or contradictions in participants' beliefs or behaviour. This posed a risk of making individuals uncomfortable and producing negative feelings, which could be considered as falling short of the principle of beneficence. However, taking into account the wider principles of ethical research, and of a loving epistemology, on balance I considered these limitations acceptable.

Similarly, the commitment to ensure anonymity for research participants had to be balanced carefully with the requirements imposed by a pursuit of research quality: some relevant information about individual interviewees had to be included to retain the depth and richness of the data.

## **5.9. Conclusion**

The theoretical aspects of research constitute an academic field of its own, or even a number of interlinked fields, reflected by an extensive literature. It is important for reflective researchers from other disciplines to engage regularly with this wider field in order to evaluate and develop their research practice in their own fields. At the same time, the focus in a research project needs to remain on the actual research subject, rather than the tools used to carry out the research.

In this chapter I have considered various aspects of the methodological framework: key features of qualitative research, the philosophical assumptions informing the underlying research paradigm, questions of research quality, the research strategy and methodology used and their implications for the role of the researcher, as well as some ethical considerations. Each of these areas could have been expanded on but I have highlighted the particular theoretical aspects of research that have been most relevant for this study and that I have found most significant in my development as an academic researcher.

In the next two chapters I will describe the practical outworking of the research design and methodology in data collection and analysis.

## **6. Data collection**

### **6.1. Introduction**

At the heart of this study is the data from individual qualitative interviews with CofE parish ministers. In this chapter, the process of collecting the data is discussed, including sampling decisions, the development of research tools, the recruitment of interview participants and the interview process. In line with grounded theory, initial interviews took place at the start of the research process, preceding the review of literature and CofE official documents on other religions.

### **6.2. Data selection: sampling**

#### **6.2.1. Sample size and sampling methods**

Decisions about sampling are a central aspect of the research methodology; selecting the sample for the study in terms of size and representativeness is critical for the eventual outcome. However, an ideal sample frequently cannot be achieved due to limitations of time, resources, access and other factors, and the actual sample most often emerges as a compromise (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.27ff).

A search of the literature revealed a decided hesitancy by authors to recommend specific sample sizes, particularly in the context of research using variations of grounded theory where sample sizes are determined by theoretical saturation (5.7.).

Mason (2010) draws together suggestions on sample sizes from a range of researchers, where depending on the methodology recommended sample sizes ranged from five or six for phenomenological studies, to 30-60 for ethnographic studies. For grounded theory methods he found recommendations for 20-30, or 30-50 interviewees, but also notes that a review of fifty articles on research using grounded theory found sample sizes ranging from 5 to 350, with 34% using a sample size of 20-30 and 22% using more than 30, leaving a substantial 44% with a sample size of less than 20 participants. Mason also found a recommendation of a minimum of 15 as the smallest acceptable sample for all qualitative research, as well as suggestions of 10, or even 6 interviews as sufficient for a highly homogenous population.

The population for this study consisted of CofE ministers, both stipendiary and self-supporting ministers, formerly non-stipendiary ministers (NSMs), but excluding readers and members of the Church Army. In 2010 there were 8,501 licensed stipendiary clergy, 3,151

licensed non-stipendiary clergy and 1,598 chaplains and other non-parish ministers within the Church of England, a total of 13,250 (CofE, 2012).

In the original research proposal I had planned to interview 60 individuals at different stages in their career, with half the research participants drawn from the Diocese of Winchester, representing a southern, traditional, largely rural diocese and half from Manchester diocese, a northern, multi-cultural, urban diocese. However, when developing the methodology and deciding on the approach to be taken for this study, it became evident that this number was far greater than required for a research project of this nature. In consultation with the supervising team a sample size of 15-20 interviewees for the initial stage was agreed, to be followed with either additional interviews as necessary to develop theory, or with the collection of other data to triangulate and contextualise interview data, or both.

I also decided to limit the initial sample to research participants from the Diocese of Winchester, which, although mainly rural, includes Southampton and Basingstoke, two urban areas with sizeable religious minorities. While differences between the south and the north of the country therefore are not reflected in the initial part of the study, the practical advantages of a far more limited geographical distribution of interviewees outweighed this limitation. A geographically more diverse sample remained, however, an aspiration for later stages.

The next decision concerned the sampling method to be employed. Blaikie (2010) suggests that the choice of sampling method will be informed by three factors: the nature of the research, the availability of the information and the cost involved. Regarding availability of information and cost, it was clear from the outset that in this study simple representativeness would not be achievable, as ministers are spread geographically across the entire country, and as individuals represent numerous combinations of age, sex, ethnicity, churchmanship, professional background, theological training and ministerial experience. However, due to the nature of the research, representativeness of the sample was not actually required. Instead, the essential criterion was the adequate representation of a range of perspectives within the sample. I therefore considered a form of non-probability sampling most appropriate for this study.

Classic grounded theory uses theoretical sampling, where data pertinent to the development of the emerging theory is sought and collected until saturation is achieved, that is, until no new properties of the categories emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Charmaz (2006) points out that while theoretical sampling is appropriate and requisite for developing categories and emergent theory once initial data has been collected, it is not suitable for initial sampling, when neither categories nor theories exist. Nevertheless, while categories or theories may not be explicitly formulated, the researcher does not approach the research *tabula rasa*, and is likely to have at least vague or provisional categories and theories in mind (5.7.).

The most suitable initial sampling method for this study appeared to be quota or criterion sampling, where participants are selected according to a set of selection criteria relevant to the research topic. This approach ensures that a variety of perspectives are included, it is economical and easy to administer (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Blaikie, 2010). Anticipating potential difficulties with the recruitment of research participants, I also decided to use some snowball sampling, asking participants and other personal contacts to recruit potential participants on my behalf.

Accidental or convenience sampling is generally considered the most unsatisfactory form of non-probability sampling, as it is likely to produce very unrepresentative samples (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Blaikie, 2010). However, this method has a frequently overlooked quality from an ethical perspective: it is non-discriminatory in that it gives all members of the relevant population an opportunity to participate if they wish; nobody's voice is excluded. For this reason I decided to include an element of accidental sampling in my approach, as the weaknesses of this method would be compensated by combining it with others. My initial sampling method therefore combined three methods: quota, accidental and snowball sampling.

### **6.2.2. Sampling criteria**

The next step was to establish the criteria considered relevant for quota sampling. I initially considered the basic socio-demographic descriptors of age, gender and ethnic background, along with disability, sexual orientation and marital status, as well as churchmanship and length of ministry. All these factors contribute to differences in experience, ministerial practice and social context.

The age profile of CofE parochial clergy in 2010/11 (CofE, 2012) indicated a distribution of around 12% of both male and female stipendiary clergy under 40, with 72% of women and 64% of men in the 40-59 age category, and 16% of women and 24% of men 60 or over. Amongst self-supporting clergy 2% of women and 4% of men were under 40, while 42% of

women and 44% of men were between 40 and 59; 57% of women and 54% of men were 60 and over. The average age of stipendiary clergy was 52 and that of self-supporting clergy 58. I therefore aimed to include numbers roughly reflecting this distribution.

In 2010/11, 1,712 (21%) of ministers in full-time stipendiary appointments were female, however, women made up 53% of self-supporting clergy, and both numbers were predicted to increase. The aim was therefore to include around a third of female participants in the sample.

*Church Statistics 2010/11* (CofE, 2012) indicated that 2.8% of clergy were from an ethnic minority background; however, in the Diocese of Winchester this figure was only 0.6%. This clearly had implications for using ethnicity as a criterion for quota sampling. In 2010/11 the Diocese of Winchester had only 295 stipendiary ministers, which meant that statistically only two ministers were from an ethnic minority background. While the inclusion of one or both of these ministers was still desirable, it was not going to be possible to attribute data as originating from a minister from an ethnic minority background without undermining participants' anonymity. I therefore decided not to make ethnicity a sampling criterion.

Although I did not initially perceive an obvious connection between either disability or sexual orientation and beliefs about other religions, my commitment to a loving epistemology required me to ensure that the voices of disadvantaged and excluded groups could be heard. The *Church of England Clergy with Disabilities Audit 2005* (CofE, 2007) indicated that 3.4% of clergy considered themselves as having a disability. In my planned sample of 15-20 research participants less than one person would be expected to be disabled. I therefore decided to ask participants to identify themselves as having a disability as part of data collection, rather than setting it out as a formal sampling criterion. I decided against including sexual orientation either as a sampling criterion or as part of data collection, due to the sensitive nature of this issue. If sexual orientation played a role in individuals' beliefs about other religions, I hoped this would become evident in interviews, where participants had the opportunity for disclosure if they desired. This was indeed the case, and two interviewees identified as homosexual and bisexual respectively.

Churchmanship, or church tradition, is an expression of both theological beliefs and religious practice and I therefore considered it a potentially relevant aspect of ministers' beliefs about other religions. However, a criterion of church tradition was not without difficulties, namely what descriptors should be used in the first place and what criteria applied to assign participants to the different descriptors. Commonly used descriptors for the different



traditions in the Church of England include Anglo-Catholic, evangelical, broad, conservative and liberal (Davies, 1993; Randall, 2012); however, many Anglicans would describe themselves as a combination or variation of these, or none of these in particular. Moreover, worshippers with a range of theological beliefs and widely differing preferences about style of worship and other aspects of religious practice may be found in churches of any particular tradition. Equally, one minister may serve a group of churches with different traditions. I therefore decided not to use church tradition as a sampling criterion but to ask participants to identify themselves with regard to their church tradition, using their own descriptors, as part of data collected.

The reason I considered length of ministry a relevant criterion was its implication for the timing of ministers' training at theological college. Recently ordained ministers were likely to have received different training on interreligious engagement than those ordained fifteen or thirty years earlier. I therefore aimed to include ministers with various lengths of ministry in my sample, to reflect a range of experiences of ministerial training.

These considerations on data selection provided the framework for sampling decisions. The next step was to consider methods and tools for data collection.

### **6.3. Development of research tools**

The basic access to any social world is the accounts that people can give of their own actions and the actions of others. These accounts contain the concepts that participants use to structure their world and the 'theories' they use to account for what goes on. However, much of the activity of social life is routine, and is conducted in a taken-for-granted, unreflective manner. It is when enquiries are made about their behaviour by others (such as social scientists), or when social life is disrupted, and/or ceases to be predictable, that social actors are forced to search for or construct meanings and interpretations. Therefore, the social scientist may have to resort to procedures that encourage this reflection in order to discover the meanings and theories. (Blaikie, 2007, p.90)

#### **6.3.1 Initial considerations on methods and tools**

This study required the collection of data about a subject that for many interviewees was unlikely to be central to their daily life and therefore not a focus of sustained reflection. It was important to employ a method for data collection that would facilitate reflection on the subject and allow rich and substantive data to be collected. I developed this method through a carefully deliberated process involving several stages.

This study aimed to generate primary qualitative data from individuals in semi-natural settings, as 'informants who report on their beliefs, values, norms, social activities and,

possibly, their motives' (Blaikie, 2010, p.167). The most effective method for this seemed to be individual qualitative interviewing.

Initially I planned to carry out standard semi-structured interviews using some open-ended and some standardised questions. I started compiling a questionnaire by generating questions to investigate the various categories I considered contributing factors in the formation of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions. I became concerned, however, that the resulting questionnaire was too narrow and prescriptive. On the other hand, using just a few open-ended questions rather than a number of specific questions carried the risk of interviews being very short and superficial, and not covering relevant aspects. In addition, even open-ended questions might have introduced an undue amount of researcher influence, in the range of questions asked and the formulation of the questions, and thereby limited the breadth and depth of the data collected, or even distorted it.

A method was required that would allow participants to reflect on and express what they considered most important in their thinking on the subject, while ensuring that a wide range of factors were discussed without the interview being unduly directed and limited by the researcher.

### **6.3.2 Prompt cards**

A conversation with a colleague who had investigated the spirituality of secondary school teachers for her PhD research (Sunley, 2005) provided a useful pointer. When attempting to carry out interviews using open-ended questions, she found that her interviewees struggled to think broadly about the subject without a lot of prompting. Pilot interviews were short and did not yield data of the desired depth and breadth. A trained teacher, she then decided to use prompt cards to facilitate the interviews. Prompt cards are widely used as learning tools in educational contexts. They are usually made from paper or cardboard, range from credit card size to about A6 size, and show one or more images or words that serve as a reminder or a cue. Her subsequent interviews using prompt cards generated far richer and more extensive data than her pilot interviews had done. This conversation inspired me to consider the use of prompt cards for my interviews.

A search of the literature showed that prompt cards are used only very occasionally in qualitative interviewing, again predominantly in an educational context. The benefits are as follows:

First, the physical nature of the cards helps cognitive processing by providing a menu of items to respond to; this is an easier task than the unaided recall required when people are asked to describe their philosophies *de novo*. Second, the creative format encourages free association and allows teachers to think outside linear and rational processes. In comparison to working with a written list, the card method allows people to group ideas more easily into common themes and to see patterns. Third, it also meets the needs of different learning styles, providing both a visual and kinetic element. (Beatty, Leigh & Lund Dean, 2009, p.117)

This description of benefits led me to decide to use prompt cards for my interviews. Beatty and colleagues had used a set of 84 cards featuring concepts taken from various teaching philosophies to help students create their personal teaching philosophy statements. As I planned to use cards for a different purpose, in a different context, it was necessary to develop a suitable set of cards relevant for this study.

One possibility I considered was a review of relevant literature on the formation of religious beliefs and identification of suitable existing frameworks and categories as the basis for both prompt cards and a questionnaire. However, in line with grounded theory methodology I decided not to use existing categories and frameworks for the research tools but to attempt to develop these from original data.

I began the development process with a reflective exercise, attempting to identify factors that I considered had influenced my own beliefs about other religions, as well as factors that I could identify as influential on the ministers I knew personally. I compiled an initial list of 16 prompts, consisting of the following:

1. Theology
2. Bible
3. Church community
4. Christian leaders
5. Clergy training
6. Ministry
7. Education
8. Work
9. Family
10. Friends & Acquaintances
11. Personal relationships with people of other religions
12. Personal experience
13. Positive experience
14. Negative experience
15. Media
16. Society

However, I recognised that in order to ensure that the prompt cards reflected a wider range of perspectives and experiences, other people would need to be involved in their development. I therefore decided to use focus groups.

### **6.3.3 Development of prompt cards in focus groups**

When considering suitable participants for the focus groups, CofE ministers were the obvious choice. I decided to cast the net slightly wider, and to include people working closely with these ministers, such as non-ordained employees of churches or lay people involved in full-time ministry or in the running of a congregation. The reasons for this decision were both methodological, as this approach introduced a wider perspective, and practical, as I considered it extremely unlikely that I would be able to convene a focus group consisting entirely of ministers, the expression 'herding cats' coming to mind.

I convened two focus groups. The first resulted from an open invitation by e-mail to all members of the university's chapel community. Four women and two men responded and volunteered to participate, including a minister, two non-stipendiary ministers and three lay people, of whom two were considering ordination and one was employed by chaplaincy. The second focus group consisted of members of the staff team of a large CofE congregation and was carried out at the church, as part of the staff team's development programme. Voluntary participation was emphasised to ensure compliance with the ethical framework and several staff members chose not to take part. This group consisted of seven women and five men, including one minister and eleven lay people. Participants in both groups were given information sheets (Appendix F) and asked to sign a consent form.

### **6.3.4. The use of the nominal group technique in the focus groups**

In my professional work as a researcher on learning and teaching in Higher Education I had used the nominal group technique successfully for several research projects. I decided to employ this method in the focus groups, as it offered several advantages compared to standard focus group discussions.

The nominal group technique is a mixed methods approach used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The technique was originally developed to facilitate group decision-making processes (Delbecq, 1971) but has since found a wider range of applications, particularly problem identification, development of solutions and establishing priorities. The name refers to the fact that the groups of participants are researcher-convened, rather than

naturally occurring groups (Barbour, 2007). Table 2 describes the process of using the nominal group technique.

**Table 2: Process of nominal group technique**

<b>NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE</b>
<p><b>STEP 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every participant works individually and without consulting with neighbours</li> <li>• Every participant is given a pad of post-it notes and a pen</li> <li>• An open-ended statement (the research question) is displayed on a flipchart and read out</li> <li>• Each participant writes down endings for the statement on their post-its (ca. 5 minutes)</li> <li>• Each post-it can only contain one ending – separate post-its are used for each different ending</li> </ul>
<p><b>STEP 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants are divided into groups of 4-6 individuals</li> <li>• Each group is given a sheet of flipchart paper headed with the open-ended statement</li> <li>• Each individual reads out their endings to other members of their group</li> <li>• Endings are stuck down on the sheet in clusters of similar statements</li> <li>• Group names the clusters</li> </ul>
<p><b>STEP 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each participant is given coloured stickers in five different colours</li> <li>• Participants mark what they individually consider the five most important statements out of the large number of statements produced by their group by putting the colour-coded stickers on the relevant post-its.</li> <li>• Specific colours are assigned to signify the order of importance (e.g. red – most important, orange – second most important etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>STEP 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All groups' response sheets are placed in the middle of the room</li> <li>• Participants compare and discuss different groups' contributions</li> <li>• At the end of the session, the researcher collects and retains the sheets for analysis</li> </ul>
<p><b>STEP 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of response sheets, including counting of stickers and calculation of points for individual comments.</li> </ul>

The main advantage of this technique is that it gives all participants an equal opportunity to contribute. It allows people who may be hesitant about speaking out in a larger group to express their opinions. It also allows various aspects of an issue to be addressed simultaneously and is therefore efficient in terms of time and cost. Other advantages include minimal preparation for participants, high levels of participant satisfaction due to task completion and immediate dissemination of results to the group, as well as minimised researcher-bias due to the structured nature of the process (Potter, 2004).

The disadvantages generally associated with this method include only being able to address one issue at a time, the lack of spontaneity and requirement for careful planning and preparation on the part of the researcher, and the need for a certain amount of conformity on the part of the participants who need to be prepared to work within the parameters of the method. In addition, data analysis can be a time-consuming process due to the volume of data generated.

In the two focus groups I convened (6.3.3.), the nominal group technique was used with three open-ended statements, namely 'My understanding of salvation is...', 'Compared to other religions, Christianity is...' and 'In my experience, people from other religions...'. Thematic analysis of the comments on the response sheets from the two groups resulted in the addition of the following extra prompts to my initial list:

17. Evangelism
18. Mission
19. Interfaith engagement
20. Salvation
21. Truth
22. Fear
23. Faith
24. Religious practice
25. Ethics/Morality
26. Identity
27. Culture
28. Lack of experience

The revised prompt list was then reviewed and discussed with the supervisory team, consisting of a social anthropologist, a theologian and an educationalist, which allowed me to draw on the expertise of experienced researchers with different professional and academic perspectives, as well as diverse personal experiences and backgrounds. During a spirited discussion several more prompts were suggested and discarded. The personal stories offered in support of the inclusion of particular prompts served as a first indication of the potential efficacy of this research tool. We agreed on the following additional prompts:

29. Social justice
30. Human rights
31. Racism/xenophobia
32. Feminism
33. Travel

34. Charity work/engagement
35. Community
36. Churchmanship

Finally, I took the re-revised list of prompts to a third focus group, consisting of four members of staff from the diocesan office of the Diocese of Winchester. This group was also asked to review and discuss the prompts. No additional prompts were suggested; however, during the discussion it became clear that individuals interpreted some of the prompts differently. I did not consider this a problem but rather an advantage, as it allowed participants to use the prompts in an individualised way.

The four-stage process used to develop the prompt cards involved 27 individuals in addition to the researcher, and resulted in a set of 36 prompt cards (Appendix G)

### **6.3.5. Development of the interview questionnaire**

While I was confident that the use of prompt cards would allow interview participants to discuss all aspects of their beliefs about other religions, I decided to additionally use a simple questionnaire during the interviews (Appendix H). The purpose of the questionnaire was to facilitate the collection of socio-demographic data, to assist in filling any gaps if interview participants did not expand sufficiently on particular aspects while using the prompt cards, and also to triangulate the data collected using the prompt cards. Like the list of proposed interview prompts, the questionnaire was first reviewed by the team of supervisors and then by the third focus group, with both groups discussing each of the questions and suggesting some small changes to enhance comprehensibility and clarity.

As the prompt cards and questionnaire were designed specifically for this study, I decided to carry out three pilot interviews, review the data with the supervisory team and, if necessary, amend and re-test the prompt cards and questionnaire.

## **6.4. Interviews**

### **6.4.1. First round of interviews: Winchester diocese**

Recruitment of interviewees in the Winchester diocese started with a call for participants in the diocesan office's monthly e-newsletter to ministers in December 2010. Concurrently, I approached some ministers known to me personally and asked them to participate. As there had been no response to the December newsletter, a further advertisement was placed in

the February 2011 edition, which resulted in one response. Once interviews started, participants were asked to suggest other potential interviewees and this became the most effective way of recruiting participants. The remaining sample was recruited through networking and word of mouth (see Appendix J). The combination of sampling methods, including quota, convenience and snowball sampling (6.2.), produced a sample of sixteen interviewees, including male and female ministers, from different age groups, with different lengths of ministry and from different church traditions (6.5.).

Two further individuals had agreed to be interviewed towards the very end of the data collection period but no mutually convenient interview dates could be found. Two ministers I contacted on the recommendation of other interviewees declined to be interviewed and three did not respond to my e-mails.

The first three interviews were initially intended for trialling the research tools, namely the prompt cards and questionnaire (6.3.5.). However, a review of the transcripts by the supervisory team led to the decision to include the data from these interviews, as the methodology had produced data of the requisite quality and depth and did not require adjustment.

All interviewees, whether or not previously known to me, whether volunteers or approached face-to-face, by phone or by e-mail, received an e-mail confirming the date and place of the interview and an information sheet (Appendix F) describing the research project, including details of the methodology, that interviews would be recorded, and an ethics declaration. This gave interviewees an additional opportunity to ask questions and to reconsider their agreement to participate before the interviews.

#### **6.4.2. Interview format**

Interviews were carried out in a six-month period between 31<sup>st</sup> January and 20<sup>th</sup> July 2011. Fourteen out of sixteen interviews took place at the interviewees' own offices, usually the study or living room of the vicarage; two interviews took place in a meeting room at the University of Winchester.

Each interview started with a brief informal conversation, establishing some personal background of the researcher and interviewee. Interviewees generally asked me about the journey, my nationality, church membership and reasons for doing this research. I asked questions about the length of time spent in their current parish, size of the parish and noticeable features of the church or vicarage. I then gave a brief introduction to the research,



gave interviewees a copy of the previously e-mailed information sheet and asked them to sign a consent form. While interviewees re-read the information sheet, I laid out the prompt cards, usually on a small coffee table or similar surface. I then explained the format of the interview: the first part would involve the use of prompt cards, in order to allow participants to talk without being directed; in the second part a questionnaire would be used, aimed at complementing and completing the data collected in the first part. At the end of the preliminary part I switched on the digital recorder.

I started the formal interview process by reading out the following instruction: 'Please select the three factors that you think were the strongest influences on your current beliefs about other religions'. Interviewees then selected three prompts – some seemingly without needing to deliberate, others taking several minutes selecting and discarding various prompts before settling on their final selection. This was followed by the second instruction, asking 'Could you please talk about these prompts, explaining with examples from your life why you have selected them?'. Interviewees then talked, usually at some length, about the prompts selected.

I then gave interviewees the third instruction, asking them to group together and talk about the remaining prompts in the same way, discussing how they influenced their beliefs or expressed aspects of their beliefs about other religions, drawing on personal experience and using examples from their own life. At this stage several of the interviewees hesitated and needed further explanation. In these cases I encouraged them to repeat what they had done for the three most important influences, using two, three or four other prompt cards, and combining prompts that had some connection to each other. This enabled most interviewees to progress, although most at some stage required reassurance that they were 'doing it right'. Several interviewees requested a repetition of the instruction at some point of the process.

While interviewees discussed the prompt cards, I only very occasionally intervened in their account to ask for clarification or further detail, and generally attempted to avoid making comments on what was said, in particular not expressing any reservations, disagreement with or objections to interviewees' statements. I recorded interviewees' use of prompt cards, including their order and combination, on paper, along with short comments on my impressions and observations.

Once interviewees had discussed all the prompt cards, the interview progressed to the second stage using the questionnaire. As some of the interviews took far longer than the 60-90 minutes expected, I did not ask all interviewees all the questions contained in the

questionnaire, generally leaving out questions that interviewees had already covered during the first stage. At the end of each interview I invited interviewees to add any further thoughts on the subject; a number of interviewees used this as an opportunity to thank me for my time, to express appreciation for the opportunity to engage with the subject and to consider their own journey, and to state a desire to follow up the interview with further study or an intention to use it to inform a future sermon.

I offered interviewees the opportunity to see the transcript of their interview. Only one of the sixteen Winchester interviewees asked to see the transcript and was duly e-mailed the transcript for approval, which was given by return e-mail without any limitations.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 61 to 126 minutes, with an average length of 95 minutes; altogether 25 hours and 18 minutes of interviews with ministers in the Winchester diocese were recorded.

#### **6.4.3. Transcription**

I had intended to personally transcribe all the interviews; however, I soon realised that this was too time-consuming, as I took around eight hours to transcribe each hour of recording. On the recommendation of the supervisory team I therefore investigated the use of a professional transcription agency and decided to make use of their services. I approached a Scotland-based agency in order to reduce the likelihood of interviewees being personally known to transcribers. The implications of using external transcribers are discussed in the next chapter (7.3.2.).

I fully transcribed four of the sixteen interviews; twelve were initially transcribed intelligent verbatim by the agency and I checked and extended them to verbatim transcription. The sixteen transcripts together contained more than 180,000 words.

#### **6.4.4. Development of research**

After transcription of the 16 interviews I proceeded to analyse the initial set of data, described in detail in the next chapter (Chapter 7).

Following the initial round of data collection and analysis, I engaged with the academic field of theology of religions (see Chapter 3), and with CofE documents relating to other religions and interreligious engagement (see Chapter 4). I considered frameworks used in these contexts and themes resulting from the initial set of data to begin developing a theoretical model in line with grounded theory methodology.

In addition, I met the Church of England's National Advisor on Inter Faith Relations, who suggested contacting another expert, namely the co-ordinator of the Church of England's Working Group on Common Awards Inter Faith Engagement Modules at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham. The aim of both these conversations was to enrich my background understanding of interreligious engagement in the Church of England. Both interviewees contributed suggestions for further reading as well as their own perspectives as practitioners in the area of interreligious engagement and dialogue. As both men had previously been based in Presence and Engagement parishes, they also discussed some of their own experiences as parish priests.

At this stage in the research process, and in part due to these conversations, I decided to interview a second group of CofE ministers, specifically ministers based in Presence and Engagement parishes. This second round of interviews also provided the opportunity to include ministers from a different geographical area, as originally intended (6.2.1.).

#### **6.4.5. Second round of interviews: Leicester**

For the second round of interviews, I used a theoretical sampling method, in line with grounded theory methodology. Specifically, I aimed to collect data from ministers who engage with people of other religions on a daily basis, with the intention of comparing themes in the two data sets, and also with testing and discussing the emerging theoretical model.

I therefore approached one of the four national CofE Presence and Engagement Centres, St Philip's Centre in Leicester. According to the 2011 Census, the city of Leicester had a population of around 330,000 people, of which 32.4% identified themselves as Christian, 22.8% of no religion, 18.6% Muslim, 15.2% Hindu, 4.4% Sikh, 0.6% other religions (including 0.2% Jain, 0.1% Pagan, 0.1% Spiritualist), 0.4% Buddhist and 0.1% Jewish (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

I sent a request to St Philip's Centre, asking for help with recruiting ministers based in parishes with a majority of parishioners from other religion. A staff member at St Philip's kindly facilitated my request and e-mailed ministers in relevant local parishes on my behalf, asking for volunteers. Six ministers responded positively to the e-mail and I was able to coordinate five interviews over two days on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June 2013. In addition, I interviewed the Director of St Philip's Centre and had informal, but highly informative conversations with

several other members of staff at the Centre, again adding context and background to the data collected in the interviews.

The interviews with the five parish ministers were carried out using the same set of prompt cards as for the initial interviews, and the same process; however, some questionnaire items that after analysis of first round transcripts seemed less useful were no longer asked, mainly in order to allow time to discuss and get feedback on the developing theoretical model. The five interviews lasted between 50 and 101 minutes, altogether 350 minutes, an average of 70 minutes per interview, compared to an average of 95 minutes in the initial round.

As before, interviews were initially transcribed by a transcription agency; I then checked and extended the transcripts to verbatim transcription. The five transcript documents contained nearly 47,000 words. Three of the five interviewees asked to see the transcripts and were e-mailed these, and all three agreed for their interviews to be included.

### **6.5. Demographic of participants**

During the two rounds of interviews, first in the Winchester diocese and then in Leicester, eight women and 13 men were interviewed. The youngest interviewee was 36 and the oldest was 63 years old; there were two ministers under the age of 40 (9.5%), four were in the 40-49 age category (19%), six were between 50-54, seven between 50-59 (%), and two were 60 years and over (9.5%). The average age was 52, equivalent to the average age of stipendiary clergy nationally (6.2.2.).

19 interviewees were married, one was single and one was in a civil partnership. 14 of the 16 Winchester ministers were parents, whereas only one of the five Leicester ministers had children. Although no questions were asked relating to sexual orientation, one interviewee stated that they were in a same-sex relationship and one self-identified as bisexual. 19 of the interviewees were white, one was Asian and one was Black British. Three interviewees described themselves as having a disability.

Interviewees' length of ministry ranged from one year to 40 years; six ministers had been in ministry for less than 10 years, five for 10-19 years, five for 20-29 years and five for 30 or more years. Three of the ministers had served the first part of their ministry in a different capacity, as lay minister in the Church of England, as Catholic priest, and in a non-conformist Protestant denomination respectively.

Five ministers described themselves as evangelicals (including one 'contemporary conservative evangelical'), one as 'central rural Anglican', four as broad (of which two

described themselves as previously evangelical), one as ‘broad to liberal’, one as ‘broad to high’, two as Anglo-Catholic, one as ‘open moderately catholic’, three as liberal catholic and three as liberal.

In order to anonymise interviewees’ identity, each person was assigned an alias, which is used to identify quotations included in the thesis. I selected the alias names from online lists of the most common names in the respective years the ministers were born in. For the Leicester ministers, names beginning with the letter ‘L’ were chosen, in order to allow interviewees’ location to be easily identified without reference to the table. Table 3 below gives an overview of interviewees’ aliases, age and churchmanship; other sampling criteria are not attached in order to protect their anonymity.

**Table 3: Overview of interviewees’ alias names, age and churchmanship**

Interview	Alias	Age range	Churchmanship
	<b>WINCHESTER</b>		
1	Susan	55-59	previously evangelical, now broad
2	James	55-59	broad
3	David	50-54	evangelical
4	Robert	55-59	contemporary conservative evangelical
5	William	60-65	previously evangelical, now broad
6	Mary	60-65	evangelical
7	Mark	40-44	open moderately catholic
8	John	55-59	modern liberal catholic
9	Michael	50-54	liberal catholic
10	Richard	55-59	liberal
11	Nancy	55-59	broad
12	Thomas	45-49	liberal
13	Barbara	55-59	broad to liberal
14	Charles	50-54	broad to high
15	Chris	40-44	evangelical
16	Amy	35-39	central rural Anglican
	<b>LEICESTER</b>		
17	Lawrence	50-54	Anglo-Catholic
18	Linda	50-54	Anglo-Catholic
19	Lisa	35-39	liberal Anglo-Catholic
20	Laura	50-54	liberal
21	Luke	45-49	evangelical

including sampling, the development of the research tools and the actual interviews. In the next chapter, the analysis of the data collected in the two rounds of interviews is discussed.

## 7. Data analysis

### 7.1. Introduction

In this chapter I begin with some theoretical considerations on data analysis with reference to constructivist grounded theory (5.7.). I explain the approach to data analysis used in this study and discuss various choices and decisions made. In the second part, I describe the process of analysing two sets of data, firstly the use of the prompt cards by participants during interviews, and secondly the transcripts of the interview recordings in light of theoretical considerations.

Data analysis is at the heart of the research process and is critical to the quality of the research (5.3.). It involves the researcher making numerous consequential decisions about the data though selecting and discarding, ordering and grouping, making links and establishing relationships. Data analysis can be argued to be the most creative and the most personal aspect of the research process. Different researchers given the same data set are likely to each approach the data differently, take different routes and bring their own individual perspective to bear on the analytical process. Unsurprisingly then, their respective findings may also focus on different aspects and lead to different conclusions – not necessarily contradictory conclusions but quite possibly seemingly unrelated ones. This is both the joy and the agony of qualitative data analysis, and a fascinating aspect of reading other researchers' work.

The collection of qualitative data can be labour-intensive and therefore time-consuming, and the researcher can occasionally encounter difficulties, for example in accessing interviewees, or their willingness to answer questions. However, from my own experience as a qualitative researcher and from observation of colleagues' research work, data collection is often fairly straightforward, and frequently a rewarding experience for the researcher and the participants. The analysis of qualitative data, on the other hand, is fraught with difficulties. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.2) point to practical issues such as data overload and the time demands of processing and coding data on one hand, and to problems such as 'the generalizability of findings, the credibility and quality of conclusions, and their utility in the world of policy and action' on the other. Practical difficulties include the use and choice of technology, specifically computer software packages, the processing of field notes, and the transcription of recordings, especially where carried out by an external transcriber. At the same time, more philosophical issues rooted in the underlying research paradigm and the methodology used also require attention.

In the next section, some theoretical considerations about qualitative data analysis, and the grounded theory approach to data analysis are discussed.

## **7.2. Theoretical considerations**

### **7.2.1. Data analysis in qualitative research**

The nature of qualitative data analysis is the subject of some disagreement between qualitative researchers: Miles and Huberman (1994, p.2) note that some 'still consider analysis to be an art form and insist on intuitive approaches to it'. They instead argue that methods are needed which are 'credible, dependable, and replicable in *qualitative* terms' (italics in original), advocating a more systematic approach, which parallels that used in the natural sciences. Arguably, both aspects need to be combined for effective and high-quality qualitative data analysis: a solid methodological approach combined with an imaginative, perceptive mind set, ready to explore new ground.

Data analysis in qualitative research is commonly described as three concurrent flows of activity, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Blaikie, 2010). Data reduction is 'the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). The researcher's decisions on what data to select, code and interpret are analytical choices. In addition, 'anticipatory data reduction', taking place before data collection, is implicit in the researcher's choice of research method, research questions and sampling decisions. Data display involves the organisation and presentation of data in a condensed but immediately comprehensible format, in preparation for drawing conclusions and informing further action. Conclusion drawing and verification consist of interpretation, that is, the extraction of meaning from the displayed data. Again, this stage is not separate from the preceding stages but already begins alongside data collection and display, as the researcher considers and reflects on data while collecting, selecting and organising it. At the early stages, conclusions may be vague and fluid, sharpening and firming as more data is added and analysed, and as conclusions are verified.

Data reduction is carried out through coding and categorising the data. In the context of qualitative data analysis, a code is a label assigned to a unit of data in order to assign the coded unit of data to a particular category, thereby enabling the organisation and retrieval of the units of data.

Most commonly the data to be coded is in written form, for example a word, sentence or paragraph in a written document, such as an interview transcript or written questionnaire. Where researchers work with audio or visual sources, analytic software enables direct coding of these materials without the need to convert them to written text first. However, it is frequently more practical to work with word-based data, particularly at the later stages, when reporting on the research.

Codes can be purely descriptive, particularly in the early stages of analysis, or can be more interpretative or explanatory, referring to underlying motives, processes or patterns. The creation of codes can be approached in different ways, depending on the methodology used. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 58) suggest creating a provisional 'start list' before data collection, drawing on such factors as the theoretical framework, the research questions and key variables. After initial data collection that list is edited – codes are amended, added or deleted as necessary. Alternatively, one of various existing coding schemes can be used and refined. When using grounded theory, codes are not created in advance but drawn from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In qualitative studies data most commonly consists of extensive amounts of written text, such as transcripts and field notes, which is reported in another form of extended written text, such as a report. The purpose of a data display is to present the data in a more visual format that enables the user to grasp the information contained in the data and draw valid conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.91) argue that 'you know what you display'. Data displays can consist of various forms including tables, matrices and networks and form the basis of conclusion drawing.

Conclusion drawing, the extraction of meaning from the displayed data, is carried out through using various techniques including noting themes and patterns, seeing plausibility, clustering, making metaphors, counting, contrasting and comparing, partitioning variables, generalising, factoring, noting relations between variables and finding intervening variables (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Huberman and Miles draw on a range of studies to produce a useful list of common deficiencies in conclusion drawing, namely:

- Data overload in the field, leading to the analyst thus missing important information, overweighting some findings, skewing the analysis
- Salience of first impressions or of observations of highly concrete or dramatic incidents



- Selectivity, overconfidence in some data, especially when trying to confirm a key finding
- Co-occurrences taken as correlations, or even as causal relationships
- False base-rate proportions: extrapolation of the number of total instances from those observed
- Unreliability of information from some sources
- Over-accommodation to information that questions outright a tentative hypothesis (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p.439)

The verification of conclusions involves procedures to check for these shortcomings and can take many forms. Huberman and Miles (1994, p.429) suggest 'triangulation, looking for negative cases, following up surprises, and checking results with respondents'; other forms may include peer review through discussion with colleagues and comparison with other data or other studies.

The exact form and order of these three aspects of data analysis, namely data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification, depend on the methodology used for a study, as well as the researcher's individual approach and preferences.

Although a formalised approach to data analysis involving particular procedures and techniques, as advocated by Huberman and Miles (1994), can strengthen the quality of a study, there is also a risk that it can lead to data analysis becoming mechanical and superficial. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) strongly challenge a simplistic approach to qualitative data analysis:

We argue that qualitative data interpretation and analysis does not happen via mechanistic coding, reducing data to themes, and writing up transparent narratives that do little to critique the complexities of social life; such approaches preclude dense and multi-layered treatment of data. Furthermore, we challenge simplistic treatments of data and data analysis in qualitative research that, for example, beckon voices to 'speak for themselves', or that reduce complicated and conflicting voices and data to thematic 'chunks' that can be interpreted free of context and circumstance. (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.vii)

Instead, they propose what they describe as 'plugging in' theory, namely bringing to bear theoretical concepts from different theorists, utilising different theoretical perspectives to consider the same set of data and thereby produce a variety of readings. This challenge of engagement with theory is particularly pertinent for a study using grounded theory.

### **7.2.2. Data analysis in grounded theory**

The purpose of grounded theory is to develop theory from data. With regard to data collection, grounded theory is characterised by theoretical sampling (6.2.1.). With regard to

data analysis, the distinctive approach of grounded theory is the constant comparative method, which involves coding data and grouping it into categories. Different properties of the categories are observed and described. As more data is added, on the basis of theoretical sampling, these categories are developed and refined until core categories can be established. In grounded theory the process of data analysis is therefore particularly closely interlinked with data collection, with the focus in the course of the research moving from the latter to the former (Blaikie, 2010).

In a later development of grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (2008) distinguish three different types of coding, beginning with an initial stage of open coding, where various categories and sub-categories are established and units of data assigned. This is followed by axial coding, which focuses on individual categories and explores their respective characteristics and connection with other categories. Finally, there is selective coding, once a core category has been established, where all other categories and their properties are considered in relation to the core category. Glaser (1992, p.43), however, considered this staged approach 'totally unnecessary, laborious and a waste of time', and advised adherence to the original constant comparison method.

Alongside comparative analysis, grounded theory also involves the writing of analytical memos, consisting of the researcher's questions, comments, hunches and ideas, alongside the comparative analysis. These memos contribute to the development of theory, helping the researcher make connections, and even imaginative leaps.

The point of theoretical saturation in the analytical process is reached when new slices of data do not add new properties, or categories. The determining of this point is left to the judgement of the researcher: 'as he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.61). A wide and diverse sample is necessary to achieve adequate theoretical saturation and this becomes evident from the theory developed. Seale (1999, p.94) suggests that the concept of theoretical saturation can be related to Geertz's notion of thick description, namely 'as revealing and building on many-layered interpretations of social life, so that a rich and detailed understanding of the several meanings available for particular events is made possible'. Failure to engage with cultural meanings on the other hand lead to thin description which is 'both uninspired and uninspiring', that is, partial and superficial rather than necessarily untrue or invalid.

Finally, theory is developed from the description of the core categories and their various properties, and their relationship to each other (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Two forms of theory, namely formal and substantive, are distinguished. Substantive theory is developed for an empirical area of enquiry, such as patient care or professional education, and is based on comparative analysis within a substantive area. Formal theory is developed for a conceptual area of enquiry, such as stigma or socialisation, and is developed from comparative analysis among different kinds of substantive cases (Glaser, 1987). The difference between both forms is predominantly one of degree of generalisation and there is no strict dividing line between them. A strong substantive theory can provide the basis for the development of a formal theory. Nevertheless, during analysis the researcher is advised to focus clearly on one level or the other and use appropriate strategies to develop either form of theory.

The constant comparative method thus provides a rigorous framework which enables the researcher to move from data and initial categories to the level of theory. In grounded theory the task is then complete:

The research product constitutes a theoretical formulation or integrated set of conceptual hypotheses about the substantive area under study. That is all, the yield is just hypotheses! Testing or verificational work on or with the theory is left to others interested in these types of research endeavour. (Glaser, 1992, p.16, underline in original)

While testing or verification of the theory may be a separate activity involving a different type of research strategy and methodology, researchers using grounded theory may find it desirable, even necessary, to engage the new grounded theory with existing theory (Blaikie, 2010). This is certainly the case in a doctoral thesis, which requires an original contribution to a field and therefore necessitates engagement with theory in that field, or fields.

### **7.2.3. Grounded theory and existing theory**

The relationship between grounded theory and existing theory is complex. Even though in classic grounded theory existing theory does not play any part in the analysis of data, or in the development of theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) acknowledge that existing theories may be combined with grounded theory. This is confirmed in a later discussion of the role of theory in grounded theory:

One does not begin with preconceived ideas or extant theory and then force them on data for the purpose of verifying them or rearranging them into a corrected grounded theory. Grounded theory is done without this burden and excess baggage. Later the researcher may show how his work is at odds with other theory and suggest corrections of it or suggest synthesis of other theories. (Glaser, 1992, p.15)

In constructivist grounded theory the influence of internal and external factors on the research process is explicitly acknowledged (Charmaz, 2009) and it can be argued that these factors include the researcher's knowledge of existing theory. In general, researchers who embark on a study do so with an awareness of previous work carried out in the field, or related fields, and of the dominant theoretical frameworks in the relevant discipline, and these are likely to inform the research design at least to some degree. In this study, engagement with existing theories forms part of the discussion of research findings (Chapters 8-11). The next section will discuss practical aspects of data analysis, discussing some of the choices made and the problems and tensions inherent in these choices.

### **7.3. Approach to data analysis**

#### **7.3.1. Transparency of choices**

The process of data analysis continually involves the making of choices. These choices may be between options amongst which one clearly stands out as the best; however, frequently different options each come with their respective advantages and disadvantages without an obvious choice. It is therefore essential that the researcher explains the choices made, in order to make the research process more transparent. To ensure transparency, Huberman and Miles (1994) propose that, as a minimum, researchers should make explicit their sampling decisions, instrumentation and data collection operations, a database summary, software used, an overview of analytic strategies and also include key data displays which support the main conclusions.

In this study, sampling, instrumentation and data collection operations were described in detail in Chapter 6. Information about the database, the computer software and the approach to data analysis are set out in this chapter (7.3.3.), where I also make explicit the approach to data analysis by describing the development of codes and categories (7.3.4.). Key data is included through extensive use of quotes in the subsequent chapters on findings (Chapters 8-10) and the inclusion of sample transcript material in Appendices P and Q.

#### **7.3.2. Transcription and data analysis**

The process of transcription is at the interface of data collection and data analysis. Oral data is converted into written data, making it easier to examine, retrieve and preserve. Lapadat (2000) describes the purpose of transcription as follows:

...taking speech, which is fleeting, aural, performative, and heavily contextualized within its situational and social context of use, and freezing it into a static, permanent, and manipulable form. (Lapadat, 2000, p.204)

The aim of the transcriber is to reflect the original conversation as well as possible from a recording. However, the transcription process inherently involves a reduction and simplification of the data as, depending on the transcription conventions used, aspects of speech such as tone of voice, emphasis and pauses, as well as gestures and environmental aspects, such as background noises, may not be recorded in the written transcript of the conversation.

In addition, Lapadat (2000) notes that transcripts are theoretical constructions, not simply neutral representations of 'reality', and that the process of transcription involves interpretive and political choices.

The challenges inherent in the transcription process itself are intensified by the introduction of a transcriber external to the project. Professional transcribers often do not have any particular background knowledge about the field of research or the particular project. They may not be familiar with some of the more specialist vocabulary used, or with names or places central to the area under investigation. As they were not part of the conversation, they transcribe decontextualized data, possibly without knowledge about the time and place of the interview, and without a visual impression of the interview participants. At the same time external transcribers bring their own experiential and theoretical frameworks to the process of listening and writing, which can affect their perception of the audio data. Consequently, they take an active part in constructing the written data that will be analysed.

Although I transcribed several of the interview recordings myself, time pressures necessitated the involvement of two external transcribers for the remaining recordings. In order to reduce their interpretative influence, I checked, corrected and amended each transcript while re-listening to the interview recordings, following Lapadat's (2000) recommendation.

### **7.3.3. Use of computer software in data analysis**

The use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) has become prevalent in qualitative research:

Just as it is unthinkable to conduct multivariate quantitative analyses (like factor analysis or regression analysis) without the support of a computer, it should be unthinkable that a researcher performs an intensive interpretative analysis that

meets the standards for scientific work, without the support of a[n] adequate computer program. (Peters & Wester, 2006, p.657)

The use of CAQDAS is discussed in a number of studies and resources, and its advantages and disadvantages, in general and in relation to specific software packages, considered (e.g. Lee & Esterhuizen, 2000; Peters & Wester, 2006; Lewins & Silver, 2007, 2009).

Advantages include saving time through the ability to manage large amounts of data more efficiently; data can be coded, recoded, retrieved and output more easily. As the various stages of analysis can be tracked, the process becomes more transparent, replicable and therefore more credible (Hwang, 2008).

Dangers include unrealistic expectations of the software as a methodology in itself, rather than as a technical resource (McMillan & Koenig, 2004). Also, the use of software for data analysis can lead to a more mechanical approach to coding and discourage higher-level analytic processes such as abstraction, reflection and intuition, resulting in a basic or simplistic analysis. There is also some concern that it may distance the researcher from the actual data; this however is contested by Lewins and Silver (2009, p.4) who argue that CAQDAS enables 'much more reliable contact with source data than is possible when working manually'.

Bearing in mind these considerations, I decided to make use of CAQDAS in the analysis of the interview transcript data. I assumed that each of the software programmes successfully established on the market would be suitable for my purposes, in spite of slight variations in their strengths and weaknesses. The choice of programme was therefore based on a pragmatic reason: the University of Winchester made available and provided some initial training for Atlas-ti, which was therefore the software package I used.

As is evident from the discussion in this and previous chapters, there are numerous theoretical and methodological considerations, as well as practical choices and decisions involved in data analysis. At the centre of data analysis, however, are the research questions that generate the research project. The process of analysing data is the attempt to find answers for these questions from the data.

The data collected during the interviews encompassed two related but discrete parts, namely the written record of interviewees' use of the prompt cards and the transcriptions of the interview recordings. The analysis of the different data sets is described next.

## **7.4. Analysis of prompt cards**

### **7.4.1. Compilation of spreadsheets**

The first stage of data analysis involved a review of interviewees' use of the prompt cards after the first round of interviews with 16 ministers in the Diocese of Winchester (6.4.1.).

The order and combination in which interviewees used the prompt cards was entered into Excel spreadsheets. Although this involved counting the number of various incidences, due to the nature of the research methodology this did not constitute quantitative data analysis, and did not aim to produce statistically relevant findings. The purpose of the analysis instead was to identify trends to inform the subsequent analysis of the interview transcripts. I then considered the first three and the last prompts selected, the order and combinations of prompts used, and also interviewees' suggestions of additional prompts.

The same process was carried out for the second round of interviews with five ministers in Leicester at a later stage of the research (see 6.4.3.), which allowed for a comparison between the two sets of interviews.

### **7.4.2. Prompt selection**

At the beginning of each interview, ministers were asked to choose the three most important influences on their current beliefs about other religions, using the prompt cards (6.3.2.).

'Friends & acquaintances' and 'Interfaith engagement' were each selected by seven interviewees, 'Travel' by five and 'Culture', 'Personal relationships' and 'Religious practice' each by four. Some prompts that I had expected to feature more prominently, such as 'Family', 'Media' and 'Bible', were chosen just once or twice; and nine of the 36 prompts were not selected at all, including 'Christian leaders' and 'Churchmanship'. Appendix K lists the prompts respectively chosen by each interviewee and Appendix L contains a list of the chosen prompts in order of frequency. Findings on interviewees' perceived formative influences are discussed in Chapter 9.

As interviewees were asked to identify the three most important influences, these prompts constituted ordinal data, they established a ranking. However, this did not apply to the order of subsequent prompts, as the next instruction to interviewees was simply to discuss the remaining prompts in relation to their beliefs about other religions, not necessarily in order of importance (6.4.2.). Their order therefore primarily reflected ready association, rather than significance. The order in which prompts were used by every interviewee was entered

into a table, each prompt assigned a numerical value, and an average value for each prompt calculated, indicating when on average a prompt was used in the interview. No prompt was consistently used either amongst the first or the last in all interviews; instead, each prompt showed a wide spread of values. However, the average values indicated that some prompts were generally mentioned earlier on in interviews, while others were more often mentioned later on. The five prompts mentioned on average earlier on in interviews were 'Interfaith engagement', 'Culture', 'Religious practice', 'Friends & acquaintances' and 'Personal relationships'.

The prompts selected late or last during an interview might simply have been the least important factors for interviewees. However, it was also possible that they were the ones interviewees were least comfortable in discussing. This was the experience of the colleague who used prompt cards in her own research; she found that occasionally the prompts mentioned last related to factors her interviewees found personally difficult or emotionally disturbing (Sunley, 2005). When reviewing the prompts used last by interviewees no single prompt was used as the last with noticeable frequency: 'Charity work' and 'Lack of experience' were mentioned last by three of the interviewees, and 'Church community', 'Community', 'Positive experience' and 'Society' each by two of the interviewees. Interview transcripts were reviewed to establish whether prompts discussed last were difficult subjects for interviewees; however, no evidence for this could be found in the data. Instead, interviewees often stated that nothing came to mind in relation to these prompts, and some asked for examples of what these prompt could refer to.

Participants had been asked to group prompts when discussing them. The purpose of ascertaining the frequency of prompt combinations was to identify possible themes in the data, requiring further investigation in the analysis of the interview transcripts. Data on the combination of prompts from the 16 Winchester interviews was entered into a table to show the frequency with which individual prompts were combined with each other (see Appendix M). Some prompt combinations occurred very frequently while other prompts were not combined by any of the interviewees. The most common combinations – 'Human rights' with 'Social justice' (10), 'Human rights' with 'Feminism' (9) and 'Christian leaders' with 'Churchmanship' (9) – reflected a close and obvious relationship of meaning, occurrence or connection between factors. A less obvious combination was of 'Media' and 'Fear' (6), which pointed to a theme in the data and will be further discussed in Chapter 9 (9.5.2.).

During interviews, several interviewees proposed additional prompts that they felt should have been included alongside existing prompts. The following seven suggestions for



additional prompts were made, namely: 'Worship', 'Ignorance', 'Respect', 'Academic interest', 'Curiosity', 'Philosophy', 'Books'. None of these was mentioned more than once and interviewees either talked about these influences without reference to a prompt card or used existing prompts to discuss these aspects, e.g. 'Worship' was discussed using 'Religious practice', 'Ignorance' was replaced by 'Lack of knowledge' and 'Academic interest' by 'Education'.

#### **7.4.3. Conclusions from the analysis of the use of prompt cards**

The reason for using prompt cards for the interviews was to facilitate participants' reflection on their beliefs about other religions, ensuring that they considered and discussed a wide range of factors yet without undue researcher influence (6.3.1.).

As only a very small number of additional prompts were suggested, and ministers were usually able to use existing alternatives, the method used to develop the prompt cards appears to have been effective. It is possible that other prompts would have led to ministers discussing additional aspects of their beliefs about other religions; however, none of the interviewees pointed to a glaring omission.

The prompts used first in the interviews, or that were generally used early on in interviews, were suggested by a mix of contributors: two by myself ('Friends & acquaintances', 'Personal relationships'), three by the focus groups ('Interfaith engagement', 'Religious practice', 'Culture') and one by the supervisory team ('Travel'). Similarly, the prompts that interviewees used last or that were usually used late in the interviews came from different sources: three were suggested by me ('Society', 'Church community', 'Positive experience'), four by the focus groups ('Truth', 'Identity', 'Ethics/Morality', 'Lack of experience') and two by the supervisory team ('Community', 'Charity work') (6.3.). This indicates that the strategy of drawing on a range of sources for the development of the prompts was successful, with each source contributing some important prompts.

The analysis of the use of the prompt cards gave an early indication of the critical importance of factors related to experiences and relationships for interviewees (see Chapters 8-9).

## 7.5. Analysis of interview transcripts

### 7.5.1. Coding of first round interview transcripts

The first stage of data analysis was carried out after completion of the interviews with ministers in Winchester diocese (6.4.). The sixteen interview transcripts were imported into Atlas-ti for coding and analysis of the interview data (7.3.3.).

As described above (7.2.2.), the process of coding data in classic grounded theory begins with codes drawn from the data during initial close reading. However, having used prompt cards and a questionnaire in the interviews, these research tools contained ready-made codes for the first reading and coding of the transcripts. In addition, interviewees had made comments about specific religions and I therefore knew that codes relating to these would be required. Consequently, I drew up an initial list of predetermined codes, as follows:

- 37 codes for prompt cards (P1-P36) – e.g. P1: Bible, P8: Culture, P12a: Faith as personal belief, P12b: Faith as religion
- 70 codes for questions on questionnaire (Q1-Q70) – e.g. Q1: Age, Q31: Significant encounters with other religions
- 7 codes for religions (R1-R7) – e.g. R1: Buddhism, R2: Christianity, R3: Hinduism

As I already had become aware of some themes during the interviews, these generative codes were also added before the first reading of the transcripts:

- 4 codes for other topics: (O1-O4) – e.g. O1: Intellectual curiosity, O4: Hospitality

In addition, a number of codes relating to frequently used words were identified on the basis of the word usage count, a feature of Atlas-ti, which produces a list of all words used in the transcript documents with a figure indicating the frequency of each word.

- 6 codes for extra topics (E1-E6) – e.g. E2: Religion, E5: Respect.

This resulted in a total count of 124 initial codes. I then began to apply the codes as tags to relevant sections of the interview transcripts. Codes relating to specific words, such as the prompts, religions or some additional topics, were located in the text with the help of the word search function.

During the initial coding process I became aware of themes in the data and added additional higher-level codes, relating to particular specific words or subjects. These consisted of the following:

- 6 codes for concepts related to theology of religions (A1-A6) – e.g. A1: Exclusivism, A5: Difference
- 6 codes for analytical concepts – e.g. B1: Formation of beliefs, B3: Self-identifying statements, B6: Metaphors
- 3 codes for Church-related themes – e.g. C1: Other CofE clergy, C2: Church as institution, C3: CMD
- 1 code (D) for comments on Methodology

With these additional 16 codes there were now a total of 140 codes. The additional codes were applied in a second reading of the transcripts. After two rounds of coding there were approx. 1800 coded quotations, many with several codes attached.

The next step of analysis was to organise the codes into thematic groups (see Appendix N). The various codes were arranged into four overarching groups, namely Theological Themes, Experiential Themes, Religious Themes and Ecclesiastical (church-related) Themes. In the group of Theological Themes, for example, one sub-group consisted of codes relating to Theology, and included the following codes:

Q49 Describe God  
Q50 Who or what is a Christian?  
Q51 What is unique about Christianity?  
Q52 What does Christianity have in common with other religions?  
P01 Bible  
P33 Theology  
P35 Truth  
E4: Gospel

Another sub-group consisted of codes relating to Salvation and included the codes:

P30: Salvation  
Q53 Define the concept of salvation  
Q54 Who is saved?  
Q55 How is a person saved?

- Q56 What does salvation mean to you?  
Q57 Is there an official CofE position on salvation?  
Q58 What is the official CofE position on salvation?  
Q59 Is there salvation through other religions?  
Q60 What happens to followers of other religions?  
B4: Universalism

Other subgroups in this section related to Theologies of Religions (e.g. Exclusivism, Inclusivism) and Faith and Religion (e.g. Fundamentalism, Spirituality, Religious Practice).

Similarly, within the Experiential Themes group there were subgroups relating to Formation of Beliefs, Formative Spiritual Experiences (Conversion, Call to Ministry), Formative Personal Influences (e.g. Family, Education), Cultural Influences (e.g. Media, Society, Racism) and Experiences with other Religions.

The group of Religious Themes included subgroups relating to Views on other Religions (e.g. Religions admired, Buddhism, Islam), Moral Aspects of Religions (e.g. Human Rights, Feminism, Social Justice) and Engagement with other Religions (e.g. Evangelism, Mission, Interfaith Engagement).

Using Atlas-ti, all quotations for each subgroup were then extracted from the coded transcripts and each thematic area analysed for initial findings. This consisted of reading all the quotations relating to the different codes, comparing and contrasting quotations and establishing possible themes, as well as questions and theories for further investigation.

Findings from relevant subgroups are presented in the following chapters, arranged in response to the three research questions (Chapters 8-10).

### **7.5.2. Emergence of themes**

During analysis of the data I became aware of several central themes that ministers consistently referred to when explaining their beliefs about and engagement with people of other religions, and other faith communities. In line with the abductive research strategy (5.5.) I drew on the social actors' lay language, that is, the language interviewees used. These themes, named 'roots', 'respect', 'ministry', 'commonality' and 'contrast', pointed towards a possible explanatory framework for ministers' beliefs about other religions.

All ministers referred to at least some of the themes, and many to all of them. The themes were arranged in a provisional framework and discussed as part of the second-round

interviews with ministers in Leicester. Feedback from these ministers confirmed the importance of these themes.

These themes and the framework are explored and discussed in the final part of the thesis (Chapters 8-11).

### **7.5.3. Coding of second round interview transcripts**

As described in the previous chapter (6.4.4 and 6.4.5.), I decided to interview a second group of ministers. One purpose of this was to fill sampling gaps – the first round of interviewees did not include any Anglo-Catholic ministers and few ministers from urban, multi-cultural areas. The main purpose of the second round, however, was to discuss and test the emerging themes and frameworks.

Once the additional interviews in Leicester had been transcribed (6.4.5.), I added them to the dataset in Atlas-ti and coded them using the existing codes.

Some of the original 140 codes had only been rarely used in coding the first round of interviews, and some codes seemed not very relevant to the developing framework. Even some more frequently used codes were not followed up further, and are not discussed in the findings in detail, as they were not central to the research questions. In line with grounded theory, coding of the additional data collected in the second round of interviews was more focused, concentrating on the emerging themes and theoretical framework.

Data from the second-round interviews was compared and contrasted with data from the first round of interviews and integrated into the initial findings.

### **7.5.4. Final review of all interview transcripts**

After completion of the first draft of the findings, I re-read the original interview transcripts without any coding. The purpose of this exercise was to check whether any relevant data had been lost in the process of coding, writing and editing. I also considered whether any data contradicted the developing model or had not been accounted for. As a result, I was satisfied that the findings represented a valid and reliable interpretation of the data (5.3.).

## **7.6. Conclusion**

Data analysis was a central aspect of the research process from the very beginning and continued alongside the various rounds of data collection and writing up of findings and

conclusions. Engagement with the literature at various stages of the research process also led to revisiting and reconsidering data from different perspectives.

In the second part of the thesis, Chapters 5-7, various methodological aspects of this study were described, including the research design and methodology, questions of research quality and research ethics, sampling and the process of data collection, and data analysis.

In the next part, Chapters 8-11, the research findings will be presented, with final conclusions in Chapter 12.

## **8. Interviewees' beliefs about other religions**

### **8.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents findings for the first research question: What beliefs do CofE ministers express about specific religions and other religions in general? I explore what aspects or characteristics of other religions interviewees address – positively or negatively – and what underlying beliefs regarding other religions their statements express. The focus is on beliefs about other religions not from a specifically theological, but a wider personal perspective. This chapter draws out common themes in interviewees' statements about other religions, and identifies shared features. Establishing the 'what' of beliefs in this chapter will provide the basis for exploring the 'why' of these beliefs in the next chapter, and the 'how' – the theological frameworks underpinning these beliefs – in Chapter 10.

The findings in this chapter are grounded in the data from interviews first with sixteen ministers in the Diocese of Winchester and then with five ministers in Leicester, and as such provide a snapshot in time (see Chapter 6). The prompt cards (6.3.) and questionnaire (6.4.) used in the interviews did not address the research question explicitly: there were no prompt cards naming a specific religion and the questionnaire did not include direct questions about another religion. The aim of this study is not to establish the extent of ministers' knowledge about other religions, but to explore their conceptual frameworks in relation to them. The questions that most directly invited comment on other religions were 'Which religion(s) do you particularly admire?' and 'Which religion(s) do you find it difficult to relate to?' (Appendix H). However, the findings are based on interviewees' statements made throughout the interviews, for example when discussing religious practice, social issues or experiences during travel, ministerial training or as part of their ministry.

During initial data analysis these statements were coded with one of the R (Religions) codes (7.5.1.). Comparative analysis of data attached to a specific code across a range of respondents is an integral part of developing core categories and subsequently grounded theory (see Chapter 5). Winchester interviewees made 83 statements referring to Islam or Muslims, 76 to Judaism or Jews, 54 to Hinduism or Hindus, 53 to Buddhism or Buddhists, 19 to Sikhism or Sikhs and ten to various other religions. Leicester interviewees made 37 references to Islam, eight to Hinduism, four each to Buddhism and Sikhism, three to other religions, but none to Judaism.

Initially I analysed data from the two groups in the Winchester diocese and in Leicester separately. However, I realised that rather than the geographical context, it was the extent of

interviewees' exposure to other religions that differentiated their approach to the subject. Winchester ministers with extensive previous or current experience of interreligious engagement were more similar to Leicester ministers than to Winchester ministers with little exposure to other religions.

Interviewees with sustained current or previous engagement with people of other religions were far more outspoken and made stronger, more confident pronouncements, particularly when making critical and potentially more controversial statements. Less experienced ministers were more circumspect and understated in their comments about other religions and emphasised their lack of knowledge. Perceived negative aspects or experiences of other religions were expressed in very cautious terms. Some comments could be perceived as stereotyping or essentialising other religions and their followers; however, this may at least in part stem from the nature of the questions and the resulting process of generalising, comparing and contrasting.

In the next section I will describe the characteristics of specific religions interviewees addressed.

## **8.2. Commonly described characteristics of specific religions**

### **8.2.1. Judaism**

Interviewees described Judaism as the religion they were most familiar with, and that shared most common ground with Christianity, as well as offering distinct strengths of its own.

Interviewees emphasised Christianity's roots in Judaism and their shared heritage.

*I have an interest and respect and family feeling for Judaism, because I have a very strong understanding of the development of our Christian faith as being from those Jewish roots, you just can't escape that, I wouldn't want to. You can't understand our faith without understanding at least something of Jesus' Jewish context. (AMY)*

Half of the Winchester interviewees named Judaism as a religion they particularly admired, particularly the continuity of the tradition and the faithfulness and commitment of believers.

*Judaism ... you know, they have shown an immense faithfulness, generally speaking, for so long, in this one God that's faithful to them. And throughout, you know, some really difficult times [laugh] in their history, going way back in time. I think there is something significant about that, as a community and a body. (JAMES)*

In addition, a strong focus on family and community was described as an admirable characteristic.



However, this respect for Judaism co-existed with a highly critical attitude to the state of Israel, on account of contested Palestinian territory, discrimination against non-Jewish citizens and aggression towards neighbouring countries.

*Don't like what they do now. I mean whilst I know good Jews I still think there are plenty around that I don't...well, the whole Israeli/Lebanese thing just sort of sends me off the deep end, it's so bad. (BARBARA)*

Interviewees generally attempted to differentiate between Israeli politics and the Jewish faith. Nevertheless it was evident that admiration for contemporary Judaism was actually limited to its more liberal and westernised - perhaps even anglicised – expressions, while more orthodox or ‘fundamentalist’ Judaism was met with disapproval. Experiences of travelling in Israel were critical in tone and many interviewees described a sense of alienation in their encounters with Israeli Jews, describing them as dismissive, challenging, arrogant, even aggressive.

*And when we went into the Jewish quarter [of Jerusalem] we were treated with dismissiveness, I think, is probably the right word. There was a sort of sense...I mean obviously we must have looked like Christians - people do, don't they, you're unaware of it. But there was a sense that we weren't really wanted there, and they would rather we left...Because of my upbringing, because I had a positive sense of the Jewish faith, I was quite taken aback by it really. I felt quite ostracised and uncomfortable, and much more comfortable in the Muslim quarter, with the Muslim people. (NANCY)*

Although no interviewee described a positive encounter with Israeli Jews, many mentioned Jewish school and university friends and work colleagues; several had current close Jewish friends and spoke warmly of these relationships. Some of this differentiation between the two geographical contexts, Britain and Israel, may be linked to cultural similarities and disparities (8.3.5.).

The statements on Judaism form a complex picture, where admiration, appreciation of shared roots and description of good personal relationships in Britain was offset with acknowledgement of a problematic history between the two religions, disapproval of the actions of the modern state of Israel and descriptions of difficult encounters with Israeli Jews.

### **8.2.2. Islam**

Of all the religious traditions, Islam attracted the most ambiguous reactions. Many interviewees had at least some familiarity with Islam and several had specialist knowledge or extensive experience of working in a Muslim context. However, only one interviewee stated particular admiration for Islam, while five described it as the religion they found it most difficult to relate to, including three of the five Leicester ministers.

Interviewees admired the whole-hearted dedication of Muslims to their religion and found aspects of religious practice exemplary, particularly hospitality and the regularity of prayer:

*Oh, I admire Islam... I admire their commitment in prayer, their whole theme of pilgrimage and it being a way of life, all those are very attractive, their commitment to it. (MICHAEL)*

Nevertheless, the 'family feeling' described toward Judaism as a fellow Abrahamic religion was not paralleled with regard to Islam. While some interviewees spoke warmly about individual Muslim acquaintances or neighbours, a sense of wariness marked many statements:

*I admire the discipline of our Muslim brothers and sisters but there is - you know, that's more difficult, a more difficult place for me to go from where I am. (LAURA)*

*I need to be honest and recognise that, having done all of this stuff [interreligious engagement] and said about the closeness that I feel to Muslim friends, I think Islam is going through a great deal of turmoil around the world at the moment, so within Islam - just as Christianity did in the Reformation, and there are other people who have written about this, there are suggestions that this is a period almost like the Reformation for Islam and there is a real struggle going on, what is Islam, does it have to come into the modern world, or does it have to retreat into an older culture. And how does it hold onto the truth while at the same time becoming more modern, how does it understand its own scripture - all these things are going on at the moment and therefore, in that tension, I do have a fear and anxiety about those conservative elements within Islam that are so resistant to what they see as a modernising culture, and a decadent culture. That they are holding on to very conservative and I would feel unhealthy understanding of Islam. And I can only say that because I do know a little bit about Islam and I have good Muslim friends who would acknowledge that that's not what they want their faith to be. So I don't have a fear of Islam in terms of terrorists and fundamentalists, I do have a fear of the tensions that are going on in Islam, which I think in the end will be a very positive thing but that could well be in a hundred years. And I think in the interim, that mixed with international problems and inequalities and issues around poverty and injustice means that it could be part of further tensions and problems around the world. (RICHARD)*

There were numerous references to Islamist fundamentalism and its implications for non-Muslims, including religious minorities in Islamic societies.

*I suppose it depends on which country you live in and what kind of Islam you are living amongst, as to whether you have cause to be fearful and in some places you would have cause to be fearful, with good cause, really. Unfortunately. (ROBERT)*

Several interviewees also pointed to the implications of Muslim fundamentalism for women. Muslim women were widely perceived to be oppressed or at least disadvantaged not only in Islamist societies but in most contexts, including Britain. The link between religion and culture, and the issue of gender equality are further discussed below (8.3.5. and 8.3.6.).

Muslim communities were described as closed off, sometimes even hostile in comparison to other faith communities, particularly by the Leicester ministers. The issue of social

segregation within multicultural communities has been discussed widely in the media and the academic literature (McGhee, 2005; Kymlicka, 2010; Heath, 2012; Palmer, 2012; Howarth & Andreouli, 2012; Weller *et al.*, 2013).

Although several interviewees referred to Muslim school, college or university friends, few current friendships were mentioned, even though according to the 2011 Census (Office for National Statistics, 2012) there were nearly ten times more Muslims (4.8%) than Jews (0.5%) in Britain. All the friendships mentioned resulted from joint involvement in interreligious fora, even amongst Leicester ministers who encountered Muslim fellow citizens on a daily basis:

*There is one, I've got a friend, a woman friend, who is a Muslim, and we became friends, we met at a dialogue group meeting, and she was speaking, and she said to me, I don't have any Christian friends, maybe we could become friends. So, we became friends very mechanically, but we're still friends now, so that was lovely. I said, oh I don't have any close Muslim friends, so that was nice, we sort of set a friendship up. (LISA)*

Consequently, these friendships were with Muslims who might not be particularly representative of their wider communities – as Christian ministers involved in interreligious engagement equally are often not representative of their congregations or parishes.

As the ministers interviewed for this study are not a statistically representative sample, this lack of personal relationships may not reflect the experience of ministers in general, and more research would be needed to confirm this. However, I suspect that this finding may well be replicated in other studies, for a variety of reasons: for Muslims and Christians in particular, past and current conflicts may play a part, as suggested in some CofE documents (4.2.2). Mutual prejudice, wariness of cultural differences, conflicting priorities and a lack of time and energy may all inhibit a willingness to form friendships across the religious divide. Another reason may be that traditionally many religious and ethnic minority communities have concentrated in specific geographical areas and socialised mostly within their own communities, leading to a lack of opportunities for social encounters. Economic disadvantages may contribute to excluding them from shared social activities and spaces. For first-generation immigrants language barriers may hinder the development of relationships, particularly for women mostly confined to the home. These and other reasons contribute to a perspective on Islam often marked by wariness.

The need for increased engagement with Muslim communities has been acknowledged in CofE documents (4.4.), although no practical strategies were offered. In their absence, perhaps the deliberate approach to establishing friendships demonstrated by LISA above could serve as a model.

### 8.2.3. Buddhism

Of the non-Abrahamic religions, interviewees expressed most familiarity with and most admiration for Buddhism, yet no one queried the description of Buddhism as a religion. Several interviewees mentioned Buddhism's influence on the liberal Christian tradition, and praised the interreligious engagement of individuals such as Thomas Merton and Anthony De Mello.

Aspects of Buddhism particularly admired were respect for all beings and for creation, and the contemplative religious practice, meditation. A few interviewees also found Buddhism inspiring for their own apophatic theology.

*I actually do find certain aspects of Buddhism very powerful. It's more the issues around Zen Buddhism that I find interesting, philosophical elements of Buddhism, the ways of looking at the world and also the practices of Buddhism in terms of meditation and contemplation. Those things I find very valuable...I would actually say that those issues around meditation as a form of self-calming and of getting closer to God are there in Christianity anyway. But you had to look at Buddhism to rediscover what actually goes back hundreds of years in Christianity. (RICHARD)*

Several interviewees described positive encounters with Buddhists when engaging politically or socially, for example with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, or when travelling. However, more critical comments also mostly related to Western converts 'dabbling' with Buddhism, 'Pseudo-Buddhists - people who thought they were Buddhists but they didn't seem to quite know what it really meant', as RICHARD described them.

CHARLES acknowledged that Western understanding of Buddhism may be inadequate, as 'there are some expressions of Buddhism that people wouldn't admire, they just don't know about them'. However, in general Buddhism was seen to be a peaceful and tolerant religion.

### 8.2.4. Hinduism, Sikhism and other Eastern religions

Interviewees, particularly those based in Winchester, mostly described less familiarity with the non-Abrahamic religions. Hindus and Sikhs were often mentioned as one religious group amongst others; interviewees for example referred to Hindu, Muslim and Sikh colleagues.

In comparison with Buddhism, Hinduism was less admired; it was not considered inspiring for interviewees' own theology or religious practice. Conversely, several ministers mentioned having difficulties 'getting their head round', or 'getting a handle on' the understanding of God, or the plurality of gods, in Hinduism. It was consistently described as a polytheistic religion and there was no indication that any of the ministers, in Winchester or Leicester,

were particularly familiar with different traditions within Hinduism, even though it is probably more diverse than Christianity, Judaism or Islam.

*A faith I have difficulty with [pause] probably because I don't understand enough about it, but I do have trouble getting a handle on Hinduism [pause] but again, that's probably because I just don't know enough, haven't read enough and thought about it [pause] and their concept of God and that, you know, it seems to be a bit confusing to me. (JAMES)*

*I suppose Hinduism is more difficult, with lots of gods, I find it harder to get my mind around that. (MICHAEL)*

Although polytheism was perceived as a perplexing aspect of Hinduism, it was also seen to have positive effects in the form of Hindu believers' tolerance and openness towards other religions. Several ministers mentioned working with Hindu parents in the context of CofE primary schools and, unlike their Muslim counterparts, they were seen to be at ease with their children learning about Christianity and visiting churches: 'They are happy to see God in anything and everywhere. So it's not so much of a threat. But for some other groups it is' (RICHARD). However, although this openness was appreciated, it was also seen to be based on a reinterpretation of Christianity from a Hindu perspective:

*The temple down the road has got a picture of Jesus on its ceiling, ...it does a celebration of Jesus at tea time on Christmas Eve - but that would be seen within a Hindu world view which would place Jesus amongst other gods. Whilst you do find that sometimes people come to faith and they will sometimes wander into our church for things, I am aware that actually they will be doing so from a Hindu mindset. (LEE)*

Another aspect of Hinduism perceived as difficult were the social implications of the caste system for people who were poor, from disadvantaged backgrounds or disabled:

*I have seen that their religious views can be to us - we think, well, they don't allow social mobility, for example. And that's why you get people here saying that's why we shouldn't give aid to India, because they say, they have a space programme and loads of billionaires, but of course we don't give it to them - it's because they don't give it to their poorest members that our society is giving aid to the very poorest people in India...What I might have subsequently seen, for example, the Indian caste system, which is a product of Hinduism, is awful to me. And the way in which in some of their cultures - like I have been in Thailand and Malaysia and Kampuchea - the way in which the society doesn't really care for people who are very adversely handicapped at all. (ROBERT)*

Although Hinduism was considered unfamiliar and mystifying, unlike Islam it was not perceived as threatening or worrying. Leicester ministers indicated that they felt comfortable living and working with Hindus and favourably compared Hindu to Muslim communities in the city.

*Our Hindu neighbours were more community-minded in the sense that things like our neighbourhood forum, you know, they would come and be quite relaxed about initiatives being taken cross-community. My experience, particularly in the early days of Somali Muslims arriving in the city, was they were much more self-sufficient, they liked to do things within their own communities much more because it was kind of the new arrivals experience I guess. It has to be said, I think they found it much more difficult working with women and that was my experience. (LAURA)*

*Clearly people will be more comfortable to live within a Hindu community than a Muslim community...they are more tolerant, more peaceful and the moment you have Muslim people coming in, they will avoid that territory or move from there, whereas if Hindu or Sikhs are there, there is more tolerance. I'm not sure why but it is picked up very quickly. (LAWRENCE)*

Although Leicester has one of the largest Sikh populations in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2012), there were comparatively few references overall to Sikhism, which may reflect the smaller size of this religious tradition in the UK, with fewer opportunities to meet Sikhs and a general lack of knowledge about Sikh beliefs and practices. Positive aspects mentioned were its perceived tolerance and the generosity of the shared meals and it did not attract specific negative comments, apart from one interviewee's disappointment about a lack of interest in interreligious engagement from the elders of a local gurdwara.

Hinduism, Sikhism and other smaller religions originating from Asia were overall described as less familiar, more difficult to understand, and not inspiring for interviewees' own religious practice or theology. The lack of engagement with the theology of these religious traditions parallels that in official CofE documents (4.3.4). On the other hand, these religions, although perceived as alien, were not perceived as threatening. Critical statements about these religions focused on perceived attitude towards gender equality and disadvantaged social groups.

In the next section I will identify and discuss common themes across the specific religious traditions evident in interviewees' statements.

### **8.3. Common themes in statements about other religions**

#### **8.3.1. Admiration for religious commitment**

Adherents' commitment and dedication to a religious tradition was highlighted as an admirable characteristic of both Judaism and Islam (8.2.1. and 8.2.2.). Interviewees did not explicitly refer to the commitment of adherents of non-Abrahamic religions; however, several expressed admiration for followers of any religion who showed faithful commitment and integrity:

*I admire many people who are religious and meticulous in their devotion to their faith, yes, absolutely. (DAVID)*

*I think the thing I admire in any faith relationship, whether it's Christian or other, it's the commitment. (JOHN)*

The admiration was for the devotion and religious practice of individual believers and not for their actual religion. However, it points to an underlying belief that the religions are comparable in their ability to inspire and claim their followers' allegiance, making this an aspect of the commonality of the religions.

### **8.3.2. Admiration for familiar aspects of religious practice**

Interviewees admired familiar aspects of other religions: aspects that are part of Christian theology and practice but that they considered to be expressed more, or better, or more consistently in the other religion, for example prayer and hospitality in Islam, meditation and respect for creation in Buddhism, or family life and the sense of community in Judaism.

*I remember going out into the garden the first afternoon I was here, and hearing the call to prayer, and thinking that the practice, the regular practice of daily prayer, and what an example, and how lax I had become in my practice of daily prayer, and it was a real moment of insight actually. (LINDA)*

*I really admire Buddhism because I think that it is one of the most respectful of religions and it values not just human beings but the whole of creation. I think if I have a problem with Christianity it's because so often it's human centred. It's about man's dominion in the world, and I think we got it seriously wrong on that one. This is where we have to relearn the whole business of partnership, that it's not for us to conquer the world and flatten it all and use it all up. (BARBARA)*

The importance of familiarity was also evident in the choice of the religions that were admired: Winchester ministers with little experience of other religions mostly chose Judaism, with which they felt most familiar through clergy training and personal friendships.

Interviewees with more experience of other religions often named specific aspects of different religions, or another religion they felt particularly familiar with:

*Hinduism I would say, and Buddhism - the reasons are that they respect nature and creation, and the tolerance [they teach]... the Abrahamic faiths have a lot in common, and there's a lot to learn from the Koran and from the Torah, and from the deeply spiritual practices of my Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters. (LAWRENCE)*

*I suppose that my experience has always been that I am more comfortable with Hinduism because philosophically I know my way around the territory better. I've had some kind of fairly in-depth teaching around Hindu cosmology and Hindu practice and so I understand more clearly where some of the interactions are and, for example, you know I think I've mentioned, the influence of meditation on my prayer life. (LAURA)*

The admiration for familiar aspects in other religions had a counterpart in what interviewees found difficult about other religions.

### **8.3.3. Difficulty with unfamiliar aspects**

Interviewees found difficult aspects of other religions that were unfamiliar and that they therefore perceived as other - different, strange, or exotic.

*I think things like Shintoism I find difficult - I find it difficult with figures, actual carved figures and stuff like that I find really quite difficult. The Tibetan monks and things like that. I just think they are just totally other for me. They are just different and I don't - I find it difficult. It's just a different culture. (DAVID)*

*Well there's some I know very little about. I would say that some of the primitive African religions present me with huge problems because I don't know about them and I don't understand them and they seem to have some remarkably awful customs at times. It's the stuff I know nothing about is a real problem. (BARBARA)*

With the exception of polytheism in Hinduism, the reasons given why various religions were found difficult were mostly not theological in a narrow sense, that is, they did not refer to the understanding of God, but instead expressed disapproval of cultural expressions of these religions. The link between religion and culture was addressed in many comments and this will be discussed below (8.3.5.).

When interviewees discussed what they found difficult about other religions, they frequently indicated their lack of knowledge. This may be a linguistic device used to minimise possible offense from the critical remarks. It may also reflect the link between familiarity with a tradition and appreciation of it.

### **8.3.4. Rejection of fundamentalism**

Another widely identified theme was fundamentalism, which was seen to exist in all the religious traditions. Statements on fundamentalism in other religions by liberal ministers frequently included references to Christianity.

*I know that it's only a portion of Islamic society that will carry out that kind of Sharia law to the nth degree. The trouble is, as with Christian fundamentalists, they're always the ones that hit the headlines, and I was just as embarrassed by the guy who wanted to burn the Quran in America. And you think: this is really so bad. (BARBARA)*

*I think some Jewish groups and some Jewish leaders are as insular in their views as some evangelical Christians and that's what I find very difficult and that's what in that context in particular is preventing a sense of hope and working towards peace and bringing the communities together. (RICHARD)*



This rejection of fundamentalism provides an interesting counterpart to the admiration for a person's commitment to their religious faith (8.3.1.). The question of where the boundary falls on the continuum between dedication and fundamentalism would be interesting to explore further in future research.

### **8.3.5. Culture and religion**

Many interviewees commented on the interplay between culture and religion, the different cultural expressions of religions, and on tensions between culture and religion.

*I think we often get culture and faith muddled, because the faith grouping title is often the label that you put on the culture that has grown out of that faith, but not necessarily the faith that's expressed through that culture. (JOHN)*

Although never questioning the concept of religion itself, they showed awareness of the wide range of beliefs, values, religious practices and cultural backgrounds within different religious traditions, particularly in Islam:

*What you tend to find, just as Christians will give you different views on it, so do Muslims... Islam would say homosexuality is wrong and they would argue that it is there in the Koran but - many of the Imams and the leaders that I know have said... it is not up to us to condemn those who are gay... They are having to deal with what does it mean to be a Muslim in contemporary Britain. Islam in Iran or Saudi Arabia or another more conservative country, I suspect there would be much less tolerance. (RICHARD)*

*There was a programme on telly and this reporter was taken to see this very famous Mullah somewhere, with a very, you know, extraordinary theology about killing all Jews or something, I don't know. So he went and he heard from them and did the full bit and he was guided there by another Mullah who was the head religious chap in his little village, not so important or anything. And he said quietly to him: I believe that the duty of man is to be kind and compassionate to one another and that is faith! And he was as different as the previous guy as you could imagine and yet ostensibly they're the same faith. (CHARLES)*

Describing a 'theology about killing all Jews' as 'extraordinary' is an example of the understated tone of critical comments from a minister with little personal experience of other religions (see 8.1.).

A strong awareness of the differences between their own Christian beliefs and practices and those of fellow Christians from very different traditions and cultures made interviewees conscious of such differences within other religions:

*So what does it mean to say that Muslims are different from Christians when within Christianity the expressions of what we believe are so huge? It is quite difficult sometimes to boil it down to anything that we can agree with and the more you get to know about another faith the more you realise that's also true for them. Within Islam the expressions just culturally, encountering Muslims in Turkey and encountering them in Saudi Arabia, completely different. You know, really*

*interesting when the Somalis arrived in Leicester because their expression of Islam is really different. (LAURA)*

*I respect the power of religion to do good and ill. So in that sense I fear other faiths but then I fear my own. I listen to American Bible Belt Baptists and I get very frightened and in a sense they have their [fingers] on more triggers than even more obvious characters. (CHARLES)*

The complexity of the link between culture and religion was also noted in comments on Muslims' perception of Christianity in relation to Western secular culture and values:

*And my perception has always been that actually Muslims don't have a big problem with Christians as such, they have a problem with the secular Western world. Decadent Western world, as they would see it. (BARBARA)*

*Particularly the Muslims, I think, think that Christians should speak up a bit more definitively on morality and things, in our country. (ROBERT)*

In discussions of what religions interviewees found difficult to relate to, some indicated that they found particular cultural expressions of other religions difficult but not necessarily the religion itself.

*I think, it's probably not religion, but more some of the cultural underpinning for some of my neighbours from other faith traditions. I think, it's, you know, some of the practices of the Muslim communities here which, I think, are not strictly to do with faith, but more to do with culture, I do find very difficult. (LINDA)*

This is an intriguing differentiation, as religions only exist in their various historical and cultural expressions rather than in some pure form unadulterated by cultural influences. It may express an underlying assumption that the 'real' version of the other religion is one that is most acceptable to interviewees' own Christian and Western values, which links in with the rejection of fundamentalist expressions of religions (8.3.4.).

Some comments about cultural expressions of religions were only peripherally about religion but addressed the tensions inherent in multiculturalism, between religious and cultural tolerance on one side, and gender equality and the rights of minorities on the other:

*I guess where that then comes against the crunchy stuff is, for example, female genital mutilation was an issue [in the parish]. It was commonly practised and I can remember having the conversations with the GP about how do we on the one hand offer appropriate hospitality and build good relationships with this community, when their attitudes, particularly to women, are a really long way from where we are with all of that? (LAURA)*

Many of the statements on culture and religion related specifically to the experience of women.

### 8.3.6. Equality of women and minorities

A recurrent theme in most interviews was the issue of gender equality in other religions, and to a lesser degree equality for minority groups, such as homosexual or disabled people.

*The Jain community ... there are actually five different Jain communities that all use [the Jain temple], and one of the communities does not believe that women have a soul. It is, aaaargh, I find that very difficult. (LINDA)*

*I have really found that the Baha'i faith is very difficult to relate to, because I have had a bit of, I had quite a lot of dialogue actually, with Baha'is, because we have got a fairly large group of Baha'i people in Leicester, so I know people individually, and they're a fairly modern faith and they proclaim to be inclusive and open-minded, and particularly on gender equality and homosexuality, I don't find them to be that. So, again, it's on the ethical, moral issues, I find that there's a difference in what they proclaim to be and actually what they are. (LISA)*

Although the subjects of equality and human rights were a concern in all the religions – perhaps with the exception of Buddhism – the majority of the comments addressed the experience of Muslim women (see 8.2.2.):

*The narrow bigotry of some of the more extreme forms of Islam, for instance, are used for repression basically, and I do have a problem with that. I don't have a problem with a woman wanting to wear a burka. I do have a problem when a woman is not allowed to take it off. And I speak here as a Western woman who would find those kind of male driven restrictions very, very hard. And I get inflamed by cultures that insist that adultery is the fault of the woman by and large. (BARBARA)*

*I get the impression with Islam that they are quite hard on women, particularly the daughters. (ROBERT)*

All three female interviewees in Leicester referred to the practical limitations Muslim women in the city encountered.

*The fact that only men can go to the local mosque here is something that irritates me. (LINDA)*

*In our local community, I think one of the big issues is feminism, because [the local mosque] doesn't have a prayer room for women, and that would be one of the biggest issues for me as a women, and a practicing women of faith here, that's one of the things that I see is an injustice for local Muslim women, as well as, I suppose, it's a bit of an injustice for all women, really, in the fact that they're not able to go and worship or pray over there. (LISA)*

However, one female minister questioned Western perception of Muslim women's experience:

*We tend to think of Muslim women as shut away, not having any rights, the male is the dominant one in the household and the women because they are segregated are seen as inferior. I remember when I went to Jordan on holiday I visited as part of - we were staying with a group of Christian missionaries - we were a group of six or seven, and we went to a church service in Amman on a Sunday morning. That was a*

*Christian service, it was all in Arabic, but we were separated men and women, how that felt actually going into a service and we were separated off. We weren't to be with the men. I will always remember this woman telling me what it was like for the women. That we weren't to think of them as not liberated. Actually they were liberated because they had enormous power because they were with the children. They had a huge amount of freedom. They weren't blocked from Western ideas at all. They were watching all the soaps, all the English and American soaps, and actually although they had meals separately from the men, the children went sort of between both of them, they had an enormous amount of freedom but in a different way from us. So they - these were very modern women who were being sucked into Western values. But had she not visited them, had she not been part of it, she would not have realised that. She would have just seen them as being less - less free.*  
(SUSAN)

This account conveyed considerable ambiguity: through her tone of voice the interviewee first expressed her own uneasiness at having to sit separately from the men in a church service. Nevertheless she was prepared to accept the notion of 'an enormous amount of freedom but in a different way from us' for the Jordanian Muslim women who were segregated in their homes. They are described as 'liberated' and 'having enormous power' because they 'were with the children' and because they were exposed to Western ideas and values through watching TV soaps. This interviewee seemed to try very hard not to be judgemental or negative; however, the overgenerous use of positive adjectives in her account actually serves to convey an underlying uneasiness. The experience and circumstances of these women quite clearly would not have constituted an expression of power, freedom or liberation for the interviewee herself. SUSAN's account therefore again illustrates the tensions between different human goods – tolerance and equality – inherent in multiculturalism (see 8.3.5.).

Having highlighted common themes in the content of interviewees' statements about other religions, I will now address shared features of interviewees' statements, namely aspects of the arguments offered in support of their beliefs.

## **8.4. Features of interviewees' responses**

### **8.4.1. The central role of personal experience**

As interviewees were asked to give examples from their own lives when discussing their beliefs about other religions, they unsurprisingly spoke widely about experiences and relationships with people of other religions.

However, these experiences were sometimes given an unexpectedly central role in not just informing, but defining and justifying beliefs about other religions. An example for this is a story told by LISA:

*I remember one particular experience that I've told people on numerous occasions. I was going to see a Muslim Children and Women's group, in Brixton, I was going to talk to them about helping them develop their project further, and it was a very sunny day and it was a very nice day, and I like London in the sun, and I remember walking towards the centre, because they hired a community centre, and seeing the women and children in the playground and I remember thinking, wow, they look so happy and so peaceful, and this really is, I suppose, a slice of what heaven should be like.*

*And for me, I thought, well, what am I saying as a Christian, who is kind of invited into the Gates of Heaven, if you like, and I kind of knew at that moment really, I suppose, the kind of pluralist perspective, but didn't know about the typology at that point, because I hadn't studied any theology of religion, so I didn't know that that typology existed, but knew really, for me, at that point, in my personal faith, I didn't think that anybody was saved, if you like, using that kind of language, more than anybody else, and that kind of one experience has come back to me as I've been doing dialogue with Muslims and Christians in this area particularly, and also doing a little bit of studying theology of religions has cemented that for me even further. Yes, so that was quite an important experience really. (LISA)*

Another example is MARY's account:

*I think there's a lot of evil power in Buddhism. I have a friend who is Japanese, who is a mature Christian...who converted to Christianity when she was a teenager in Japan, and then came to England and got involved with the church and met and married a British man. And we went on holiday with her and her husband and their two children, and the children are the same age as our two, and we went to Thailand on holiday with the two families together, when our children were teenagers. And we were doing the tourist bit, you know, we were staying in a hotel and we were going round the sights, and then as part of the deal...there was a trip to visit a very famous temple came up and she said, 'well, I'm not going, I couldn't possibly, possibly go'. So she said, 'well, you can go'. So I said, 'well, why can I go and you can't go', and she said, 'well, because Buddhism is evil' she said, 'and if you've never had anything to do with it, it can't get you' she said, 'but I had to be delivered from what Buddhism had done to me in my life and I can't go back'...I was totally amazed because here's a very down-to-earth girl, very anglicised, well westernised really, not anglicised but westernised. Committed Christian, you know, very involved in the church, husband involved in the church, and here's this girl saying to me: you don't understand what really is going on in Buddhism and it is not just neutral, or it's not just not Christianity and not following the teachings that we believe are true, but actually that there is some evil in it. And she tells some fairly hairy stories about Buddhism and what had happened and what - the hold it had on people and the fear it - that people live with fear, again, that it was a religion of fear. (MARY)*

Interviewees seemed to consider personal experience, particularly their own but also that of friends or family, a reliable foundation and adequate justification for their beliefs about other religions. This feature is linked closely to the theme of familiarity (8.3.2.). The central role of personal experience in beliefs about other religions is further explored in Chapter 9.

#### **8.4.2. Differentiation between religious individuals and religions**

Interviewees were careful to distinguish between individuals from a different religious tradition on one hand and the religions as systems and communities of belief and practice on the other.

Some interviewees also differentiated between religion as personal, practised faith and as part of a person's cultural identity.

*Yes, so in terms of my experience and post-travel and personal relationships I would see that you can have devout practising believers of any faith and you can also have the most hypocritical false examples of any faith. And it wouldn't matter which one it was. I am sure I have seen examples of that a lot. So on the one hand I think about the fantastic hospitality that a Muslim family would extend to you. And the way in which some of those men if they were in a different culture would behave very differently towards women, for example. You would find that amongst those who are nominally from a Christian country as well. (ROBERT)*

*I suppose in my mind, it's the subtlety between a practising belief group, you know, an owner of a belief they practice, or an owner of a belief that just shapes - the majority of taxi drivers in this area are Muslims, and they don't stop at three o'clock for prayers because they're working. But some of them would, but the majority wouldn't, because they're Muslims by culture, not by practising faith. (JOHN)*

Irrespective of their theological position on other religions, their churchmanship or the extent of their current or previous interreligious engagement, all interviewees acknowledged and respected, even admired, the personal faith of some individuals from other religions and its expression in faithful religious practice, in a morally good life, and in charitable giving and service (8.3.1.). This did not necessarily imply admiration for the religion however. Equally, the particular expression of an individual's faith was not seen to be representative of the religion overall (see 8.3.4.).

#### **8.4.3. Centrality of the Christian perspective**

Interviewees principally considered other religions from a Christian perspective. They compared and contrasted other religions with Christianity, or rather, their own understanding of Christianity, clearly speaking from within the Christian tradition and not from a more 'neutral' or 'objective' vantage point outside the religions, as for example a non-religious person, or an academic in the Religious Studies field might do.

Other religions were discussed in terms of Christian beliefs, practices and values.

Interviewees valued aspects of other religions familiar from their own tradition (8.3.2.) but found difficult what was unfamiliar and foreign to it (8.3.3.). The standard point of reference for interviewees, the benchmark for comparison, was Christianity, particularly as practised by

Anglicans. It would, for example, be interesting to explore whether Catholic or Orthodox priests share CofE ministers' difficulties with religious statutory in Eastern religions to quite the same extent.

A question to consider in this context is whether some interviewees emphasised the similarities between Christianity and other religions, while others emphasised the differences, and if so, whether this was linked to specific characteristics of the respective interviewees. For instance, a minister's theology of religions could be expected to produce an emphasis either on the commonalities or on the differences between the religions (3.3.). Pluralist ministers could be expected to emphasise similarities, whereas those with exclusivist, inclusivist and particularist theologies of religions could be expected to emphasise the differences. However, while this could be observed in some interviews, it was not the case in others. Based on the interview data, ministers' theology of religions could not be linked conclusively to framing other religions in terms of similarity or difference as all interviewees made statements emphasising similarity as well as difference.

Alternatively, familiarity with other religions, either through current involvement or through substantial previous experience, might be expected to lead to a greater emphasis on either similarity or difference. A minister with mainly positive experiences working with other religions would emphasise the similarities, a minister with negative experiences would emphasise the differences, and ministers with little previous or current exposure would be neutral. Again, this hypothesis was not borne out in the data, as extent of current or previous exposure to or interaction with people of other religions did not translate into a clear emphasis on either similarities or differences.

What then explains ministers framing other religions both in terms of similarity and of difference? What factors affected whether a minister emphasised one or other position in a statement? A possible explanation could come from considering the social group the interviewee identified with in the context of their statement.

#### **8.4.4. Interviewees' alternative perspectives**

Each individual belongs to multiple social groups; consequently, depending on the context of their statement, interviewees spoke from the perspective of a member of different social groups: for example, while at one point an interviewee might have identified as Christian, as opposed to Muslim or Buddhist, in another context they identified as a religious person alongside Muslims and Buddhists, but as opposed to non-religious people. In yet another

context, they identified as a liberal person alongside fellow liberal non-religious people as opposed to fundamentalist fellow Christians. Each interview contained instances of interviewees giving different perspectives as a consequence of identifying with different social groups, as the following examples illustrate.

Many interviewees identified as a religious person, or person of faith, alongside other people of faith from whatever religion, as opposed to people with no faith:

*Yes, I think it affects [a relationship] positively to have a faith. I think there is greater understanding between people of faith...Someone asked [a Christian married to a Muslim]: is it hard to live with a Muslim? And she said: actually, it is harder for people who live with someone who has no faith. It is easier for me because actually we have shared ground. (SUSAN)*

*I recognise the difficulty that the kind of, the Muslim understanding of faith as being wholly integrated into society, the difficulty that that gives them in how to engage with the materialistic Western world, and I would have some sympathy with that difficulty that they have because that's something that increasingly Christians, I would say, are having. (LEE)*

*So thinking particularly of our Jewish friends...I thought we had more in common than with those of no faith. (AMY)*

All the female interviewees at some point focused on their identity as women, either as female as opposed to male Anglicans, or as women as opposed to men of any religion or none.

*When I was at university I became quite politicised as a feminist, and the whole issue about women's ordination in the Church of England... So, all those experiences of the role of women of faith, within institutional structures. (LINDA)*

*It's quite important here, you know, gender is quite important in terms of how you can interact with people and the access that you have into communities...the relationships between us have been strengthened over the last three years, yes, and I'm sure the access into that community was because I was a woman, first and foremost really, even before being a Christian minister. (LISA)*

Liberal ministers frequently placed themselves alongside liberal believers of other religions, or non-religious liberals, as opposed to evangelical, traditionalist or fundamentalist fellow Christians, as these examples show:

*Living in a city like this, you're really conscious of the extent to which, you know, it's the more liberal end of Muslims who are involved in the intercultural, interfaith conversation who are in leadership. There are plenty of people who don't agree with them, just as our Bishop gets it in the neck from the more evangelical, slightly kind of more hard-line members of his own flock. I mean there are Anglican clergy in this diocese who think we spend far too much time and resource on conversing with other faiths when we should be out there winning souls for Jesus. (LAURA)*

*The one thing that really gets me angry and turns me off is fundamentalism. Now, I don't like fundamentalism in the Christian faith just as much as I don't like Jewish fundamentalism or Muslim fundamentalism. (BARBARA)*



There were also examples of interviewees identifying as clergy or ‘religious practitioner’ alongside clergy of other religions, as opposed to lay people:

*Just seeing the difficulties that he [the local imam] has had in relation to his own constituency and getting them to support...which is similar to what I have in my own congregation. (LEE)*

*As a religious practitioner, I suppose, as a priest, the fact that I have frequent calls to conduct, preside, officiate at Christian religious ceremonies of all sorts and shapes and descriptions, which I'm aware have strong meaning and integrity and sometimes a transcendence and all sorts that can be deeply, deeply moving and significant to fellow worshipers and indeed with more passers-by, makes me inherently respectful of other religious practices and rituals which I don't understand or don't know about. So if I see something on television and for a religious ceremony with people wearing funny clothes or moving in a certain way which looks peculiar, I don't tend to think: what a load of weirdoes, I tend to think: hmm, that's probably what I look like from the outside as well. (AMY)*

Another example is of an interviewee identifying as Western alongside others with Western social values, as opposed to other cultural and religious groups – including Christianity – with non-Western social values.

*I think there's alternative ways of society, but working out that right - because I wouldn't want to justify the Taliban - and how to engage without being - without imposing Western values, to say that those are Christian values, believing in feminism. And it's again an interesting one with my orthodoxy. I am a strong believer in female ordination. And I see culturally in the East that the Eastern church is linked to Muslims in their social values. They don't seem to me any different there. (WILLIAM)*

The different perspectives expressed by each of the interviewees reflected fluid and competing personal and social identities. Similarly, the frequency with which interviewees drew on specific perspectives varied; some interviewees hinted at a hierarchy of identities: ‘I was a woman, first and foremost really, even before being a Christian minister’ (LISA).

This feature of identification with different social groups could be usefully explored from a sociological perspective drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1978, 1999; Reicher, Spears & Haslam, 2010; Ellemers & Haslam, 2011) and self-categorization theory (Turner, 1978, 1999; Turner & Reynolds, 2011).

## **8.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the beliefs about other religions my interviewees expressed during the interviews. I have first described what characteristics of specific other religions they discussed and then identified common themes.

I have shown that interviewees discussed other religions mostly in terms of their similarities with and differences from Christianity. This was not necessarily an expression of religiocentrism, the 'conviction that a person's own religion is more important or superior to other religions' (Corsini, 1999, p.827), but rather a reflection of their personal and social identification as Christians. At the same time, interviewees were conscious of the imprecise nature of category labels, particularly those referring to the religions, including Christianity. Although other religions were observed from a Christian perspective, commonalities between the religions were nevertheless widely acknowledged.

Ministers differentiated individual and collective dimensions of religious faith, with individual persons of faith distinguished from religions as systems and communities of belief and practice. An individual's religion was viewed as just one amongst several factors affecting social categorization: difference or similarity to the religious other was equally likely to be based on factors such as gender, role or outlook. The other person was encountered as an individual who, amongst other things, had a particular religious faith, but was not always or exclusively perceived as a representative of the other religion. Hedges (2010, p.83f) observes that '...our identities, including our religious identities, are multivalent phenomena'. Interviewees showed awareness of the complexity both of their own identity and that of others. The varying perspectives interviewees expressed during the interviews reflected their own different personal and social identities.

The complex net of personal and social identities that combine to construct a person's religious identity can be described as follows:

Religious identity is, above all, a discourse of boundaries, relatedness and otherness, on the one hand, and encompassment and inclusiveness, on the other – and of the powerful forces that are perceived to challenge, contest and preserve these distinctions and unities. In this sense the conjunction of religion and identity is both more, and less, than religion, seen broadly as a world-encompassing way of life relating to the sacred, and identity, as the locus of self and subjectivity. (Werbner, 2010, p.233)

The complexity of religious identity is linked intricately to the development of beliefs about self and religious others. In the next chapter I will discuss factors that the CofE ministers interviewed considered most influential on their beliefs about other religions.

## **9. Perceived formative influences on interviewees' beliefs about other religions**

### **9.1. Introduction**

This chapter addresses the second research question: What factors do CofE ministers consider the main influences on their beliefs about other religions? Having investigated which aspects of other religions interviewees addressed, and established common themes and features of their statements (Chapter 8), this question approaches interviewees' beliefs about other religions from a different angle: it explores their understanding or sense of why they believe what they believe. The perceived formative influences on beliefs add an interpretive layer to an understanding of these beliefs.

The findings in this chapter are exclusively grounded in the interview data. I explore what research participants identified as the most significant influences at that particular moment in time and do not either corroborate or disprove their perceptions through observation of their activities, or other external data. Interviewees' own appraisals of what has most influenced their beliefs are accepted as valid data; however, their description as 'perceived' acknowledges their partial and subjective nature.

At the beginning of each interview participants were asked to choose from the 36 prompt cards the three factors that they considered the most important influences on their beliefs about other religions (6.4.2.). An overview of individual choices is included in Appendix K. I analysed different groups of interviewees' use of prompts, comparing by sex, age, church tradition and theology of religions. There were no major discernible patterns for any of these groups; interviewees selected prompts in an individual and unpredictable manner.

In the next sections I first discuss the most frequently selected prompts, namely 'Friends & acquaintances' and 'Personal relationships', 'Interfaith engagement' and the four prompts relating to experience – positive, negative, personal and lack of experience. I then address factors that I had expected to be considered significant influences, on the basis of personal reflection and the focus group discussions, but that were selected by fewer or even none of the interviewees, namely 'Family', 'Media', 'Clergy training', 'Christian leaders' and 'Bible'.

When analysing the data, I first examined interviewees' discussions of the prompts selected as the main influences on their beliefs about other religions at the start of each interview (6.4.2.). I then identified and reviewed all statements referring to the relevant factor made throughout the interviews, to develop a more detailed and comprehensive picture. In

accordance with grounded theory (5.7), I noted key concepts in different interviewees' comments and established descriptive categories - the context, the characteristics and the consequences of the relationships and experiences - and then interpretive, conceptual categories.

## 9.2. 'Friends & acquaintances' and 'Personal relationships'

The prompt 'Friends & acquaintances' was selected as a main influence by seven interviewees; in addition, 'Personal relationships' was selected four times. Interviewees were not provided with definitions for the prompts and used these two interchangeably; statements relating to both are therefore examined together.

The majority of interviewees discussed relationships that predated their ordained ministry. They spoke about friends of other religions at school, at college or university, or when living and working abroad. All these relationships arose naturally out of the context of their everyday lives; they were incidental rather than intentional, unlike some of the relationships described when discussing interreligious engagement (9.3.).

Two interviewees described personal relationships formed in the context of their ministry: WILLIAM had worked as a missionary in a predominantly Muslim country and described friendships with local people; LEE had previously noted an absence of relationships with people of other religions before his move to his multi-faith Leicester parish:

*The 'Friends & acquaintances' which was the first one that I picked out – I could have picked up 'Personal relationships' – because having ministered for ten years in a very white part of [rural area] and then moved into the city four years ago, and coming to the whole issue of interfaith as an evangelical minister, what I found was people to talk with – shop owners and people who came onto my radar just in relation to building community – and so I've ended up having conversations with people and I've come to understand some things about what they believe, particularly Muslims, simply through conversation with them. So rather than theology as distilled into books, I would say that it's through friends and acquaintances that I've come to understand some of their thoughts about giving, ... about morality, ...about worship, ...about observance of the worshipping day. (LEE)*

Both LEE and WILLIAM chose a relationship prompt rather than 'Interfaith engagement', 'Mission' or 'Evangelism' to describe these encounters. This may reflect their informal context but may also indicate a perception of the other person as an individual, rather than solely a representative of their respective religion (see 8.4.2.). Several interviewees emphasised that another person's religious faith should be irrelevant to a relationship:

*I hope [a person's religion] wouldn't affect any friendship I might have with that [person] as an individual, because my friendship with that individual would be an*

*individual, not a faith-based friendship. Because if it was a faith-based friendship, I would not have a [real] friendship with them. (JOHN)*

*For most of us [a person's religion] isn't an issue when we meet people, unless we choose to make it one...It doesn't have to be a sort of - a dividing line in that way. If we approach people as human beings in the sight of God I do not see where there's a problem. (BARBARA)*

The friendships with people of other religions interviewees described involved conversations, visiting school friends' houses and 'doing things with them' (MARY), playing football together, sharing accommodation and working together, or just having 'pleasure in each other's company' (AMY). These characteristics highlight the circumstantial and non-purposive nature of these relationships – they were not formed with specific objectives, such as networking, but naturally arose out of the shared context. The ordinariness of these relationships could not account for their significance to interviewees.

The significance of the relationships instead arose from their outcomes: interviewees stated that their friendships resulted in improved knowledge about other religions and consequently changed their beliefs about them; they even affected some individuals' self-understanding as a Christian:

*What it's done each time is to get rid of any stereotypes... simply by opening my eyes to the fact that actually they were people like us in many ways. In many ways. They had the same sort of warmth, generosity of spirit... and it made me open in the sense that I could see straight away that had I been born in another part of the world I would not have been a Christian probably. If I'd have been born in North Africa I'd have probably been a Muslim, and I began to think in terms of, okay, so there's a lot of cultural influence on being a Christian, the fact that it's just the culture I grew up in. (BARBARA)*

Interviewees emphasised the mutual character of the relationships and also showed awareness of their friends' perspectives, moving beyond mutual respect to deeper understanding and empathy:

*Each of us recognising that both ourselves and the other was genuinely seeking to live life in a way that was shaped by religious faith. And we did it slightly differently, but that wasn't a cause for clashing, we actually respected one another. I thought we had more in common than with those of no faith. (AMY)*

*One of the interesting things was that my Muslim friends wanted to call me a Muslim because I was religious, and a Christian is someone who gets drunk, commits adultery and doesn't take religion seriously. Therefore anyone who takes religion seriously must be a Muslim. (WILLIAM)*

Interviewees who described relationships developed in the context of their ministry acknowledged an element of purposiveness; nevertheless these more expedient relationships were also marked by empathy and mutuality:

*My feeling is that the best way to go forward on some of these issues is to build bridges of trust where we're known as people, and that's why the relationship thing is important, where doing things together in the community is important, so that you can gain a hearing for sharing your own understanding of faith...I've come to understand some things about what they believe. (LEE)*

The importance of the personal relationships with people of other religious traditions resulted from the other person being encountered chiefly as an individual rather than as a representative of another religious tradition (8.4.2.). This allowed their religious faith, and by association the other religion, to be explored within an essentially positive framework, marked by mutual respect, understanding and empathy.

Although several older ministers noted that they did not know people from other religions when growing up, most interviewees had developed close relationships at some stage. One exception was CHRIS, one of the youngest interviewees who had grown up in a multicultural Northern city, followed by a professional career in London:

*I don't have any friends who belong to other faiths. Bizarre really. Well, I just think it's odd. I mean, not so much living here but we've lived in London. We've sort of - you think that you ought to have at least one black friend. That you ought to have at least one friend who belongs to another religion, I don't know. It just seems that we come from such a multicultural place. (CHRIS)*

Chris's comment points to the issue of social segregation within multicultural communities, which was also observed by some of his Leicester colleagues (8.2.2.). He further introduces the subject of colour, linking ethnicity and religion, as did ROBERT:

*I'd like to think that I just see people as fellow human beings - the colour of their skin, to my mind it's irrelevant. I am sure I am not colour-blind but I like to think I am. I have friends who are all sorts of different people. (ROBERT)*

Both comments may acknowledge the complexity of individuals' religious and social identities (8.4.2.), but may also indicate a stereotypical identification of ethnicity and religion.

Generally, there were very few references to ethnicity or colour; instead religion was mostly linked to or juxtaposed with culture. However, two interviewees commented that over the course of their ministry the issue of racism had been replaced by religious intolerance, particularly Islamophobia. The interrelation between these issues has been widely addressed in the academic literature and the media (e.g. Bowie, 2008; Weller, 2008; Chao, 2015; Parris, 2015; Storm, 2015), particularly following recent incidents of Islamist terrorist attacks.

When discussing 'Friends & acquaintances', interviewees mostly addressed relationships with people of other religions; there were just two references to the influence of Christian friends on their own beliefs about other religions. The influence of peer groups on beliefs, including religious beliefs, is extensively acknowledged in the sociological literature; however, much of

this research is focused on adolescents and young adults (e.g. Ozorak, 1989; Schwartz, 2006; Roberts, Koch & Johnson, 2011). As interviewees were at least in their mid-thirties, and many in their fifties and sixties, perhaps the influence of their Christian peers on their beliefs was no longer perceived as particularly pertinent.

### 9.3. 'Interfaith engagement'

Seven interviewees selected the prompt 'Interfaith engagement' as a main influence; none of these also selected 'Personal relationship' or 'Friends & acquaintances' – 'Interfaith engagement' seemed to be used as an alternative or in preference to these prompts.

In their discussions of 'Interfaith engagement' interviewees divided into three groups: firstly, *immersed* interviewees, who lived and ministered in multi-faith contexts; secondly, *engaged* interviewees who did not live in multi-faith contexts but were actively involved in formal interreligious dialogue; and thirdly, *non-engaged* interviewees who neither lived in multi-faith contexts nor had any current interreligious engagement. The seven interviewees who had selected 'Interfaith engagement' as a main influence represented all three groups.

*Immersed* interviewees described their interreligious engagement as resulting naturally from the multi-faith context of their everyday lives, and forming an integral part of their ministry:

*You can't really live here, unless you stayed inside your house all the time, you couldn't live on these surrounding roads, without having some interfaith engagement, whether you wanted to or not really, every day, whether it be going to buy a pint of milk at the local shop or working...you can't really escape from that... [Interfaith engagement is] very much part of, I suppose, what we do, I hope, what we do as a Church, in terms of our mission and our service to the local community, and it was very much part of what I knew the work would be about when I arrived here. (LISA)*

The second group, *engaged* interviewees, often referred to specific previous events or experiences that inspired their continuing involvement, for example the events of 9/11:

*Interfaith dialogue is in my view no longer just something nice that a few people do; it's become completely crucial. Fundamentalists of different faith convictions are possibly going to really destroy this. The guys that flew into the Twin Towers ten years ago were certain that they were doing the will of Allah. And I think that in a sense the interfaith dialogue has in this country, or needs to, supersede the ecumenical one, it's the more urgent agenda. (MICHAEL)*

*Engaged* ministers were most explicit in expressing their motivation; they saw their interreligious engagement as a part of their calling and ministry – 'Ministry' goes along with 'Interfaith engagement' because...I believe my ministry was not just to Christians but to all people' (WILLIAM) – as well as necessitated by world events and social developments: 'I think

probably, not to put too fine a point on it, the future security of the world may depend on it' (MICHAEL).

The third group, *non-engaged* interviewees, frequently referred to the lack of opportunities for meeting people of other religions in their current contexts:

*You actually have to meet somebody! And one hasn't really had the opportunity. But then you know, if you work in the gas industry you're not going to talk to somebody who is an electrician, are you, in a sense. (CHARLES)*

*Non-engaged* ministers suggested that their lack of interreligious engagement did not result from a deliberate decision but from their circumstances; in this regard they resembled *immersed* ministers. Several acknowledged the existence of the Three Faiths Forum in the Winchester diocese but pleaded time pressures, or clashing priorities.

Most *non-engaged* interviewees nevertheless described some past engagement, and this would explain why two selected 'Interfaith engagement' as a main influence. More recently ordained ministers frequently referred to visiting places of worship of other religious traditions during clergy training. Some described interfaith events in their parishes or local area they had organised or been involved with. Several also referred to reading the writings of authors from other religions – a more indirect type of engagement.

Interviewees not currently living in multi-faith contexts, both *engaged* and *non-engaged* ministers, defined interreligious engagement more narrowly, namely as participation in particular events, activities or organisations, 'at a structured level' (MARK).

In contrast, *immersed* interviewees had a broader perception of interreligious engagement, namely 'social concern, local activism rather than a conversation about faith' (LAURA). They referred to charity and community work, involvement in education such as taking assemblies or hosting visits by school children at their church, or social justice activities:

*The second [prompt] that I've chosen is social justice because of the way in which I come at interfaith matters...the interfaith world, it seems to me, is sometimes a rather esoteric world of people who have interest in talking about such things...that world of conversation, discussion, and heavy thinking and all of that. But there's [another] world as well, which is the actual world of those people who aren't particularly religious but come from one of the other religious communities...not actually the churches or the temples or the mosques, but people in the community centres, many of whom are just nominal believers in this, that, and the other and have a heart for community. (LEE)*

*Immersed* ministers also drew comparisons between their interreligious engagement and ecumenical engagement on one hand and engagement with people without a religious faith on the other:



*Lots of the issues that we come up against in living in a society, in a community, which is very much identified as being interfaith or intercultural, actually they're exactly the same issues in my post-Christendom outer estate where the language of faith that we speak could as well be Martian. Trying to find ways through to find common ground and to find ways of telling stories and sharing experiences and finding shared language, without compromising what it is that we're saying, is just as much of a challenge if you're trying to share the gospel with a working class 25-year old who's come to get married as it would be with a Muslim or a Hindu really. (LAURA)*

*I see my interfaith work as an extension of the ecumenical work that I did before...and to many degrees the interfaith work is quite similar, that there are people on the spectrum in terms of their faith and practice, and whether you're a people of the book, or people of the strong ritual traditions, or people with a more mystical approach to your faith, and you see that within the Christian spectrum, and it's there within the interfaith spectrum...in the Church of England I would call it internal ecumenism, you know, how Anglo-Catholics and reformed evangelicals talk to each other. Well, that's not unlike a Sufi Muslim trying to speak to a Sunni Muslim, you know. There's the same spectrum, and you can't generalise about our different world religions. (LINDA)*

It is not clear whether LINDA meant to refer to Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, or whether she was comparing ritually or scripturally orientated traditions to mystical ones; however, the central claim is that of a spectrum of traditions within both Christianity and Islam. Few interviewees referred to other Christian denominations, and ecumenism was not a significant theme in the data.

Even though all *immersed* ministers described feeling called to or intentionally choosing to minister in a multi-faith area and were engaged in their local community, several considered formal interreligious engagement as incidental or peripheral to their principal ministry, and sometimes an unwelcome duty:

*Primarily my focus is on the Church community and even though I have agreed to do interfaith stuff...and I've tried to make the running in some areas, which is possibly why I get frustrated that I'm doing something that actually I never felt called to do, never felt that passionate about, and yet I am doing my bit and other people just don't seem to be doing their bit and I think that makes me sometimes quite resentful of that. (LEE)*

*Immersed* ministers also articulated and emphasised their strong commitment to their Christian faith and the importance of a clear Christian witness for their interreligious engagement.

*It's important for me, as a Christian, to be well rooted within my own spiritual tradition. I think, people who are less mature in their own faith find it more difficult to enter into dialogue with people of other faiths, and part of the task I was given by the Bishop here in Leicester was to be a confident Christian presence. So, I can engage with my brothers and sisters of other traditions without compromising my own beliefs. (LINDA)*

*Interfaith work is not in any sense about anyone watering down their own faith. So by working in interfaith work, I hope I become a better Christian. And I think we all of us who are involved in this field, that the Muslims who are involved feel that it should strengthen them to become better Muslims...I am very definite about my Christian faith. I'm not just a wishy-washy liberal, I'm not wanting to water it down. (RICHARD)*

However, others had a critical perception of the Christian witness of those actively involved in formal interreligious engagement:

*I think they want to basically have a lowest common denominator. So want to reduce everything so that we don't offend each other... in my early days I would avoid interfaith worship and interfaith dialogue as being a total waste of time because of the values of the people who wanted me to be engaged with them in it, and basically they wanted to water it all down. (DAVID)*

The various difficulties and limitations of interreligious engagement were widely acknowledged: some interviewees felt that it was predominantly initiated and driven by Christians while representatives of other religious traditions were slow to engage and contribute. Several described situations where it led to tensions – with colleagues in a team ministry, with other church leaders, or with members of the congregation – over a range of issues, including the use of financial resources and buildings. RICHARD discussed at some length a difference of opinions with a senior colleague regarding the removal of the cross from the church when hosting an interreligious meeting:

*I am the person who would be organising an interfaith event at St X's, so on the whole, if I want to rearrange the furniture, that's what I do. There was one specific event where the person who is the team rector who technically is the overall boss and he had a concern about shifting a cross...I think it touched something in my colleague who thought - is that taking interfaith work too far, to actually remove the cross. Now, my argument was, well, I'm not removing the cross in the context that we are all - you know we are altogether going to be in the church. They all knew perfectly well they were coming into a Christian building. I am a Christian priest. That was absolutely fundamental to what was going on. There was no watering down of my faith, as far as I was concerned. But on a practical level, we needed to set up the church for the meeting and the cross, in the particular place that it was, was quite a dominating feature. So to shift it to one side for me wasn't an issue but it was for him...we left the cross where it was and we shifted our focus sideways. (RICHARD)*

Ministers who were actively involved in formal interreligious dialogue sometimes were faced with disappointment or disapproval from members of their congregations, who felt it resulted in neglect of their pastoral duties towards them.

*You would quite often get - from a small group of maybe older people, and older not well-off people, a sense of unfairness and a sense of: the vicar doesn't care about me, he seems to care more about Muslims and people from other countries. (RICHARD)*

*In my congregation I have people who have found no sense of acceptance from those of other faiths to their becoming Christians, and would question why I am*

*therefore going out and offering the hand of friendship to people who they would see as being part of a grouping that have not been very affirming of them. So there is a bit of a tightrope that I do walk. (LEE)*

The various problems of interreligious engagement described by interviewees seem to be common issues in this field (Wingate, 2005; Cornille, 2008).

In spite of these difficulties, interreligious engagement was perceived as significant for interviewees' beliefs about other religions because it challenged preconceptions and enriched their own faith:

*There's nothing like meeting people of other faiths who are very committed in their faith, to hear and, you know, engage with them really, to begin to perhaps dispel any wrong thoughts you may have had, or wrong information you may have picked up. (JAMES)*

*So limited personal experience of interfaith engagement, but what engagement I have had has been positive, nourishing, life-giving, fascinating, enlarging, I'd characterise in extremely positive terms, both in terms of understanding more about others, but also therefore challenging one's own preconceptions. And yes, being confirmed in one's own faith, as well as challenging. (AMY)*

In addition, interreligious engagement facilitated the development of personal relationships with people of other religions. The findings for the prompt 'Interfaith engagement' in many ways paralleled findings for the prompts 'Personal relationships' and 'Friends & acquaintances', particularly for those living in multi-faith contexts. Those who did not currently live in such contexts but chose to participate in formal interreligious groups or events usually had significant previous experience of a different cultural or religious context. The importance of experience is further explored in the next section.

#### **9.4. 'Experience' prompts**

There were four prompts relating to experience: 'Personal experience' had been intended to refer to knowledge and understanding gained over time through extensive exposure to other religions, with 'Lack of experience' describing a dearth of such exposure. 'Positive experience' and 'Negative experience' were intended to describe specific events or encounters memorable to interviewees in a positive or negative way. Interviewees, however, used the prompts interchangeably. The 'experience' prompts combined were selected nine times.

An initial review of the statements of interviewees who had chosen one of the experience prompts as a main influence showed that the context of these experiences in all but one case was interviewees' earlier years and long preceded their ministry, the same as for the relationship prompts (9.2.). Three interviewees had been brought up abroad and referred to their childhood and youth in different cultures. Others described experiencing hospitality in

the homes of school friends from different religious traditions, or encounters with individuals or groups of people from other religions at university, when travelling or working.

Also comparable to the friendships and personal relationships described (9.2.), sustained personal experience was perceived as ordinary and circumstantial, and not resulting in specialist or authoritative status:

*In no way am I setting myself up as an expert. It's just that over 30 years or so, I have been lucky to be in places where I've had that experience. (RICHARD)*

Personal experience was generally gained in one of three contexts: either through growing up, living or working in a different culture abroad, or through ministering in a multi-cultural setting, or through sustained involvement in formal interreligious engagement. If none of these three contexts applied, interviewees described themselves as lacking experience:

*I would say my knowledge, experience and contact with other religions and people of other religions is not quite negligible, but very, very limited, which is largely because culture, I have almost always lived in very white English areas where there's very little cultural mix at all. (AMY)*

*I haven't had to interact or even had the opportunity to interact with people directly of other faiths...My only experience is, basically, through television and one or two people and the odd book. (CHARLES)*

Nevertheless, both interviewees with sustained personal experience and those lacking such experience described significant encounters or events – many positive and occasional negative experiences. Some of these occurred unexpectedly or coincidentally, for example a conversation with the Hindu spouse of a participant at an Alpha supper or a remarkably helpful Muslim supplier when refurbishing the vicarage. Others were initiated or sought out, such as a sabbatical at a study centre in Israel with visiting Muslim and Jewish scholars, or through interreligious engagement:

*When I was first ordained... [I] went on various marches with the CND people and at that stage in the 80s there were people of other faiths, there was a proper Buddhist community who went along to a lot of the marches, they wore the robes and they had chanting and then they were building a peace pagoda in Battersea park and it was being opened. And for the opening they arranged an interfaith walk from Canterbury...to London... So I joined in. I had that week walking during the daytime, chanting, and at the end of each day and at the beginning...we'd have a bit of prayer and each faith group would have a few minutes of its own prayer and we would all just experience each others' prayer...So it was a really important time. It absolutely showed me how we could learn from each other and be side by side without in any way limiting or watering down our own faith. So that was a very definite, strong experience. (RICHARD)*

The significance of these experiences, as for the personal relationships (9.2.), predominantly resulted from their consequences, chief of which was appreciation of the commonalities

between people of different religious traditions, 'of what we share together rather than what is making us different' (RICHARD). NANCY described this as 'we weren't in the same club, but we were definitely in 'a' club together, sort of thing, if you see what I mean?', while ROBERT offered a theological perspective:

*It is always good to eat and talk with people individually and you recognize that they are human beings and they have a great deal - the Christian doctrine of creation means we have an awful lot in common to start with. Therefore, I think that draws you together, your common heritage as human beings. (ROBERT)*

Part of this appreciation of commonalities was a recognition of the influence of the cultural context on a person's religious faith. Interviewees frequently acknowledged the effect other people's experience had on their beliefs and attitudes when they referred to individuals or groups whose positions they disagreed with:

*The guy who was the Bishop of Rochester, who was originally from Pakistan, Nazir-Ali, and it's partly because of his experience from Pakistan, he is much less comfortable with working together [with other faiths]. (RICHARD)*

*I went to Israel once, I have grave reservations about things like the wall that's been built there but it's very hard for us with minimal experience of the bombings that they have had to put ourselves into that situation. (MARK)*

*The same must surely be true of those of other faiths, that they too are on a journey in which they have revelations and experiences and things that turn them one way or the other. Somehow, people like Osama Bin Laden got turned at a particular point - into a very perverted view of truth, in my view. (BARBARA)*

The findings reported so far may give the impression that interviewees' experience of other religious traditions or people was mostly positive. This was not the case: some interviewees who had extensive personal experience of different cultures or multi-faith contexts described this predominantly negatively:

*As Christians you have no rights there, technically yes, theoretically yes, but practically nothing. What the founder of [Muslim country] said is, this is a free country, and he said very clearly, whatever religion or sect you belong to, you are free to practice it. But, as I said earlier, [the Christian] minority doesn't have any rights - constitutionally yes, there are rights, but when it comes to practicality, you don't have anything. (LAWRENCE)*

Having lived and worked in Africa and Asia for extended periods of time, MARY selected 'Negative experience' alongside 'Travel' and 'Friends & acquaintances' as main influences on her beliefs about other religions.

*Nearly fifteen years of my life I've lived outside the UK... My experiences of Islam and of Chinese religions, well of Buddhism and Taoism, those are the two I've had most to do with, and of African tribal religions, have all been dreadful, and I really mean that, I have seen some horrendous things going on in all of those...I have seen at first-hand what those kind of religions do to their adherents, and how much they live*

*in fear and appalling superstition and well it is, it's fear, all of them produce huge levels of fear in their adherents. And very little love, there is very little love to be taught in any of those religions...my negativity is not about people, it's about the power behind the religion. (MARY)*

Some interviewees based in multi-faith contexts with generally positive personal experience nevertheless also described specific negative experiences; for example, all three female clergy based in Leicester referred to the lack of facilities for Muslim women in some of the city's main mosques (8.3.6.). The frustrations of interreligious engagement, as described above (9.3.), were also occasionally mentioned in the context of negative experiences:

*Tensions between the Sikhs and the Muslims and the Hindus...which was under the surface, came to the fore, I think, when we were trying to organise a steering group and I discovered some people wouldn't be in the same room as others, allegedly because of some sense in which our local community centre had been cornered by the Hindus, according to some of the Muslims, and therefore if we held one of our meetings in that community centre they would not come. And that in a sense was quite a negative experience for me. (LEE)*

Alongside many positive experiences of visits to the places of worship of other religious traditions, some less successful encounters were also reported:

*[Fellow ordinands] had the most horrendous time in the mosque, they were absolutely torn to shreds by the Imam and the people who were there to greet them. Absolutely extraordinary. The complete reversal of my experience of going to a mosque...They all came back completely shaken and really upset by it. Such a shame. Really destructive sort of experience. Told their faith was rubbish, you know? (NANCY)*

Interviewees with little personal experience were often relatively circumspect in their descriptions of their negative experiences (8.1.):

*I've had so little in the way of negative experience of people of other faiths I almost hesitate to use that one really...I remember on one occasion feeling a tiny bit hurt because we had invited [a Muslim friend] to come and have dinner with us, and he refused on the basis of - and his reason was that - it was to do with ritual cleanliness. He seemed to be saying that any food that we prepared would not be ritually clean. (TOM)*

*There are negative experiences of other faiths. Heckling from Muslims at Good Friday processions, that sort of things. But I've had negative experiences from Christians, so it's not a major thing. We experienced violence expressed in other faiths but I've never thought of that as the main stream of other faiths. (MARK)*

While many positive experiences were characterised by pleasant surprise, negative experiences often were marked by disappointment. Both reactions resulted from confounded expectations based, at least to some extent, on the stereotyping or othering of people and communities from different religious traditions.

Noticeably, many interviewees did not articulate the consequences of their negative experiences: some emphasised that there were no negative outcomes; others indicated that there were only minor effects – ‘feeling a tiny bit hurt’ (TOM). Considering how strongly stated some of the positive outcomes were, the negative experiences may in reality have had stronger consequences than reported, which interviewees deliberately or subconsciously suppressed. This possibility of self-censorship with regard to other religions is an area of interest for future research.

The factors interviewees identified as main influences on their beliefs about other religions – relationships, interreligious engagement and experiences – were to some extent anticipated (1.3.). I had also expected interviewees to identify several other factors as significant (9.1.); yet only three individuals chose the prompt ‘Clergy training’ as a main influence, two selected ‘Bible’ and ‘Media’, one ‘Family’ and nobody ‘Christian leaders’. All interviewees nevertheless addressed these prompts during interviews and in the next section I will discuss their statements about these factors.

## **9.5. Other influences**

### **9.5.1. The family**

When I began to compile the list of factors relevant to beliefs about other religions for the prompt cards (see 6.3.2.), one of the first that came to mind was ‘Family’ and this was also confirmed by the focus groups (6.3.3.). In the focus group discussions I did not register a possible gender bias with regard to the perceived influence of the family. However, when reviewing all comments referring to family during analysis of the interview transcripts, a difference between male and female interviewees’ perceptions became apparent.

All female interviewees clearly acknowledged the influence of their families on their own faith and religious beliefs, including their beliefs about other religions:

*I grew up as a Christian, I've had very strong theology taught me from a child about Christ being the only way to God and everybody else was wrong and there was nothing good in any other religions. (MARY)*

*I think my background, in terms of thinking about people of other faiths, has been quite affected by my churchmanship, as well as my upbringing in the family, if you like.... I suppose, being brought up in a liberal way, I would never seek to judge somebody on something like their faith or their gender. (LISA)*

In contrast, many of the male interviewees stated that their decision to become a Christian, and a minister, went against the wishes of their families, and some also explicitly distanced themselves from their parents' views about other religions:

*Yeah, my background was very anti-faith... So although I was brought up as an Atheist I never was an Atheist. I always believed in God. When my dad caught me praying, which he occasionally did, it was something very antagonistic to him...As a child I can remember asking to go to church and told quite firmly, 'no'. (MARK)*

*My father was a very tenuous Christian...he was not happy with me being an enthusiastic Christian...My father was very unhappy about me being in the ministry. (WILLIAM)*

*Well my parents don't go to church. They would call themselves Church of England. But they're not anti-church either, so they would go, weddings, funerals, that sort of thing. Do you know who Alf Garnett is? Yeah, my mum's a bit like that really...comments about other faiths would probably be relatively negative I think. So that didn't really influence me at all, which is a good thing, yeah. (CHRIS)*

Although DAVID came from an evangelical family he also discounted its influence on his beliefs about other religions:

*DAVID: Family. No, not particularly.*

*RESEARCHER: So your family background you don't think may have influenced your beliefs?*

*DAVID: No, not really.*

Only TOM acknowledged his family's influence, particularly his father's exemplary role:

*My family of origin has influenced me very much because my dad was also a priest, so I suppose the fact that I am ordained now probably is to do with growing up in a Christian household, a clergy household... I would always have said of [my father] that he was a very tolerant person, very tolerant of people - of any kind of difference really, whether that be sexual orientation or faith or culture, just extremely tolerant... I suppose my values are shaped by that. (TOM)*

As this is a qualitative study, findings cannot be generalised. However, male and female interviewees' markedly different perception of their families' influence on their beliefs is noteworthy, particularly as it was the only factor with a pronounced difference between the two sexes.

Numerous studies have confirmed the influence of parents and the wider family on an individual's religious beliefs (e.g. Ozorak, 1989; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Roberts, Koch & Johnson, 2001; Schwartz, 2006; Horwath, Lees & Sidebotham, 2012), although Voas and Crockett (2005) have argued that parental influence on religiosity in the UK is actually comparatively weak, as only around half of the children of two religious parents go on to be religious themselves, whereas around 90% of non-religious parents have non-religious offspring. There is evidence from some studies that family influence has more effect on female than male



offspring (Voas & Crockett, 2005; Bengtson *et al.* 2009). The influence of parents and the wider family on ministers' religious beliefs offers itself as an interesting subject for further investigation.

### 9.5.2. The media

As with the family, I had expected interviewees to identify the media as a significant influence on their beliefs about other religions, based on my own experience and feedback from the focus groups, as well as a body of research (e.g. Pirner, 2009; Collins & Sturgill, 2013). Only two interviewees selected the prompt 'Media' as a main influence on their beliefs; however, the media's power was widely acknowledged.

Nearly all references to the media were negative, and it was mostly seen to present a simplistic and unfair picture of the religions and their adherents.

*I despair at what the media does all too often, because what the media does, because of its necessity to have everything in sound bites, it reduces that that is complex into simplistic sort of forms very often, and I think what we will get is inflammatory headlines from time to time, stuff that does nobody any good at all... Shall we say that the media's intention sometimes seems to be to titillate and to excite rather than to educate. (BARBARA)*

*I think inevitably, because this is the nature of the media, where interfaith contact is reported it tends to be negatively so, because naturally the media is looking for stories and clashes and such like, so we don't hear of the wonderful great interfaith collaboration that's going on all over the world in all sorts of contexts. (AMY)*

Acknowledging the positive contribution of the media in terms of its educational work NANCY nevertheless described it as a 'two-edged sword'.

Several ministers felt that coverage of Christianity, and the Church of England, was particularly unsympathetic, pejorative, even 'very, very negative' (SUSAN).

*You hear about the church when there's a sex scandal. You don't hear about the local church being there when a child dies and supporting a family and giving hope. Whether it's religion or anything else, that's the way of [the media]. (AMY)*

Consequently, some ministers suspected that other religions might be covered similarly unfairly or inadequately:

*Whenever you see the way in which Christianity is portrayed, it's usually either daft or dull. When I think most Christians are neither...I don't think we are getting the correct picture of what I do know, so I suspect that we are not of what I don't know... I don't know enough about the different shades of Islam really, who is it, if they get to speak – who it is they are getting? (ROBERT)*

Parts of the media, especially right-wing newspapers, were seen as particularly unhelpful in their representation of Islam, presenting a generalised and simplistic picture, 'scapegoating Muslims' (LAURA), implying that 'Muslim means terrorist' (RICHARD) and 'stirring up anti-Muslim sentiment' (TOM).

Six interviewees combined the prompts 'Media' and 'Fear' and a further five combined 'Media' and 'Racism/xenophobia' (see 7.4.2., Appendix M). The media was widely described as compounding fear of other religions, particularly Islam, or fostering racism and xenophobia through biased and unrepresentative coverage.

ROBERT suggested that the media itself was influenced by fear: 'It's a tricky and delicate area to convey and they are probably fearful of getting it wrong and what they might be in for if they do say'. This statement referred to Islamist threats and violence against journalists, although his comment preceded the murders of staff at French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, which has drawn wide attention to this subject.

Although interviewees acknowledged the influence of the media on people in general, and on their parishioners, they did not consider themselves influenced in quite the same way:

*I've left media till last, I think that's probably arrogance, I think I'm not influenced. You know I'm a liberal Guardian reader, you know, of course one is influenced by media to some extent... [what] we're very conscious of in this city is the negative influence that the media can have and the importance for us of being publicly people who are keen to make people question what they read in the media...So in that reacting to the media thing has been quite kind of influential at times in terms of thinking what do I need to preach about, what do I need to teach? What do I need to address directly with the congregation? (LAURA)*

Perceived insusceptibility to media influence and a generally critical attitude to the media might explain why few selected it as a main influence on their beliefs about other religions. Yet several ministers referred to a need to countermand the negative influence of the media on their parishioners, implying that they considered them more susceptible.

Interviewees' discussions reflected concerns in CofE documents: the authors of *Staying present and engaging faithfully* (CofE, 2009a, p.5) observe a 'homogenisation of public discourse about religion', and a reluctance or inability to differentiate between religions. They note a general climate of anxiety, even – or especially – in areas where other religions are not physically represented and attitudes are solely formed through the media, which 'in general increases the levels of anxiety by its limited vocabulary and its insistence upon conflictual approaches to reporting'. Similarly, the authors of *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*

(CofE, 2010a, p.7) note 'the lack of direct experience and understanding of any religious tradition' in the media.

Interviewees' wary attitude towards the media is likely widespread amongst CofE ministers and could be explored further in future research.

### **9.5.3 Christian leaders and Church of England senior leadership**

The response to then Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams's reference to Sharia law in a lecture at the Royal Courts of Justice raised my interest in ministers' beliefs about other religions (1.4.). I therefore offered the prompt 'Christian leaders' and asked a question about interviewees' views on senior clergy's positions on other religions (Appendix H). However, none of the interviewees selected this prompt as a main influence, and most discussed it only late in the interviews.

Some interviewees, mostly but not exclusively female, talked positively about Christian leaders, in some cases mentioning individuals, both senior church figures and personal mentors, who served as role models:

*What the best of the Christian leaders have taught me is that it is perfectly possible to hold to one's own faith and yet to be respectful to others, and I find that is where I want to be. (BARBARA)*

Other interviewees were fairly non-committal about the possible influence of Christian leaders on their beliefs in general, and about other religions:

*Christian leaders - I don't really know what to say about that. They are pretty much some and some aren't they? So I can't say that I would be influenced by other Christian leaders, especially. (CHARLES)*

*Through what I've heard from other Christian leaders...I've been taught about other faiths and I have been taught the theology of it all and - interestingly, as I've said, that had less effect on me than [personal experience] in a sense. (MARY)*

Yet others were distinctly unimpressed by the contributions of some Christian leaders, particularly with regard to other religions.

*Some Christian leaders in the way they speak out about other faiths are extremely unhelpful, and some are desperate to defend what they would call the uniqueness of the Christian faith, the uniqueness of Jesus and his message. I don't feel at all at home with them. (MICHAEL)*

Several ministers referred to former Archbishop Rowan Williams's 2008 lecture at the Royal Courts of Justice and even ministers who admired him were troubled; comments were very

similar to those I had heard from other parish ministers in the Winchester diocese at the time of Williams's lecture (1.4.):

*Christian leaders have both inspired me and driven me to despair on the subject of other faiths. I mean - raised an eyebrow, I have to say, over Rowan and his Sharia law. I thought, well, hold on a minute, that would have to be within the context of the rule of this country, because we do not stone women to death for adultery... quite why he said it that way I don't know. Difficult to second-guess an Archbishop. But I think that [long pause] some Christian leaders speak a great deal of sense...The trouble is Sharia law is such an emotive subject and gets everybody worked up. I just wish he hadn't said what he did, because I have a great deal of time for Rowan, but that was an unhelpful comment, in some ways. (BARBARA)*

The generally low priority assigned to the influence of Christian leaders, including the senior leadership of the Church of England, reflects wider social trends. A study by Horwath, Lees and Sidebotham (2012) found that the views of faith leaders did not seem to influence young people's religious beliefs, whereas the views of parents, grandparents, peers and wider society did to various degrees. Other research indicates a decline in the Roman Catholic Church's moral authority and influence on Roman Catholic lay people's beliefs (Voye, 1999; Ó Féich & O'Connell, 2015). A survey of religious trends in America also notes a declining confidence in religious leaders (Chaves, 2011). However, the low perceived influence of Christian leaders also reflects a distancing from the Church of England as an institution expressed throughout interviews:

*I don't know where [the Archbishops are] coming from theologically but I don't take much notice really. It doesn't really worry me...in one sense the Church of England has always been a 'work it out for yourself' type organisation...the authority's been devolved to me to run that church, so if I end up in a multicultural area then I would go and do the reading and I would seek organisations who know more about it than I do to inform me about how I should handle them, but I wouldn't look to the Church of England for it. (DAVID)*

This understanding of the ministry in autonomous and individualistic terms will be discussed further in the next chapter (10.3.).

#### **9.5.4. Clergy training**

During training for the ministry, aspiring CofE clergy engage theologically with topics related to other religions, such as mission and evangelism; in some training institutions they are able to study specific world religions in depth; and most ordinands are given the opportunity to visit other religions' places of worship. Clergy training enables ministers to explore and develop their beliefs about other religions – at least in theory. Interviewees' responses indicated that training had varied enormously over the years, and that there were and are substantial differences between different institutions.

The prompt 'Clergy training' was selected as a significant influence by three Winchester ministers, respectively ordained for two, eleven and eighteen years. Interviewees generally discussed this prompt early on in the interviews, perhaps indicating that even if it was not considered a main influence, it was nevertheless a factor they were conscious of.

The aspect of clergy training described most positively was the opportunity to visit the places of worship of other religions. Several interviewees also appreciated being able to engage with other religions theoretically and theologically.

Some interviewees who described a lack of opportunity to explore other religions during clergy training had trained many years ago: 'At the time it wasn't a theme. I mean I'm a dodo... my initial training was back in the late '70s, early '80s.' (BARBARA). However, some who had trained within the past two to six years also felt that their training on other religions had been lacking – 'I think it was woefully inadequate in respect of other faiths and engagement' (CHRIS) – or had been optional:

*When I arrived here, I said to [my training minister], I think I need to go on the Presence and Engagement course. But that was only through our initiative really... the division who looks after clergy training here didn't say, well I think you should do the Presence and Engagement course... we don't have to do that course, even if we have a curacy in the City of Leicester, which to me is crackers. (LISA)*

Leicester interviewees generally strongly expressed the need for training relating to other religions:

*That dominates the whole of our energy, building a relationship with the Muslim community, and that should be part of clergy training. (LAWRENCE)*

*I do think that Presence and Engagement needs to be on the curriculum for everybody training for ordination in the Church of England. (LINDA)*

Although there was no prompt or question regarding Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD), which is compulsory for all clergy, several interviewees addressed this topic. Unlike their Leicester colleagues, some Winchester interviewees felt CMD provision relating to other religions was either irrelevant to their ministry, or inadequate.

*Clergy training since is nothing [to do with other faiths] and if...there was, I wouldn't choose to go on it, because I don't see any relevance to me. (JOHN)*

*We do clergy training days, they don't do them very well, they don't help us, I don't think, very well, because they don't help us minister in a multicultural, multi-faith world...I do think the training we get is just inadequate. (DAVID)*

No link was evident between theological or practical engagement with other religions during clergy training and a later ministry in multi-faith areas or participation in formal interreligious

engagement. Interviewees' experiences of clergy training clearly were very mixed and so was their satisfaction with this aspect.

*Learning Pathways: Equipping Ministry in Multi Religious Contexts* (CofE, 2009b, p.5) is a resource providing colleges, courses, individual clergy and lay leaders 'with a systematic framework to guide curriculum design and to assist individuals to locate themselves on a 'learning pathway' in relation to multi religious contexts'. Research on the implementation of this resource in clergy training institutions and CMD would be a relevant and worthwhile project for future research, particularly as this area does not seem to have been addressed by academic research so far.

### **9.5.5. The Bible**

Anglican theological tradition since Richard Hooker (1554-1600) traditionally has had three reference points: Scripture, tradition and reason, described as the Anglican triad or 'three-legged stool' (Markham, 2010). Scripture – the Bible – could therefore reasonably be expected to be a significant influence on CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions. However, the prompt 'Bible' was selected as a significant influence by just two interviewees, both identifying with a Catholic churchmanship. References to the Bible were mostly made when discussing the prompt and only rarely in other contexts.

For this prompt there was a pronounced difference between liberal and evangelical interviewees, while participants from Anglo-Catholic and broad church traditions held positions in-between. Some interviewees with a liberal background expressed outright wariness about the Bible:

*A little bit of a tricky one. Never approach it on its own!...I'm fearful of just using the Bible on its own without any interpretation of it. Yes, I think the Bible can be a source of good, but also a source of bad, in interfaith dialogue, it can be, as I say, if you just look at the Bible in an isolated sense, particularly when asking questions of theology of religion, is that what you think about other faiths, it can be quite a negative thing. (LISA)*

*At one level [the Bible] is the most wonderful and liberating collection of books, and at another it can, in my view, wrongly used and interpreted, be a terrible weapon. [chuckles] And folk use it and I'm probably part of that too, to justify the position they hold, but that needs to be done with huge care. And so for me a literalist, a fundamentalist approach to the text, is not only as it were indefensible, academically and theologically, but hugely dangerous...I think we have to balance the text with both reason and experience. (MICHAEL)*

MICHAEL's reference here to 'reason' and 'experience' as a balance to Scripture is interesting, as the traditional Anglican triad does not include experience. However, the Methodist tradition for theological reflection draws on a quadrilateral, which adds 'experience' to the

Anglican triad (The Methodist Church in Britain, 2016) – perhaps the substitution of ‘experience’ for ‘tradition’ suggests a non-conformist inclination.

Other statements from liberal interviewees were less wary but still clearly indicated the limited role of the Bible in informing their beliefs:

*Lots of the challenges we face today are not directly addressed, as it were, in the books of the Bible. But there are all sorts of wonderful norms, if you like, that can guide. (MICHAEL)*

*The bottom line for me is: the reality of God is actually bigger than any of us can ever say. So, the reality of God is bigger even than the church, bigger than the Bible. (RICHARD)*

At the other end of the spectrum, some of the evangelical ministers very clearly affirmed the centrality of the Bible to their theology:

*[The Bible], that's where my theology would come from. (MARY)*

*That's where I derive my theology, which I've outlined to you... I guess my churchmanship is derived from the Bible, basically you take the Bible, you systematise it to give yourself a theology, that theology is then given a label. (ROBERT)*

*I'm a Bible-believing Christian and it forms where I am. And I believe it to be the truth. And that's where my faith sits...the Bible is important to me and everything I believe in rests on what's in there. (CHRIS)*

Some avowedly evangelical ministers nevertheless combined a more inclusive and universalist theology of religions with their commitment to Scripture:

*In my study of the Bible I would generally emphasise those texts that have got an inclusive feel to them...I would often describe God as being a little bit like a magnet...that will continue to draw us to himself and will never give up, and if that's the case, and one doesn't know how that works out in terms of life, death, and whatever else is after, but from the point of God is being like that, then it seems to me that that opens up a space for that magnetic love to be at work in all places. And I perhaps have stretched that a little bit to think about the work of God in other faiths as well. (LEE)*

Interviewees who had identified themselves as part of the Anglo-Catholic tradition presented a range of positions, from fairly liberal to more traditionalist. All emphasised the importance of the Bible for their theology but varied in their emphasis on the need for appropriate interpretation.

*I feel there is a need with our Scriptures and our tradition to reflect on our experience and our beliefs. So actually it's not just a personal feeling, that we should reach out and embrace other faiths but actually I feel that should be rooted in my own faith tradition. And so how, for example, do we understand 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one will come to the Father except through me'. I do think it is necessary to engage with passages like that. We can't just ignore them... how you*

*read the Bible is important and how you treat biblical inspiration, I think that's important. (MARK)*

*We too easily forget that a very high percentage of Bible characters are Arab or Jewish in their culture, in their tradition, in their background, in their total lifestyle... some of the stories, or some of the situations we get in the Bible are really down to the culture and not necessarily, you know, the Christian faith. So this is the book of the faith, but it's what you can take out from the book and reapply, as opposed to applying one's life to what you find in the book. And the lightning hasn't struck yet, so I'm probably safe. (JOHN)*

Interviewees who had identified their church tradition as broad varied widely, but most put less emphasis on the importance of the Bible for their own theology than either evangelical or Anglo-Catholic ministers.

*Previous generations thought that the Bible was written in English, you know, it's just so sad that [Bible-believing Christians] can't open their eyes to see the Bible itself is a multiplicity of ideas and thoughts, some of which are totally contradictory. But you can see where they've come from and why they were important and how one idea has to go to another through a different set of experiences. (CHARLES)*

*It's not the Bible that's at fault, it's the way people use it that's at fault... I don't like the Bible being used as something that narrows things down... what I see in the Bible is much that sets us free rather than much that ties us down.... Yeah, I don't see the Bible as being anything that actually draws a line between us and other faiths in that way. (BARBARA)*

In general, evangelical and Anglo-Catholic ministers emphasised the centrality of Scripture to their theology, including their theology of religions. Liberal ministers and, for the most part, those from a broad church tradition emphasised the need for appropriate biblical interpretation, which could perhaps be identified as the 'reason' component of the Anglican triad, and in some cases also the importance of experience.

There is a substantial body of research, particularly by Leslie Francis and others (e.g. Francis, 2010, 2012; Francis *et al.*, 2007; Francis, Robbins & Jones, 2012; Village, 2010, 2012; Village & Francis, 2012) exploring the psychological profile of clergy in relation to various aspects of their ministry, including their biblical hermeneutics. Kay, Francis & Leslie (2011) also report on the findings of a range of studies that link certain personality traits with particular church traditions and denominations. In the light of these studies it would be interesting to explore the connection between approaches to biblical hermeneutics and church traditions further. Ministers' approaches to the Bible may be a reflection of their personality rather than, or as much as, their churchmanship; or their churchmanship and approach to the Bible may both reflect particular personality traits.



## 9.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the question of what interviewees perceived to be the main influences on their beliefs about other religions.

The three factors interviewees identified as most significant were personal relationships and friendships, experience – including personal, positive, negative and lack of experience – and interreligious engagement. The fourth most frequently selected prompt was another kind of experience, ‘Travel’; some accounts of interviewees’ travel experiences are included in Appendix P. These factors could be further reduced: interreligious engagement fundamentally consists of the building of personal relationships and the sharing of experiences. It could be argued that ‘relationships’ and ‘experiences’ are often two sides of a coin, rather than distinctive and separate factors. In many of the interviewees’ statements and stories the two were intermingled: experiences involved people, and people were encountered in contexts that constituted experiences. Interviewees could have assigned stories to either or both, and indeed frequently did so, as many comments reflected:

*So personal experience and personal relationships. Those are, you know, a lot of my formation and my view on other religions has grown out of that. (MARY)*

*And I think in that sense it could be positive experience mixed with friends and acquaintances and personal relationships. They all really overlap. (BARBARA)*

*Personal relationships - I would say goes with positive experience [ahm] well - you've got personal experience - all the experience ones one would tend to put together. (CHARLES)*

Of the 67 prompts selected as main influences on beliefs about other religions, 35 (57%) related directly to relationships and experiences: ‘Friends & acquaintances’ (7), ‘Interfaith engagement’ (7), ‘Travel’ (5), ‘Personal relationships’ (4), ‘Personal experience’ (3), ‘Positive experience’ (3), ‘Lack of experience’ (2), ‘Community’ (2), ‘Family’ (1) and ‘Negative experience’ (1); ‘Clergy training’ (3) can also be included, as interviewees discussed visiting places of worship of other religious traditions, rather than theological aspects of their training. All interviewees selected at least one of these prompts, many chose two, and three participants chose three. Interviewees clearly considered relational and experiential factors, in their various manifestations, as significant influences on their beliefs about other religions.

From interviewees’ descriptions of experiences and relationships it was often not immediately obvious why they would consider them so significant for their beliefs about other religions, as many were unremarkable and ordinary. Their significance resulted from their outcomes, which included increased knowledge about other religions, challenge to

preconceptions and correction of misconceptions, and recognition of the influence of the cultural context on a person's religious faith. Appreciation of the commonalities between people of different religious traditions led to a growing understanding of and empathy with people of other religions as well as relationships marked by mutual respect. In addition, individual interviewees described transformed self-understanding as a Christian and enrichment of their own faith, a sense of the importance of interreligious engagement, a more relaxed attitude to other religious traditions, an international perspective on Christianity, and empathy with others who feel they don't belong. Many of these outcomes of the relational and experiential factors reflected common themes throughout the data, particularly the link between culture and religion and the commonalities between the religions, as well as empathy with and respect for fellow religious people of other traditions (see Chapter 8).

These positive outcomes explain why interviewees assigned such significance to relational and experiential factors. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to describe the beliefs of interviewees as solely or even principally influenced by relationships and experiences. The majority of interviewees also referred to other significant influences, for example 'Culture' (4), 'Religious practice' (4), 'Theology' (3), 'Education' (3), 'Bible' (2), and the 'Media' (2). Many of these other prompts involve the transmission of knowledge or critical or reflective processes. The relational and experiential factors were informed by and in turn informed interviewees' religious, philosophical, social and cultural frameworks (see Chapter 11).

All human experience is interpreted within existing frameworks and one type of framework used to interpret encounters with other religions that is particularly relevant to CofE ministers is a theological framework. Interviewees' theological frameworks are explored in the next chapter.

## 10. Theological frameworks and themes in interviewees' beliefs about other religions

### 10.1. Introduction

In this chapter I address the third research question: What theological frameworks inform interviewees' beliefs about other religions? I consider aspects of traditional theology of religions and propose an alternative theological framework to take account of the interview data. I then discuss three additional themes in the data: the centrality of interviewees' understanding of their ministry in informing this alternative theological framework, the significance of their roots for their Christian identity, and the importance of respect for the religious other.

When setting out on this study, I had expected that, as CofE ministers are theologically trained, interviewees would use the language and framework of the theology of religions (2.2.4.; 3.) to explain their beliefs about other religions. I had also expected them to draw on concepts from relevant CofE documents relating to other religions, such as 'hospitality' (4.2.). However, when analysing the interview data it became apparent that interviewees had done this only comparatively rarely.

Just six of the 16 Winchester interviewees had used one or more of the terms 'exclusivist'/'exclusivism', 'inclusivist'/'inclusivism' and 'pluralist'/'pluralism' at all; in over 180,000 words of transcripts these six terms combined were mentioned only 16 times. Of the five Leicester interviewees, two used these terms. One used the terms exclusivism and inclusivism once; however, another used the terms 29 times. This interviewee, AMY, had trained comparatively recently and as part of her studies had taken a module on the theology of religions. Overall, the eight ministers who had used the terminology had no common characteristics with regard to gender, age, church tradition or length of ministry.

The term 'hospitality' was used by four of the Winchester interviewees on nine occasions; however, on eight of these it referred to the hospitality experienced from people of other religions, particularly from Muslims (see 8.3.4.). The only use that connected with the concept of hospitality as suggested in CofE documents (4.2.) was the following:

*And so I would say, from the Old Testament, the doctrine of caring for the strangers and then in the New Testament, the doctrine of hospitality, is one that the church should be emphasising. (WILLIAM)*

None of the Winchester ministers referred to any of the relevant CofE documents relating to other religions; several emphasised that they didn't have time to engage with the reams of

publications emerging from the central bodies of the Church of England. ROBERT spoke for many colleagues when saying: 'Most of these things are written and forgotten. I've got a filing cabinet full of them'.

Consequently, I took a list of 14 relevant documents to the second round of interviews and asked Leicester interviewees which of these documents they had read, which they were aware of, and which they were not aware of (Appendix O). Three interviewees were aware of two, four or six of the documents respectively but had read none; LAURA was aware of three and had read two, namely *The Mystery of Salvation* (CofE, 1996) and *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005); AMY was aware of four and had read two, *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005) and *Generous Love* (NIFCON, 2008). Both AMY and LAURA had studied for postgraduate theological degrees.

Three of the Leicester ministers used the term 'hospitality' on six occasions, one again with reference to hospitality received by the Muslim community. The other two used it in a way that resonated with relevant CofE documents, particularly LAURA, who used it on four occasions to discuss ways in which the church could reach out to people of other religious traditions:

*How do we on the one hand offer appropriate hospitality and build good relationships with this community... I'm interested, in a theoretical as well as a practical way, in how we negotiate through that kind of hospitality and engagement and conversation without making assumptions about what our dominating paradigms are...our hospitality to one another seems to me absolutely crucial to what I see us being as the church in this place...So I would identify my basic theology of being one of a kind of take on Girard and understanding of salvation being Jesus is being prepared to be the forgiving victim and a sense of the importance of our hospitality to the outsider. (LAURA)*

My original third research question had been: 'How do interviewees relate their beliefs about other religions to the theology of religions and to the frameworks of the Church of England?'. These findings made it necessary to reformulate the question, as interviewees had rarely done so. Instead, interviewees drew extensively on their personal experiences and relationships in describing and explaining their beliefs about other religions, recounting specific events and encounters. They considered relational and experiential factors most influential in the shaping of their beliefs about other religions (see Chapters 8-9).

Nevertheless, interviewees did make many explicitly theological statements, particularly but not exclusively in response to specific interview questions about their theology on the questionnaire (Appendix H). A few ministers also spoke at length about their beliefs about the nature of God, about human nature and sin, and about the significance of Jesus when

discussing various prompts, and all interviewees made shorter statements, sometimes in passing, such as ‘I believe in a God of love’ throughout the interviews. They were drawing on theological concepts and frameworks to inform, interpret and reflect on their experiences and relationships with people from other religious traditions. Their personal experience and their theology were in effect mutually informing each other.

As interviewees mostly did not explicitly draw on the theology of religions in their discussions, it raised the question of what other theological frameworks were evident. To address this question I identified various characteristics of traditional theology of religions and used these as a basis of comparison for describing the framework manifest in interviewees’ statements.

## **10.2. Ministers’ theological framework relating to other religions**

### **10.2.1. Comparison of theological frameworks**

As noted, interviewees rarely used the terminology of traditional academic theology of religions; neither did they merely use different terminology to refer to the same framework based on its central considerations, that is, the salvific potential of different religions and the significance of Jesus Christ for human beings’ eternal destiny (Race, 1983; Race & Hedges, 2008). Although this type of academic theology had undoubtedly informed ministers’ thinking – in some cases mostly in the past, in other cases more recently or still currently – they drew on a different theological framework, which I propose to name Ministers’ Theology of Faiths.

In comparing the two theological frameworks I consider aspects including language and terminology, central themes, the theological, philosophical and temporal focus of each framework, qualifying criteria and different positions. Table 4 offers a comparative overview of the two frameworks. I have displayed the data in this way in order to allow for ease of comparison; however, this may give the misleading impression that they are opposing frameworks. It is crucial to emphasise at the outset that the differences between many aspects of the frameworks are of degree, not of substance, and rather than constituting two entirely separate, parallel frameworks they overlap and inform each other. Interviewees drew on both frameworks, although leaning heavily towards Ministers’ Theology of Faiths. Similarly, most contemporary academic theologians reach beyond the traditional focus of academic theology of religions and engage with a theology of faiths, as I will discuss further below (10.2.3.).

Table 4: Comparison of academic theology of religions and Ministers' Theology of Faiths

<b>THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>Academic Theology of Religions</b>	<b>Ministers' Theology of Faiths</b>
Terminology	Religion	Faith
Language	Academic/formal discourse	Practitioner/professional discourse
Central theme	Eternal salvation: 'Salvific potential' of religions – does a religion lead to salvation, i.e. eternal life of the human soul	Earthly salvation: 'Beneficent potential' of faiths – is a faith conducive to the individual and common good of people in this life, in this world
Meaning of salvation	Eternal life	Human flourishing – fullness of (earthly) life
Human focus	Spiritual - human soul	Holistic - whole person
Theological focus	Role of Jesus Christ in salvation (Different theological positions imply different perspectives on God)	Jesus Christ as God's love incarnate (Uniqueness of Jesus is acknowledged regardless of ministers' theology of religion)
Temporal focus	Future-orientated	Present-orientated
Philosophical focus	Truth	Virtue
Characterization	Christianity as a belief system	Christianity as a way of living
Qualifying criteria	Beliefs – 'mental assent'	Practice – living out beliefs
Different positions ( <i>simplified</i> )	<p>With regard to salvation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusivism – salvation is possible solely through belief in Jesus Christ and other religions do not lead to salvation (although followers of other religions may still be saved through Jesus)</li> <li>• Inclusivism – salvation is solely through Jesus Christ, although other religions can lead their followers towards God and therefore have some salvific potential</li> <li>• Pluralism – salvation is possible through other, or all, religions</li> <li>• Particularism – salvation in a Christian sense is possible solely through Jesus Christ although God may be at work in non-Christian religions in a different way</li> </ul>	<p>With regard to human flourishing (individual good of its followers and the common good) Christianity is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique – both with regard to its transformative powers for individuals and communities now and with its implications for eternity</li> <li>• Special – although other faiths can also be powers for good in the lives of individuals and communities, Christianity offers what no other religion can</li> <li>• Equal, or comparable, to other faiths – within all faiths there are positive and negative expressions.</li> <li>• Incomparable to other faiths – different faiths pursue different goals and have different values. What counts as desirable for individuals and communities may differ</li> </ul>

## 10.2.2. Terminology and language of the frameworks

As is evident from the term ‘theology of religions’, many academics working in this field use the term ‘religion’ to distinguish groups with different spiritual belief systems and practices (e.g. Knitter, 1987; Fletcher, 2005), although some use the term ‘faiths’ (e.g. Race & Hedges, 2008). As discussed earlier (see 2.2.1.), the term and the very concept of religion has long been, and remains, contested, and is therefore defined and used in various ways within the academic community and beyond. Nevertheless, it is the preferred term in academic theology of religions, and also in some of the literature of interreligious dialogue (e.g. Race, 2001; Cornille, 2008). In the field of interreligious studies, and in religious studies, the term ‘religious traditions’ is also commonly used. The preferential use of the term ‘interfaith’ engagement or dialogue in a UK context (e.g. Gaston, 2015) may be linked with the strong representation of CofE ministers in this field who are influencing the discourse accordingly.

During data collection I used the term ‘religion’ in my interview questions. However, interviewees mostly responded using the term ‘faith’. A review of the Atlas-ti word count table and individual transcripts shows that the terms faith/faiths were used about ten times more frequently than the terms religion/religions. One interesting exception was ROBERT who used the term ‘religion’ to talk about traditions other than Christianity, but talked about the Christian ‘faith’:

*You know the fundamental difference between Christianity and all other religions...basically all religions tend to work on the basis of, if I do x, y and z I will build up enough merit in order to kind of buy my way back into His good books whereas in Christianity that's a kind of non-starter, you will never get anywhere on that basis... I would also be trying to explain to them, how the Christian faith works and because I think it is a fuller revelation than what they have received, I would hope that they may well be moved by God's Spirit to embrace it for themselves, really...Some of our history has been pretty appalling, but Christianity can cope with other religions easier than they can cope with us because I think we expect people to be at a starting point where they are not connected with God....And we allow people to exist, we don't force them to embrace the faith and we operate by dialogue, persuasion and so we can allow them to exist and practice their faith. We engage in debate and discussion with them and there may well be people from a Christian background who embrace another religion. (ROBERT)*

Although not using the language of theology of religions, ROBERT expressed an exclusivist, Barthian-influenced understanding of other religions as human constructs, as opposed to the Christian faith in response to the unique revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

Interviewees’ use of the term ‘faith’ in preference to ‘religion’ may reflect the institutional discourse of the Church of England. Even though most did not refer to relevant CofE documents, all interviewees had gone through training for the ministry, were participating in

compulsory CMD and were attending meetings with colleagues at deanery and diocesan level. Consequently, they were likely to draw on the professional discourse of the institution and be influenced at least indirectly by the terminology used in its documents.

Interviewees' preference for the term 'faith' over the term 'religion' is also likely to be related to their focus, as practitioners, on religious practice, and their appreciation of the personal faith of religious others above more abstract theological beliefs (see Chapter 8).

The discourse of academic theology of religions is generally formal, following the conventions of the discipline, drawing on existing theory and literature and focusing on more abstract concepts and definitions in its arguments and supporting evidence. Where it does draw on the personal experience of academic writers, be it through interreligious engagement, significant encounters with individuals or multiculturalism in society, these examples are often used functionally, as introductions to the topic, to make a case for the importance of the subject in general or to acknowledge their own journey from one position to another (e.g. Race, 1983; Hick, 1996c).

The discourse of Ministers' Theology of Faiths, as observed in the interviews, was far more informal and focused on experiences, which were offered as both arguments and evidence (see Chapters 8-9). Speakers frequently expressed emotions and described personal journeys of faith. They also acknowledged a difference between their statements and formal theology:

*I always find that quite hard, when someone says to me, 'What's your theology?' I don't really know how to answer. I suppose if I could put it in other words I'd say... not to be judgemental, but rather to be compassionate and understanding and to try and understand each person as God's gift to humanity; to try and focus upon what one has in common rather than the differences. I know that doesn't really sound like theology. (TOM)*

Nevertheless, the discourse could not be described as ordinary or everyday discourse (Northedge, 2003), as ministers did not speak solely as private individuals but also as holders of a particular role. Although they mostly used everyday language, their discourse was underpinned by their identity as CofE ministers, that is, informed by their responsibility as parish ministers for the 'cure of souls' of all in their parish, of any religion or none. This intrinsic link makes it a professional rather than just a personal theology of faiths, even where it was expressed in everyday language. The importance of interviewees' personal and social identity as CofE ministers for their Theology of Faiths is discussed further below (10.3.).

The fact that ministers rarely drew on the academic discourse during interviews does not signify a lack of ability to do so; indeed, several interviewees had postgraduate degrees in theology, and in two cases a PhD. It rather is likely to reflect a lack of interest in, or at least a



low priority of, academic theology of religions with regard to their ministry. Ministers either do not consider it very relevant for their current work or, although they are in principle interested in it, the pressures of their role do not allow them much time to engage with it.

The lack of engagement with the academic discourse during the interviews may also at least in part result from the general difference between written and spoken language: for example, an academic would generally use less formal language when presenting a conference paper than for a written paper. Ministers on the other hand might have used more formal language if they had been asked to give written responses. Considering easily available examples of ministers' writings, such as monthly church newsletters or articles in the local press, is only of limited value, as they are addressed to audiences with potentially very limited theological vocabulary and are therefore intentionally written in everyday language.

In any case, the observed difference between the language and terminology of the two theological frameworks is likely to be still apparent in either oral or written discourse as it arguably reflects a difference in focus, namely a different central theme or approach.

### **10.2.3. Central theme, meaning and focus of salvation in the frameworks**

The central theme of academic theology of religions is the salvific potential of the religions, that is, the question of who is or will be saved (3.7.1.). Brecht (2014, p.xvii) argues that 'the driving question for these traditional approaches...is soteriological and eschatological in nature: in the end, to whom is salvation extended?'. Salvation in this context initially concerns the eternal destiny of the human soul. The earthly outworking of this eternal salvation is in many cases also important; however, it flows from the primary concern with 'eternal salvation' and is secondary to it.

In academic theology of religions the fundamental meaning of salvation is eternal life. Consequently, the focus with regard to the human person is on the human spirit or soul and the temporal focus is future-orientated. This traditional focus has been challenged by various scholars from within academia, for example feminist and liberation theologians who 'recast salvation as liberation' (Fletcher, 2005, p.140), as well as many pluralist theologians who take an ethical stance, for example advocating salvation as justice (Knitter, 1995). Nevertheless, these approaches are still deemed 'challenges' to the established discourse in the field, although they may, in time, well become mainline.

In the framework of Ministers' Theology of Faiths the central theme is what I describe as the 'beneficent potential' of faiths. The question is whether a faith is conducive to the individual and common good of people in this life, in this world. In that sense, its concerns are with 'earthly salvation':

*My view of other religions is not a theological view of other religions, you know, I do know a bit of the bare bones of the theology, it's about what they do to their followers. (MARY)*

*I think it's about, even if it's not about life after death, it might be about how people value one another in relationship to God, so that kind of links back to the ethics and morality. (AMY)*

*But these are other cultures and other peoples...and who is it for us, anybody, to say? Again, test it! Are these people loving each other? Are they caring for each other? Are they being kind? Are their fruits - or are people being oppressed and frightened and cut out? (MICHAEL)*

The meaning of salvation in this framework is human flourishing and a fullness of life, 'becoming fully human' (JAMES), or as RICHARD described it: 'salvation for me is about being made whole and healed'. As such, salvation is holistic, concerning the whole person, as an individual and a social being, and extends to the groups and communities that individuals are part of:

*Salvation is about being made whole. It's about the healing of body, minds and soul, being reconciled and at peace with ourselves, with God, and our neighbour, and if you're a Christian you believe Jesus Christ is the one that helps you do that. (LINDA)*

TOM was far less definite in his ideas about the meaning of salvation, as these statements, made at various stages throughout the interview, show:

*You hear people saying, 'Are you saved?' and - I don't find it an easy concept, the whole idea of salvation, being saved from sin. And I just find people who often talk about being saved from sin just really flippant, and often they are Christian leaders...I suppose what would come to my mind would be to be released from bondage to sin...I'd have to think more about salvation really to - I think my ideas are still developing...Maybe salvation is more to do with finding a way of life, not being saved from sin because it's easy to say that but what does that really mean? (TOM)*

TOM questioned the link between salvation and the forgiveness of sin; in contrast, MARY asserted that 'salvation is forgiveness of sins and the restoration of relationship with God'. The notion of forgiveness potentially has both a present and a future dimension but neither TOM nor MARY expanded further on this. TOM's shift towards a definition of salvation as 'a way of life' points towards an orientation to the present time though, as does MARY's 'relationship with God'.

The temporal focus of Ministers' Theology of Faiths is the here and now, it is present-orientated, as MARK explains:

*Well, what is salvation? If we're referring to what happens after this life I think we've missed the point. It's about – there are kingdom values, for want of a better expression that are formed across the faiths, such as the Golden Rule... My perspective on salvation is that salvation is something that starts here and now. Salvation beyond this life is fairly, I think, to me, immaterial. (MARK)*

Some interviewees referred to both a present and a future dimension in describing the meaning of salvation for themselves:

*Personally, that I'm worthy; that I'm an individual within something bigger; that I'm part of a grand plan; that I have a future that's eternal. And so there is the promise of everlasting life, but not as you know it, Jim. (JOHN)*

SUSAN was the exception with placing salvation firmly and exclusively into the future: 'I would describe it as what happens to one after one dies'.

JOHN's cautious note about the future aspect of salvation was reflected by many of his colleagues. Most interviewees were explicitly agnostic about the eternal destiny of individuals of other faiths and of Christians, including themselves:

*My answer is: that's far too important a question for me to try and answer, and I really believe that, and it's dangerous when people say who's in and who's out. It's not my job; that's for God, beyond our dying. (MICHAEL)*

*Who is saved? I don't know. Only God knows. (SUSAN)*

*God only knows. I certainly don't. (LISA)*

A few interviewees expressed a firm belief in eternal life for Christians, or else for all, declaring themselves universalists.

*I believe that because Jesus has died for me, my sins are forgiven and my future is safe, because Jesus says whoever believes in me, he will not die, he will have the reward of eternal life. (LAWRENCE)*

*Salvation. It's about - it's what's at the centre of hope. Is that enough? It's about achieving your place in the Kingdom of God. It's about an eternal future, and it's what Jesus achieved on the cross for all of us. For all of us. That's what we say in the liturgy, 'for all.' Not, 'for all Christians'. (NANCY)*

AMY raised the interesting possibility that the present-orientated focus in ministers' statements reflects a, possibly subconscious, uneasiness with discussing heaven and hell, as they are perceived to be outdated and unfashionable concepts:

*I think this is one of the biggest questions actually that underlies people's thinking about those from other faith groups, actually, whether they are saved or not, and it sounds like a very Victorian question. It sounds like we don't all go around thinking, oh we are going to be sent to heaven or sent to hell, but I think actually, I think it's*

*there at the root of many people's perceptions of people from other faiths. I think it is there, I don't know whether people would admit that. (AMY)*

#### **10.2.4. Theological focus of the frameworks**

In academic theology of religions, the theological focus of the debate about the salvific potential of religions is intrinsically linked with the person of Jesus Christ, and his role in salvation. The different theological positions have different understandings of what it means to say that Jesus is the, or a, saviour. This does not imply that other aspects of the person and role of Jesus are ignored altogether; however, it is the role of Jesus as saviour of humankind that is the central focus and one of the differentiating criteria between different positions (see Chapter 3).

Jesus Christ's role in salvation was rarely a focus during interviews, and it was not immediately obvious which aspect was the theological focus of Ministers' Theology of Faiths instead. When interviewees discussed their beliefs about and experiences with other religions using the prompt cards, most did not make extensive theological statements or referred to formal theological concepts and frameworks at any length. However, many discussed their theological beliefs about the nature of God, the trinity, the incarnation and the importance of Jesus' death on the cross in response to the interview questions. Some interviewees did talk about Jesus as saviour through his death on the cross; these ministers held a more exclusivist theology of religions. Ministers with an inclusivist or pluralist theology tended to focus on the incarnation, God taking on flesh and becoming human.

Interviewees clearly held a wide range of theological positions; nevertheless, regardless of their theology of religions, nearly all explicitly expressed a belief in the uniqueness of Jesus, including pluralist ministers. The uniqueness of Christ was a central theme in ministers' theological statements. What exactly the meaning and implications of this uniqueness were was not always made explicit by interviewees; nor did I pursue these questions in more detail. It is clear though that different positions on the uniqueness of Christ and on access to salvation are linked to particular beliefs about the nature of God and of religion. While the uniqueness of Christ was a shared theme across the interviews, interviewees came to different conclusions about the uniqueness, or lack thereof, of Christianity.

What then is the theological focus of Ministers' Theology of Faiths, if it is not the role of Jesus in salvation? The answer may be found in interviewees' responses to Question 49: 'How would you describe God?' (Appendix H). A strong theme, across the spectrum of theological positions, was that God is love:

*Well, God is the, I mean the source and being of all life and reality; defined, I would say, by the word love. (JAMES)*

*There is only one way, and that is: God is love. And so if you want a text, as it were, it's the 1 John 1... God is love and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them. That's my strapline, that's what I seek to work with. (MICHAEL)*

*How would I describe God? I would describe God as love actually. (SUSAN)*

*God is a God who loves, not who condemns or punishes people, I don't believe in that God who punishes. (LAWRENCE)*

This recurrent theme of God's love for humanity may express the theological focus of Ministers' Theology of Faiths, namely Jesus' role as the embodiment of God's love through the incarnation, through his life and his death on the cross. The concept of God's love, *agape*, denotes unconditional and self-sacrificial giving to the other and as such is not just central to Ministers' Theology of Faiths but to the wider framework of their ministry, as will be discussed further below (10.3.).

In academic theology of religions, different positions involve different understandings of what it means to say that Jesus is saviour, or the saviour. Similarly, in Ministers' Theology of Faiths different theological positions lead to different understandings of what it means to say that God is love and Jesus is God's love incarnate. For some people this necessarily results in universalism – a God who is love will not allow anybody to be lost:

*I think if we believe in a God of love then I don't think a God of love will condemn what is currently two thirds of the world's population almost by an accident of birth, which is what if you take an exclusivist view of Christianity you have to believe, really. (MARK)*

For others this love is expressed in God respecting human freedom to make choices, even the choice not to accept salvation.

*I wouldn't say I'm a universalist but I do believe that we'll never really understand fully how much God loves us. And that there may be the opportunity, you think of the robber on the cross, and maybe the opportunity to repent and accept God's grace and love. But there will still be those who reject God. And I firmly believe that. (CHRIS)*

*All of us have the potential to be saved, except for those who positively reject it, and I think – I have to allow God to give us choice, because He does, so I have to accept that God gives us choice, but I do believe that only those who deliberately and perversely refuse the love of God in any form, from whichever religion – how could God say about any of His children: you are not acceptable to me? And surely He wouldn't do that on grounds of where you were born and the fact you happen to be a Jew or a Muslim. (BARBARA)*

However, most interviewees were ultimately agnostic about the afterlife (see 10.2.3.) and focused instead on the implications of God's love expressed through Jesus for this life, for individuals and communities, for their own ministry and the mission of the church.

#### **10.2.5. Characterisation, criteria and philosophical focus of the frameworks**

In the discussions of academic theology of religions, Christianity is in effect treated as a belief system (see 2.2.3). As has been noted (2.2.4), a theology of religions is essentially the theology of a specific religious tradition; it is an intra-religious conversation. Christian theology of religions predominantly concerns different Christian beliefs about other religions. Academic theologians may fully acknowledge the personal faith of colleagues; they may respect and even like them, but nevertheless ferociously disagree with their theological positions and their beliefs. Similarly, individuals from other religious traditions may be respected for holiness of life, admirable religious practice and selfless service, yet they may still be considered to hold wrong beliefs. While theologians may admire various aspects of religious practice in other religions, they rarely engage with their truth claims. Discussions of specific beliefs of other religious traditions do not generally form part of the discourse of Christian theology of religions.

In the framework of Ministers' Theology of Faiths, Christianity is treated as a way of living, as faith in practice, even in action, and this approach is also extended to other religions. Religious practice, the living out of the beliefs held, is the central criterion in evaluating individual believers, faith communities and religious traditions.

*A Christian is someone who has made a decision to follow Christ...well from a Christian perspective you have to live your life as Christ lived his. It's about living sacrificially, caring for others, it's about making peace and harmony, it's about loving others. (SUSAN)*

*Actually, it's the religious practice, the what do they [people of other religions] do and how they approach God, which is quite important to me as a person, as it were. (DAVID)*

This does not mean that beliefs are considered irrelevant or ignored altogether; in interviews most ministers mentioned beliefs that they disagreed with or considered wrong, held either by fellow Christians or followers of other religions. Nevertheless, they were ready to admire these individuals' or communities' faithful religious practice, even consider it an example for their own practice. Belief was secondary to practice.

*I think the thing I admire in any faith relationship, whether it's Christian or other, it's the commitment. (JOHN)*

*What I am saying is that I don't think God randomly chooses because you've got your theology right. (MARY)*

Once again it is important to emphasise that both theological frameworks take into consideration both religious beliefs and religious practice; the difference is one of focus and emphasis. A similar overlap also applies with regard to their philosophical focus, on truth and virtue respectively.

As academic theology of religions concerns beliefs, that which is held to be true, its philosophical focus is, by implication, truth. Some scholars in the field go further and explicitly make the question of truth the central focus: Brecht (2014) points out that both Cantwell Smith and Hick consider religious diversity in terms of universal truths and Gillis (2011) even argues that Hick's pluralistic hypothesis really should be considered a philosophy rather than a theology of religions due to this focus.

As one of the interview prompts was 'Truth', interviewees did address the question of truth in the context of their beliefs about other religions. While some of the interviewees asserted the truth of Christianity, and some explicitly questioned the truth of other religions, yet others questioned whether any religion including Christianity has a claim to truth, as the following range of statements from three interviewees shows:

*I believe that Christianity, the theology of Christianity is the truth and I believe that we all need salvation whatever our background is. (MARY)*

*Truth – that's an interesting one. Nobody has got a monopoly on the truth...I certainly feel very uncomfortable with those who say our faith is right. Our God is the God. Your God is not really God. So nobody can claim - make that claim, I don't believe. (TOM)*

*Truth – well [pause] – as a – I would say 'what is truth?' really. Different religions have different beliefs about what is the true way and what is the truth. So I think there is a lot of dialogue there to be had, about what is truth. (SUSAN)*

Whatever views interviewees held regarding truth, when discussing other religions and their adherents they evaluated and judged them predominantly with regard to their effect on the overall wellbeing of the individual believer, on communities and on people in general. The philosophical focus of Ministers' Theology of Faiths is virtue – it is concerned with the flourishing of the individual and the common good, with ethical questions, with the implications of the beliefs and practices of different religions for the poor, the weak and the disadvantaged.

The possibility of negative implications of being a Christian for believers in other parts of the world, or in this country, was touched on by two of the interviewees; however, the overall

consensus was that being a Christian is life-enhancing in a way that belonging to another religion is either not, or not as much, or equal to, depending on the minister's position on the beneficent potential of other religions, which will be examined next.

#### **10.2.6. Positions on the beneficent potential of other religions**

Traditionally, the positions in academic theology of religions are described as exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, with the more recent addition of particularism, relating to the salvific potential of the religions (see Chapter 3.). Ministers' theologies of faiths similarly reflect different positions in relation to their beneficent potential. In its effects on the flourishing of its followers and the common good, Christianity is judged to be either unique, or special, or equal, or incomparable.

Some interviewees considered Christianity unique, both with regard to its transformative powers for individuals and communities now and with its implications for eternity.

*I would say what is unique is that Christians have a relationship, a personal relationship with God. (SUSAN)*

*I believe that Christianity has love, has assurance of faith, has a good ending, you know, I take a lot of funerals, Christians have a hope, have a sure hope. None of these others really have assurance of faith. I mean the Muslims believe that the worst things you do on earth, in a sense you'll get your brides in heaven, but it's a very - for your average person in the street there's not a lot of hope that they're gonna - I guess I'm a pragmatist, it's about the outworking of the faith, of these religions that I see and I think: mmhmm, this is not truth, this is not the God that made the world, this is not the God of love and hope and all the things that we believe in. (MARY)*

Others considered Christianity special: although other religions can also be powers for good in the lives of individuals and communities, Christianity offers something extra that no other religion can offer. Kiblinger (2008, p.24) uses the term 'uniquely superior' to describe such a perspective, however, in my judgement 'superior' implies a value judgement that is not necessarily present in this approach.

*There are many, many people who have nothing to do with any faith, in particular Christianity, who lead very extraordinary lives. I believe that, if you like, there's a value added that comes from Christianity in terms of quality of life and understandings and relationships, and I'd want to say to people that's my experience, here it is. (MICHAEL)*

*We're simply people who happen to be privileged to be, perhaps a little, to have something extra in this life that other people have got to wait for. Maybe they won't know the experience of love, but then, if you're a good Muslim or a good Jew I think you do, I think you do know that...Christianity offers hope. More hope than I think any other religion can do. (BARBARA)*



*I think [other religions] they've given a black and white photocopy of a colour picture, so you can see shades of grey but not necessarily distinguish what they're meant to be. But yes, that would be my sort of image, yeah. (JOHN)*

*Does that mean that Christianity is a unique expression of God's love that no other faith has? Yes, it's a unique expression of God's love but that doesn't mean that God's love isn't there in other faiths. It sounds a bit muddled, the more you try and unpack it, which is what we liberals always fall into, it isn't always clear. But I would say that those things, elements of those things, can be there in other faiths. (RICHARD)*

*Do I believe that Christianity is the religion with the most truth? The answer would be yes. Do I believe that I have to go and argue with everyone to be a Christian? The answer would be no. And do I see faith in people who are non-Christians? The answer is yes. Do I see truth in people who are non-Christians? The answer is yes. Do I see ethics and morality in Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim etc. etc. religious leaders - the answer would be yes. (WILLIAM)*

A third position considered Christianity comparable with or equal to other religions in its implications for human flourishing and transformation.

*I'm not sure I would say there is anything unique about Christianity in comparison to other religions. (LINDA)*

*I don't feel that people of other faiths need to be saved, per se, in a Christian way, I feel that their own, particularly the major faith traditions, are authentic and have an authentic spirituality and authentic integrity. (AMY)*

Although there was no example of this amongst interviewees, there is also potentially a position to parallel particularist positions, which would consider Christianity incomparable to other religions regarding its beneficent potential. This position would posit that different religious traditions pursue different goals and have different values. What counts as desirable for individuals and communities within one religious framework may well differ from another and what appears negative or detrimental to those outside a tradition may be experienced in a positive way by those within it.

In many cases there was a link between Ministers' Theology of Faiths and their theology of religions. Interviewees with an exclusivist theology of religions were more likely to consider Christianity unique with regard to its beneficent potential, those with an inclusivist position were likely to consider Christianity special, and pluralist ministers were likely to consider the beneficent potential of other religions comparable or equal to that of Christianity.

However, this was not always the case, or at least it was not always unambiguous, as some of the examples above show: BARBARA's statements regarding her theology of religions generally were pluralist, however, she still claimed a special status for the beneficent potential of Christianity compared to other religions. SUSAN, who also generally held a

pluralist position, in the quote above nevertheless highlights a unique aspect of Christianity. Individuals' positions are fluid and complex, and occasionally seem contradictory.

Having contrasted Ministers' Theology of Faiths with academic theology of religions, I would like to re-emphasise two points: firstly, all ministers engage with academic theology as part of their clergy training, and some continue to engage with it, through their own reading, continuing ministerial development (CMD) and formal theological study. Their beliefs about other religions and their theology of faiths have been, and frequently continue to be, shaped and informed by academic theology of religions. Secondly, all theology, not just Ministers' Theology of Faiths, is formed and informed by personal experience in the widest sense. This is a circular process, as experience likewise is evaluated and interpreted in the light of theology.

### **10.2.7. Ministers' Theology of Faiths and other theological frameworks**

Ministers' Theology of Faiths shares some common ground with several other theological frameworks. One of these is 'ordinary theology', which Astley (2002, p.1) defines as 'the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education', provided that discourse is reflective. Healey (2013, p.13) more simply describes it as the 'reflective practice of non-academic and non-clerical Christians'. Ministers' Theology of Faiths is therefore by definition not ordinary theology, as ministers are clerics and theologically trained. However, there are parallels to ordinary theology: Aston (2013, p.2) notes that ordinary theology 'fits their [ordinary believers'] life experience and gives meaning to, and expresses the meaning they find within, their own lives'. Similarly, Ministers' Theology of Faiths is closely connected to the meaning ministers give to and find within their ministry. Although interviewees expressed different theologies of religions and different theologies of faiths, this did not seem to differentiate their actual approach to those of other religions within the context of their ministry and this will be discussed more fully in the next section (10.3.).

Another relevant framework is Gaston's (2015) 'practical theology of interfaith engagement':

This hermeneutical model of practical theology gives primacy to the experiences of Christians engaged at a grassroots level in interfaith engagement over more systematic or fundamental approaches that privilege the application of more abstract theological or philosophical constructions. (Gaston, 2015, p.139)

Gaston argues that traditional academic theology of religions expresses a more fundamental or systematic mode of theological reflection, where the fundamental mode emphasises

engagement with the disciplines of the western academy, appealing to reason, whereas the systematic mode emphasises engagement with the symbols and language of the Christian tradition. What is needed instead, he suggests, is an emphasis on the praxis of interreligious engagement:

A practical theology of interfaith engagement would be concerned with gathering quantitative and qualitative data on actual Christian experience in our multi faith world and how particular Christians experience the encounter with other faiths enabling these voices to be more fully represented in theological discussion of interfaith engagement by drawing upon the methods of theological reflection developed in contemporary practical theology. (Gaston, forthcoming in 2016, pre-publication copy without page numbers)

Although Ministers' Theology of Faiths is informed by their personal experience and relationships with people of other religions, these are not necessarily from the context of grassroots interreligious engagement; indeed most are not. Ministers' Theology of Faiths is rooted in their self-understanding as CofE ministers, as practitioners rather than formal theologians (10.3.).

Considering the central role of human wellbeing and the common good in Ministers' Theology of Faiths, it could be described as a moral or ethical theology of religions. The case for advocating a moral theology of religions that judges religions on the basis of their outcomes for individuals and societies has been made by a number of pluralist, feminist and liberation theologians (10.2.3.). From a more philosophical perspective, Vardy (2013, p.170) proposes a differentiation between 'good and bad religion', based on Aristotelian principles compatible with both atheist and theist positions, by 'considering religious beliefs and practices in terms of the relationship they have with promoting human flourishing'. He argues that good religion 'must aim to foster human flourishing, to help human beings develop their full potential, however this may be defined' (p.162). Ministers' Theology of Faiths shares this focus on human flourishing as a central end, or goal, of religion. However, there is an additional element that significantly informed this framework, namely their understanding of their role as ministers.

### **10.3. The 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry**

CofE ministers' distinct understanding of their ministry emerged as a central theme in interviewees' discussions. I describe this as a 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry, defined by three aspects: firstly, the duty to care for all they encounter, of any religion or none; secondly, a focus on the context of the parish; and thirdly, a strong sense of vocation, as a personal calling by God.

The name for this framework draws on a passage in *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* (CofE, 2010a):

The charge given to the minister of a parish is that of the 'cure of souls', a responsibility for the care and cure (healing) of what is essential to the wellbeing of human beings. This traditional phrase provides a very positive present day means of understanding what the offering of the gospel of salvation involves in the context of parishes with the widest variety of parishioners of all faiths and none. (CofE, 2010a, p.21)

Interviewees in both Winchester and Leicester emphasised that their ministry was applicable to all and not limited to a particular group, be it Christians, or members of the Church of England, or their own congregation:

*Ministry - I would say that I believe my ministry is to people of all faiths and none. I enjoy discussing, sharing information about faith with people. I would say that my ministry is to everyone. (SUSAN)*

*If ministry means caring for people, that means caring for everybody. So ministry to people who might be of another faith because they need support - because they might be hungry, they might be homeless, whatever. (RICHARD)*

At the same time, interviewees' statements reflected the distinctive, geographically characterised ecclesiology of the Church of England, defined by the geographical boundaries of the parish rather than the membership of their congregation.

*In a village, I believe I'm the priest of the village and not just the congregation who comes on Sunday. (WILLIAM)*

*I suppose it's really being present in the world where it is, with those sorts of social and religious issues going on, and also the sense of serving people, whoever they are, and that's very much an Anglican thing, in the kind of parochial sense, absolutely, you know, I believe that, and if people happen to be Muslim, that's where we are. (LISA)*

In the document *Learning Pathways: Equipping Ministry in Multi Religious Contexts* (CofE, 2009b, p.12) one quality explicitly required for CofE ministers in a Presence and Engagement parish is 'to show demonstrable willingness to be a minister to all in the parish or institution'.

This universal but parochially defined perspective reflects the Church of England's self-understanding as a national church, as described in *Presence and Engagement* (CofE, 2005):

Nevertheless, the Church of England has continued to understand itself to be called to be present corporately in all the localities of the country. At the heart of this self understanding is the parish church, a Christian community called to be present and to engage actively with all who live in the neighbourhood irrespective of their Faith or none. This comprehensive presence and duty of engagement with all via the shared charge for the 'cure of souls', has continued to be a foundational distinction of the Church of England and an underpinning of its relationship with the State. The obligation to engage with all and sundry in a neighbourhood, whether through the occasional offices, through pastoral care or by promotion with others of the

common good, has been a constant source of re-call out of mere presence towards renewed engagement and rediscovery of the real presence of Christ amongst those who seem to be 'other' to the churches. (CofE, 2005, p.11)

*Staying present and engaging faithfully* (CofE, 2009a) summarises this as follows:

The Church's public self-understanding which underpins the continuing commitment to the concept of a national Church is rooted in its mission to serve the people – the parishioners - without categorisation. (CofE, 2009a, Paragraph 30)

This understanding of ministry as located in the geographical parish perceivably could be diluted in a congregation from a widely dispersed area, as found in large evangelical churches, and instead predominantly be directed at the membership. My sample did not include a minister of such a church, although LEE came closest to expressing a focus on his congregation rather than the parish (9.3.).

Interviewees strongly expressed their belief of being called to the ministry by God; this calling was for some linked to a specific, significant spiritual experience or event, for others it was a growing inner conviction.

*I went to university and everyone said 'have you ever thought of being a vicar?', all the time I was at university. I said 'no'. And I said 'I'm just waiting for God to call me'. So I carried on, got a job...and then one day it was like God got hold of my insides and I couldn't do anything and it was there for six months and I decided I really ought to do something about it. (DAVID)*

*Oh, I was called by the Lord in, whenever it was, when I was 14. I had a very clear sense God wants me to be a priest. Well, I went and asked the local cathedral, and they said, no, you can't, you're a woman. I said, yes I can. (LINDA)*

*I remember the thought entering my head: 'I think I'll be a priest', and I just dismissed it as ridiculous, don't want to do that. But it kept coming back I suppose... I don't think I ever remember a moment when it hit me that I had to be ordained. It was more the fact that it grew gradually and I came to recognise that I could put it off for as long as I wanted. There was no urgency, but, no matter how long I put it off, I recognised it was always going to be there. (AMY)*

As a result of this sense of personal calling, being a minister was described as a fundamental part of interviewees' personal identity – more than a job, or even a role, but who they were as a person.

*I think I've come to the conclusion, after twelve years of ordained ministry, that work is a really unhelpful way to describe vocation... that's the person who I am really. (LAURA)*

*But as a priest, almost wherever I am, I am at least perceived as a Christian presence, so I'm related to in that way, as well as in feeling that myself. So I would say being Christian and a representative of the Christian faith is key to who I am and how others relate to me. (AMY)*

Interviewees described their calling to the ministry primarily in individualistic terms, something that occurred between them and God. Other people sometimes played a role in encouraging – or indeed discouraging – their contemplation of the ministry, but there was no institutional aspect to their vocation: interviewees did not describe being called *through* or *to* a particular church or church tradition. They defined themselves in the first instance as Christian ministers, as serving God, and only secondarily as CofE ministers (see 9.6.3.). While many at some point expressed appreciation of the institution of the Church of England, its workings and its hierarchy, most also distanced themselves from the institution with regard to their calling and ministry. Several for example described a ministry they had carried out before becoming CofE ministers, either as lay ministers, or in another Christian denomination – their vocation preceded and existed independently from the institution of the Church of England.

The ‘Cure of Souls’ Framework of Ministry also implies a particular understanding of the religious other: the most important aspect of this is that each human being, of any religion or none, is equally loved by God, and, consequently, ought to be loved and cared for equally.

*We have a responsibility to show God's love to everybody and to reach out and make no distinction between people. (MARY)*

Secondly, people belonging to other religious traditions are seen as fellow travellers on the journey of faith. Yet, thirdly, although fellow travellers, they are seen to follow a different path; they are religious ‘others’ - members of their own respective religious traditions and communities.

*All of us are spiritual beings, on different kinds of spiritual journeys.... And the same must surely be true of those of other faiths, that they too are on a journey. (BARBARA)*

*I think once you know someone you have a natural interest in their beliefs and realise really that they are on a similar faith journey to the one that we are on, exploration and wrestling with their texts and their traditions. (MARK)*

In interviewees’ descriptions of their ministry there was an emphasis on practical aspects, on caring for others, on social engagement and community work. This was especially the case for the Leicester ministers and was also reflected in their broader understanding of interreligious engagement (9.3.).

*What you are doing in ministry is to care for people, which is why they set up the food projects, and the orphanages, and the school. (RICHARD)*

*I think a very important part of the church's ministry today must be to stand up for immigrants and asylum seekers...I've been quite involved in supporting asylum seekers...I think that xenophobia is a sin that we have to name and oppose. (WILLIAM)*

*We have, in the parish, I think the last record told about 8,000 people who are not on any benefits, or any of the social services systems, so recent refugees...I have east Europeans and a whole lot of Sri Lankans, at the moment, who come to church asking for food. Asking for money. Asking for me to sign a form that should be signed by the GP, and they don't have a GP. You know, social problems that somehow the Church of England vicar is meant to have a response to. It's just way beyond my resources actually, but that's back to, well, what does it mean to be present and engaged. It means to be a point of call, and knowing where your networks are. (LINDA)*

Beyond these practical aspects, being a minister, including to people of other religions, also had a relational, pastoral dimension – giving emotional and spiritual support to people.

*After I trained I...came here to Leicester to live and work in X, which is hugely multicultural and part of one of the Presence and Engagement parishes in Leicester and also very deprived... So that was where I had to work out, in a sense, more of my belief and particularly to do that in a situation which was predominantly about my pastoral relationships with people. I look back on that time and say I was an ordained social worker really, that was my role in that community. (LAURA)*

*I always try and be a pastoral presence in whatever situation I'm in. (TOM)*

Interviewees only very occasionally mentioned preaching or teaching, although there were some references to Sunday services, and activities such as Alpha courses. This probably resulted from the focus of this study on other religions, where this aspect of a minister's role is less relevant. In a general study of ministers' understanding of their role, the balance is likely to be different. Several interviewees did, however, specifically mention their responsibility to help members of their own congregation to come to a better knowledge and understanding of other religions, and to develop their theological frameworks in relation to people belonging to these religious traditions (9.4.; 9.5.2).

*Ministry covers a lot of other areas as well but ... part of my role, I think, is to help other Christians grow, not only in their understanding of being a Christian but in their understanding of other faiths. (RICHARD)*

*My experience of being a church leader over many years is that church communities don't know enough. They need to be educated about people of other faiths. They simply don't do enough. They are afraid - fear again - or they feel like they are selling out their faith if they are almost even friends with other people - so they become an enclave, and actually what they need is a robust faith which can cope with the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to live actually with people in respect. (DAVID)*

Although interviewees' discussions of their ministry in this study emphasised expressing God's love through practical care of others, particularly in relation to people of other

religions, sharing the gospel was also described as part of their ministry in this context - and part of being a Christian.

*Lots of my work is about, as it were, helping people to come to a different understanding of the one they often hold about people like me and about the church and about faith. So for example, they think Christian equals being good, and that for me is extremely unhelpful, because whilst there are implications about behaviour, which come from faith conviction, the defining thing about being Christian is not about being good; it's about relationship with God through Christ. It's really about being forgiven. (MICHAEL)*

*I think we have a calling to share the good news with anybody and everybody, but as I've touched on before, I would want to engage more with those who can give a faith response as a new faith response, than those who need to change their allegiance in a faith response. I'm not saying that the second is not as important as the first, but you know, the second is nearer to the one true God than the one who hasn't got a God at all. (JOHN)*

*But part of our remit as Christians is to go out and preach the Gospel. (NANCY)*

Interestingly, in another section of her interview Nancy stated:

*As I said before I'm not really into standing on street corners in foreign parts, preaching to the infidel, so I don't do that! (NANCY)*

These two comments reflect a widely held understanding that while ministry involves sharing the gospel with all people, including those of other religions, the aim of ministering to people of other religions is not their conversion to Christianity:

*I'm quite happy to say, that's part of my work, to tell other people about the Christian faith. And for me that's part of what interfaith work is. It's the motive, it's where the difference lies - is your motive then to make them into Christians or is your motive to spread God's love. A, explain things and b, show in the way you are something of God's love. (RICHARD)*

*We have 25 people [in church on a Sunday].... if you didn't know why you were here doing ministry in this area, you would just kind of lose your enthusiasm and everything really. I mean, if you were here because you really wanted to convert people, I think your ministry would fizzle out very quickly, because it's just not what it's about. (LISA)*

*I don't believe that it's our duty to evangelise other people who have faith. While there are still plenty of people who have no faith... I think our first duty is to wake those who are asleep. (CHARLES)*

The 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry described by interviewees is informed by and in turn informs Ministers' Theology of Faiths, and is central to their beliefs about other religions. Specifically, the duty to serve all people, of any religion and none, which is one of its defining aspects, is connected with the focus on human flourishing in Ministers' Theology of Faiths.



## 10.4. 'Roots' and 'Respect'

### 10.4.1. 'Roots'

During analysis of the interview data two further, closely interlinked themes emerged, which I named 'roots' and 'respect'. 'Roots' describes ministers' deeply embedded inner commitment to their Christian faith and tradition, for some rooted in a strong personal conversion experience, for many in their Christian upbringing, for others primarily in their cultural identity. The essence of this theme could be summed up, in a variation on Luther's famous statement, as 'here I stand - I can be no other'. It describes a central aspect of their personal identity, their essential 'make-up' as an individual, yet nevertheless was accepted as originating from or influenced by their social and cultural context.

Interviewees did not use the word 'roots' to describe this theme, and statements relating to it were initially assigned to various different codes, such as 'Faith - as personal belief' (P12a), or 'Family' (P13), Conversion (Q12) or Culture (P08). The label 'roots' was inspired by MICHAEL's following comment on Thomas Merton, an American Catholic monk and writer intensely engaged with Eastern religious traditions, particularly Zen:

*He's remained firmly rooted as a Christian, and from that, you know, as somebody described, he said Christianity would always be my mother tongue, but that doesn't prevent me learning other languages. (MICHAEL)*

Merton's description of Christianity as his 'mother tongue' captures something of the indeliberate aspect of 'roots', the lack of intentionality – people do not choose their mother tongue, it is a given, and neither do they choose their upbringing and its wider social and cultural context. 'Roots' have a permanent, unalterable quality, much like a mother tongue, which – barring exceptional circumstances – remains the foundational framework for communication even when a different language becomes a person's primarily used language in adulthood. Nevertheless, most interviewees also ascribed a deliberate aspect, asserting their own choice to affirm their Christian roots:

*One is being brought up in that Christian context, so the fundamentals of my being, my life, my relationships, my understanding of the world was shaped by Christianity, particularly through the Anglican Church. And then secondly I would say there was a time when I owned that for myself and it moved from being my cultural context to being my own faith system, not even belief system, but faith system. So that was as a student when I left home ...and realised I didn't have to do this, didn't have to go to church ever again, didn't have to believe anything that anyone else told me. And found that actually it made sense to me, and it was important to me, and it was a fundamental part of my identity...as a personal individual thing that had nothing to do with family. (AMY)*

*I think that it would be wrong for me to become a Buddhist, because I've been called to be a Christian, and that's my culture, and my background, and it runs in me like my blood. (NANCY)*

*My personal faith journey is one of making a deliberate decision to pursue a Christian faith within the context of recognising that as being partly a cultural decision. (LAURA)*

*I'm clear I'm a Christian and would always remain a Christian. The more I've learned about other faiths, which has been really interesting but I've never, ever had any thought of joining another faith. So, am I just a Christian because that's how I was brought up? No, it's a continuing, conscious choice. (RICHARD)*

TOM was an exception in describing his Christian roots almost entirely in socio-cultural terms; he was also generally most diffident regarding his Christian faith.

*TOM: I certainly feel very uncomfortable with those who say our faith is right...My own position is feeling more comfortable with not knowing, or accepting there's a lot of not knowing, and unknowing, which is why I think I'm pretty comfortable with other faiths because I've never had this sense of, 'well mine is right'...because I don't know. I have huge doubts about lots of things.*

*RESEARCHER: So would you describe yourself as a Christian?*

*TOM: Yes, I would.*

*RESEARCHER: And why then are you a Christian and not, say, a Muslim or a Hindu or anything else?*

*TOM: Simply because of the quirk of my upbringing. Not a quirk, you know, but chance really...And I would see no reason to change but I can well imagine myself being Jewish or Muslim had I grown up in a different country or been born into a different family, so it's a cultural thing as well.*

The theme of 'roots' relates to ministers' personal faith, as a private individual, not to their public role as a minister. At the same time, this private, exclusive dimension – as something taking place between God and the individual – is shared by ministers' understanding of vocation, which forms part of the 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry. The theme of 'roots' also reflects aspects of Ministers' Theology of Faiths, particularly its holistic and present-orientated outlook: it refers to who the person is in his or her entirety, not only to their beliefs, what they hold to be true.

Nonetheless, a significant aspect of the affirmation of interviewees' Christian roots was the acknowledgement of the influence of upbringing and of culture on religious identity:

*I count myself fortunate to have been, as it were, nurtured in Christianity through my childhood as well as teenage years, and have met, continue to meet, very many wonderful people who live it out ... I guess you'd often say that I'm a Christian because that's the way I've been brought up; that's been what I've been exposed to. (MICHAEL)*

Like TOM, several interviewees moved a step further to conclude that in a different cultural context they would likely have a different religious faith:

*I think if I was born in a different country, in a different culture, then I would have been brought up with a different faith. (SUSAN)*

*I'm sure, if I had been born and grown up in a country where Islam was the dominant faith, I would be a Muslim, or I'd be a Jew, or I'd be a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Sikh, it depends where we're born and what we're brought up with really, to start with... You know, it's not going to be the same everywhere and there's something about it perhaps being earthed in where you live and your culture, your background... even, you know, your environment will shape what you might believe. (JAMES)*

The comments acknowledging the tie of religious faith to a person's social and cultural context are an interesting juxtaposition with interviewees' accounts of coming to a personal faith, in response to Question 12: 'When and how did you become a Christian?', where personal faith was described in more individualistic terms.

The socio-cultural aspect of both faith and religion links the theme of 'roots' to that of 'respect'.

#### **10.4.2. 'Respect'**

The theme 'respect' describes interviewees' belief that people belonging to other religions are rooted in their respective religious traditions in the same way, and for much the same reasons, that interviewees are rooted in their own Christian tradition, and that others' religious faith and commitment to their religion therefore is to be respected. For some this respect is limited to the personal faith of religious others, or even just the sincerity of this faith, for some it extends to the belief that other religions in general are therefore to be respected. 'Respect' and 'roots' are intrinsically linked in acknowledging the critical role that upbringing, environment, personal experience and cultural context play in the development of any individual's beliefs and faith.

Like 'roots', the term 'respect' did not appear on a prompt card or the questionnaire but – unlike 'roots' – the word and its grammatical variations were used 95 times throughout the interviews, indicating that it was an important element in interviewees' thinking about other religions.

'Respect' was used in the sense of an open and courteous attitude towards others, or religious tolerance, or mutual understanding:

*I think I'd always approach matters of faith, whether that's building or conversations with people of other faith, I hope with respect and openness. I want to hear other people's experiences, but hear and understand everything through a Christian filter. (AMY)*

*If a good Muslim says: 'actually, I want you to become a Muslim because I don't think you have got the full truth' and the Christian is saying: 'I want you to become a Christian because I don't think you have got the full truth', that's the point where either whoever shouts louder or punches harder is just going to win, or we stop that and we try to learn from each other, respect each other but allow each other to be good Christians and good Muslims. And grow in our own faith. (RICHARD)*

*Respecting each other's beliefs I think is, you know, on that level, not trying to, you know, persuade each other of it, but just engaging, understanding, trying to...you know, really try and understand. (JAMES)*

Respect can be given on account of the sincerity of someone's beliefs, without necessarily agreeing with the content of these beliefs – including Christian beliefs:

*You respect somebody who sincerely holds their beliefs and their faiths, and can engage with that and talk about it and understand it. (JAMES)*

*I learnt a lot from [my training incumbent] about how to work with [Muslims] with a real respect for what they are. Whilst I don't believe that sincerity means you're right, we can be sincerely wrong, I do believe that respect is a fundamental starting point. (DAVID)*

*The Council of Faiths, we meet together regularly, we always discuss [a subject] at the beginning of our meeting...the initial thing was just getting to know each other and being understanding of each other, so we were very polite. Now that we know each other we can be better at disagreeing and be more open and honest about disagreeing and still respect each other. (RICHARD)*

*I have very close friends who have no faith, who have nothing but respect for mine, but don't share it. (NANCY)*

Several interviewees emphasised the importance of respect for successful interreligious engagement, and also noted an incompatibility with evangelism, or overt attempts to convert others.

*Everything that Christ did, he did it for us all, not just, in my view, for one small little group. He did it for us all. And rather than evangelise I'd rather share the love of God with - by respect as much as anything. That's how we show God's appreciation of others, by respecting them and appreciating where their journey has brought them to. (BARBARA)*

*I do think in one sense our attitude towards other faiths needs to be with respect actually. The respect of why they do it...I think in interfaith dialogue the base level has to be humanity, where I accept you and you accept me for who we are and what we believe. That has to be it, before you enter into anything else. And it doesn't fit with evangelism because I don't think evangelism is very easy in that context. (DAVID)*

*In my own practice the last thing I would do is to seek to convert a Muslim. If they ask me what do I believe, delighted to chat. But the most important thing is respect of each other. (MICHAEL)*

Statements relating to the theme 'respect' included practical examples of what interviewees considered respectful behaviour when ministering to people of other religions:

*You know how some Christians they might ask you whether they should go to the funeral or the wedding of somebody of another religion. Well, what I do, and what I'd therefore advise they do, is I would go out of respect for the person and the family. And I would join in anything that wasn't going to cause me to be inconsistent with my Christian belief. So I wouldn't bow down to any shrine, if I had to do that, in their particular religion, whatever they bow down to. But I would attend, I would attend rather than participate if you know what I mean. Participate in the social side but I wouldn't participate in the religious side though I would be happy to be present out of respect for the individual. (ROBERT)*

*Anybody who has a practising faith, I would respect them for their practising faith. And, therefore, there would be a level of: this is your faith, this is precious to you, I must honour that. If they haven't got that, I haven't got to do that honour. So if I knew people were of a practising faith and, therefore, a certain day was holy to them, that isn't the day I'd visit on. But if they were of a 'culture faith', therefore that day isn't holy to them, and therefore I would visit them. (JOHN)*

Interviewees also emphasised the importance of respect as a mutual attitude, with others in turn respecting their Christian faith and tradition.

*I would have respect and interest in those of other faiths who with respect and interest are wishing to explore issues of salvation together. (AMY)*

*I think it helped to give us a kind of mutual respect. It was a kind of mutual respect, which arose from the fact that we recognised that each had a different faith to our own, but it just wasn't an issue...there was a sense of respect that came from that. (TOM)*

*I...would be supportive of the sort of interfaith dialogue that we would be involved with here. And working with other faiths with mutual respect and recognising the things that unite. But I'm sure it also says that in such dialogue we must always be clear what the Christian claim is. (RICHARD)*

CHARLES extended this to a need for people from other religions living in Britain to respect British culture, without detailing what this might look like in practice.

*I believe we have to be tolerant and wishing to learn from other faiths. I also believe that our faith has to stand in our culture as well and we have to maintain respect for our own faith. You know it's easy to respect another's faith because it's slightly more than the one that you're supposed to have but don't! ...Well, I guess we have to say to people: this is the society you and your forebears have chosen to join, for various reasons, and just as we ought to respect other cultures so I think you have to respect our culture. So, yes, I would speak very strongly to certain faith communities that believe that the practices [from cultures] that they have left can be maintained in our culture. (CHARLES)*

Very occasionally a note of doubt about the reality as opposed to the desirability of respect crept into comments:

*But at the end of the day I feel there is more ground of commonality between those of us who practice faith than there is between secularists. If we can respect one another, which is a big if. (BARBARA)*

*I recognise that your personal feelings towards another individual may well shape how you listen to, receive, respect their views, etcetera. (AMY)*

The importance of the concept of 'respect' in interviewees' discussions relating to other religions is very interesting, as respect is not a traditional Christian virtue or central Biblical value, and may be more a reflection of Western cultural discourse. For example, *Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p.4) describes one of the purposes of religious education for children and young people as teaching pupils 'to develop respect for others, including people with different faiths and beliefs, and helps to challenge prejudice'. In comparison, Cornille (2008) suggests that 'humility', both towards the other tradition and about one's own, is required for engagement in interreligious dialogue. She defines humility as 'a genuine acknowledgement of the limitations and imperfection of one's insights and accomplishments, as indeed of all human realization and self-expression' (p.9). Humility traditionally is an aspect of the cardinal virtue of temperance. Unlike 'respect', the term humility was rarely used in interviews; however, this attitude was expressed in statements such as this:

*I believe that spirituality is a universal experience, therefore the experience of one person is valid to inform the experience of another, even if their faiths are different. So therefore, such as I know, which is precious little, of others theology, ethics, religions, practice and faith would be something that would either challenge, inform or affirm my own. (CHARLES)*

This implicit acceptance of a shared universal experience of spirituality links the theme of 'respect' to the theme of the 'commonality of the religions'. 'Respect' also reflects the differentiation between an individual's personal faith and religion as a collective, cultural entity (8.4.2.).

Interestingly, there are further parallels between the main themes in this study and Cornille's (2008) proposed essential conditions for interreligious dialogue: her requirement of firm 'commitment' (p.59f) to one's own tradition has parallels with the theme of 'roots', while 'interconnection' (p.95f), the assumption of some common ground, has links with the theme of 'commonality of the religions'. Although her conditions of 'empathy' (p.137f), defined as a willingness to understand the religious mind-set from within, and 'hospitality' (p.177f), defined as openness to the possibility of truth in the other religion, were not identified as central themes in this study, they were occasionally implied or referred to. These similarities are likely to result from the strong relational focus shared by CofE ministers and practitioners of interreligious dialogue.

## 10.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have proposed a theological framework grounded in the interview data, namely Ministers' Theology of Faiths. I argue that this framework takes account of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions more effectively than the framework of traditional academic theology of religions; however, it is nevertheless a complementary rather than an alternative framework. This framework is potentially a useful resource as a theological framework for groups other than CofE ministers, as a Theology of Faiths, and future research could explore this possibility (12.5.).

I have also suggested that Ministers' Theology of Faiths is informed by a particular understanding of ministry, namely the 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry, and I have identified and described different aspects of this approach in relation to other themes in the data.

In addition, I have identified and described two further themes in the interview data that illuminate aspects of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions, namely the themes of 'roots' and 'respect'. Alongside other themes identified in previous chapters and sections, namely the 'commonality of the religions' (see 8.3.1., 8.3.4., 9.2., 9.4., 10.4.2.) and the 'uniqueness of Christ' (10.2.4.), they contribute to the construction of a complex image, a 'bricolage' (5.2.) of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions.

In the next chapter I will draw together the various strands of findings (Chapters 8-10) and offer a model to illustrate their relationship to each other.

## **11. Dimensions of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions**

### **11.1. Introduction**

In Chapters 8-10 of this thesis I presented findings for the three questions this study addressed: What beliefs do CofE ministers express about specific religions and other religions in general? What factors do CofE ministers consider the main influences on their beliefs about other religions? What theological frameworks inform CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions?

The various findings reveal a highly complex picture: even within the comparatively short timespan of an interview, each of the participants expressed a range of beliefs about other religions while describing various experiences and relationships. A minister's particular theology of religions, whether explicit or implicit, did not translate into consistently expressed beliefs about individuals or groups from specific other religious traditions, or other religions in general.

Beyond the diversity of findings within each individual interview, some common themes nevertheless became apparent throughout: the themes of the 'commonality of religions' (8.3.1., 8.3.4., 9.2., 9.4., 10.4.2.) on one hand and of the 'uniqueness of Christ' (10.2.4.) on the other, of their own Christian 'roots' (10.4.1.) and of 'respect' (10.4.2.) for the religious other. There was also evidence that ministers across the spectrum of age, gender, length of ministry and churchmanship shared a theological framework, namely Ministers' Theology of Faiths (10.2.1.), informed by a 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry (10.3.).

In order to draw together the different, sometimes seemingly contradictory findings, I have developed a model that describes dimensions of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions in the context of a foundational framework that underpins and informs these beliefs. This overarching model also places the themes that emerged from the data into the wider context of ministers' beliefs about other religions.

### **11.2. Discussion of the model**

The purpose of the model is to clarify the relationship between emergent themes and dimensions of ministers' beliefs about other religions identified in this study. It is therefore, although comprehensive, a working model – a different study might draw out additional themes and dimensions that did not emerge in this study, and the model could be further developed and refined to take account of these.

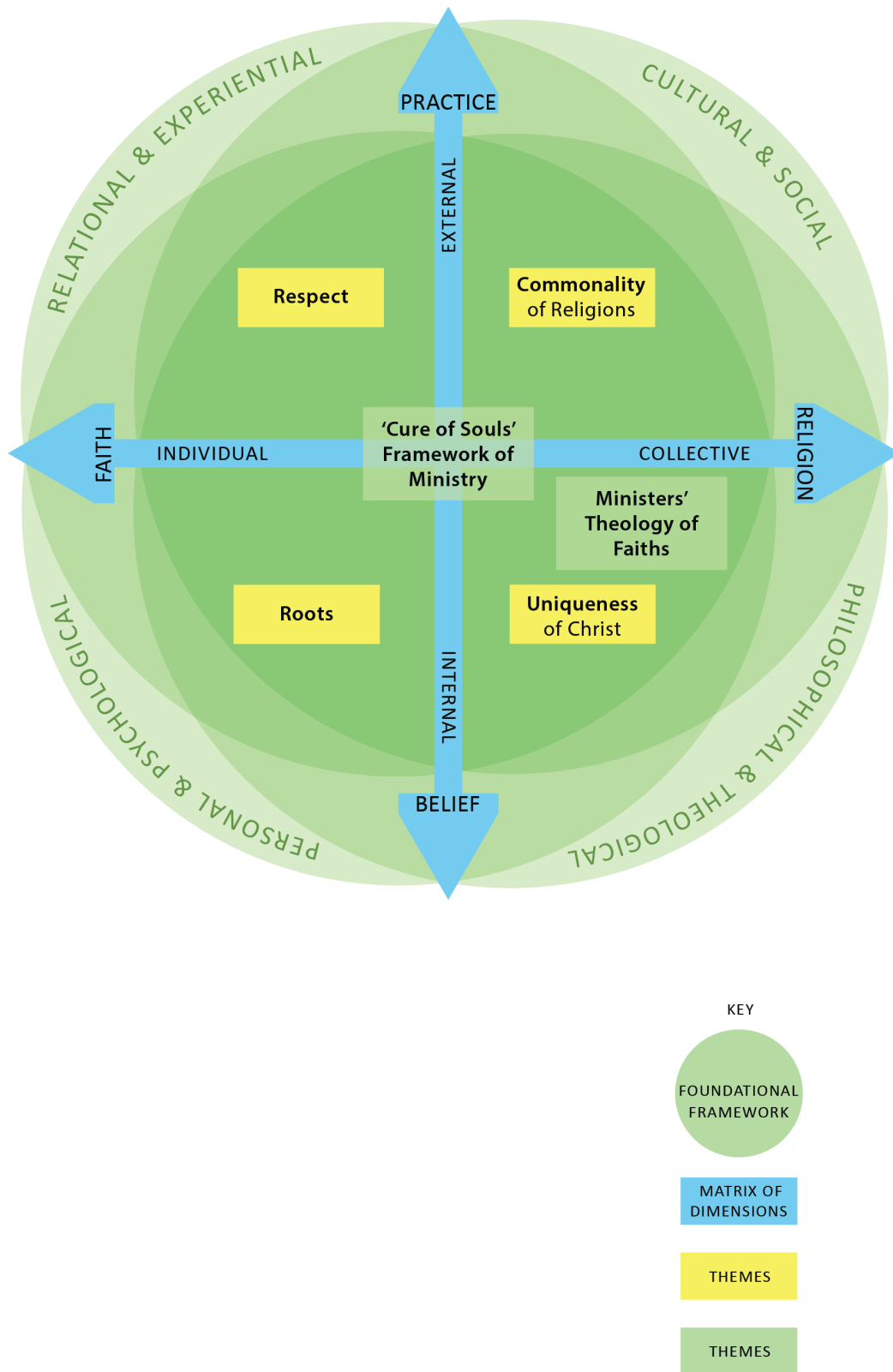


The design of the proposed model constitutes a compromise between illustrating the complexity and interconnectedness of the various elements whilst still maintaining comprehensibility. In order to avoid visually overwhelming and confusing multiple interweaving layers, this two-dimensional model therefore necessarily condenses, simplifies and generalises these elements (see 7.2.1.).

The model (see Figure 1) contains three elements: firstly, a multi-layered foundational framework that informs and underpins ministers' beliefs about other religions – in the model represented by green overlapping circles; secondly, a matrix of two pairs of contrasting dimensions of ministers' beliefs about other religions – in the model represented by blue double-headed arrows forming the x- and the y-axis of the matrix, set within the foundational framework; and thirdly, themes identified in the data – in the model represented by rectangles, set in the four planes of the matrix. The 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry combines features of two elements – it underpins ministers' beliefs about other religions and so forms part of the foundational framework, and it was also identified as a theme in the data. Ministers' Theology of Faiths similarly falls in both these categories, as part of the foundational framework and as a theme identified in the data; and both are therefore represented in the model with green rectangles. The other four themes – 'roots', 'respect', the 'commonality of the religions' and the 'uniqueness of Christ' – are in yellow.

In the next section I will explain and discuss the various elements of the model in more detail, linking it to the findings in Chapters 8-10.

Figure 1: Model of dimensions of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions



### 11.3. The foundational framework

The multi-layered foundational framework consists of four interconnecting layers: the *cultural & social*, *relational & experiential*, *philosophical & theological* and *personal & psychological*. In the model they are represented as overlapping green circles underlying the matrix; this indicates that they mutually inform each other.

The *cultural & social* layer refers to the wider context of a person's life, as a member of a particular society and its culture – including elements such as the political, legal and educational system of a country, the media, and various social and cultural bodies and organisations. Religious institutions and organisations form a part of this layer insofar they participate in public life and inform the public discourse. Many of the beliefs about other religions discussed in Chapter 8 refer to the religions as such collective and enculturated entities, expressed in the theme of the 'commonality of religions' (8.3.1., 8.3.4., 9.2., 9.4., 10.4.2.). The significance of a person's cultural and social context is also acknowledged in the themes of 'roots' (10.4.1.) and 'respect' (10.4.2.), demonstrating that the different layers are relevant to themes across the entire model, and are inextricably linked.

The *relational & experiential* layer refers to the sum of an individual's relationships and experiences – including family and friends, fellow students, trainers, teachers, lecturers, colleagues, neighbours, church members and ministers; as well as encounters in educational, training and work contexts, on travels, at church or in other social contexts. It also includes experiences or events that do not involve other people, although there were only rare examples of these in the data. The significance of an individual's relational and experiential framework was explored in Chapter 9, in the findings on ministers' perceived influences on their beliefs about other religions. Again, the relevance of this layer to the themes identified across the data is evident.

The *philosophical & theological* layer refers to a person's worldview, the theoretical ideas, concepts and systems of thought they draw on to understand and interpret the world; in the case of religious people this includes their theology, including their theology of religions. Ministers' Theology of Faiths (10.2.) also formed a part of this for the ministers interviewed. In the proposed model, the 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry is placed at the intersection of the matrix of dimensions. Unlike the foundational framework, it is specific to CofE ministers and is central to ministers' beliefs about other religions (see 10.3.). In a study with a different focus it might not play such a central role and, like Ministers' Theology of

Faiths, would form part of the wider philosophical and theological layer of the foundational framework.

The *personal & psychological* layer refers to the interior aspects of individuals, the ‘inner person’ – their personality and character, their psychological make-up, their values, principles and ideals. This study did not explore the psychological aspects of beliefs; nevertheless, interviewees made occasional references to these. For example, MARY, a conservative evangelical minister with an exclusivist theology of religions, commented: ‘from personality I would be the kind of person that would be tempted to say: all religions are great’. In this study the significance of an individual’s personal and psychological framework is most strongly expressed in the theme of ‘roots’ (10.4.1.). However, a different methodology would be required to explore the psychological aspects of beliefs about other religions more fully (see 12.4. and 12.5.).

The layers constituting the suggested foundational framework underpin various beliefs, not just beliefs about other religions – they equally inform, for example, a person’s political or ethical beliefs. They are also not specific to CofE ministers but more generally applicable.

In the model, the foundational framework forms the background to ministers’ beliefs about other religions and its role is to illustrate the constructed nature of beliefs, including beliefs about other religions. Consequently, all four layers are relevant, to a greater or lesser extent, to each of the various themes and dimensions of belief identified in the data.

The prompt cards developed for the interviews are in fact attributable to one or more of the four layers, although their development long preceded this model (6.3.): for example, ‘Culture’, ‘Education’ and ‘Media’ are part of the *cultural & social* layer; ‘Family’, ‘Friends & acquaintances’ and ‘Travel’ of the *relational & experiential* layer; ‘Theology’, ‘Truth’ and ‘Salvation’ of the *philosophical & theological* layer; and ‘Identity’, ‘Faith’ and ‘Fear’ of the *personal & psychological* layer, although all three of these also link into other layers.

#### **11.4. The matrix of dimensions**

The second element of the model is the central matrix, which identifies the different dimensions of beliefs about other religions and illustrates the complexity of an individual’s beliefs. In the course of each interview, individual ministers made statements expressing various beliefs relating to other religions, and people of other religions. Initially, some of these statements seemed inconsistent, even contradictory.

Closer analysis of the statements showed that interviewees differentiated between another person's faith and spirituality – the *individual* dimension – and religion as a communal, institutionalised entity – the *collective* dimension. Admiration of the particular expression of faith and spirituality of an individual believer of a different religion could therefore be combined with criticism of the religion overall, and vice versa. An example of this would be admiration for a Muslim friend's practice of prayer and fasting, yet disapproval of the unequal treatment of women in Islam, for example the lack of prayer facilities in some mosques.

Interviewees also differentiated between religious belief, what was held to be true – the *internal* dimension – and how these beliefs were translated into religious practice – the *external* dimension. Rejection of particular beliefs could therefore be combined with an admiration of aspects of religious practice, and vice versa, with regard to both individuals of other religions and other religions as collective entities. Chapter 8 includes many examples of this in interviewees' views about specific other religions, for example, rejection of Hindu polytheism or the understanding of Jesus in Islam, yet admiration of the practice of meditation in Hinduism and the discipline of prayer and charitable giving in Islam. Conversely, agreement with monotheistic beliefs in Judaism and Islam was frequently combined with a rejection of fundamentalist aspects in the religious practice of both religious traditions.

The two contrasting pairs form a matrix with four planes – the *individual-external*, the *individual-internal*, the *collective-external* and the *collective-internal* planes. Although the underlying foundational framework informs the entire matrix of beliefs, there is a particular relevance of the respective layers aligned with the four planes of the matrix – for example, the *personal & psychological* layer is particularly relevant to the *individual-internal* dimensions of beliefs. Each interviewee made statements relating to different planes. Differences in their beliefs about other religions are reflected in a difference of emphasis on one or more of the dimensions or planes. The methodology of this study does not produce data to support a definite association between preference for a particular dimension or plane and, for example, age, or gender, or church tradition – or indeed personality traits. However, these possible links would be very interesting to explore in future research.

Figures 2-5 show examples of four interviewees' statements mapped against the different planes of the matrix.

Figure 2: Mapping LISA to the model

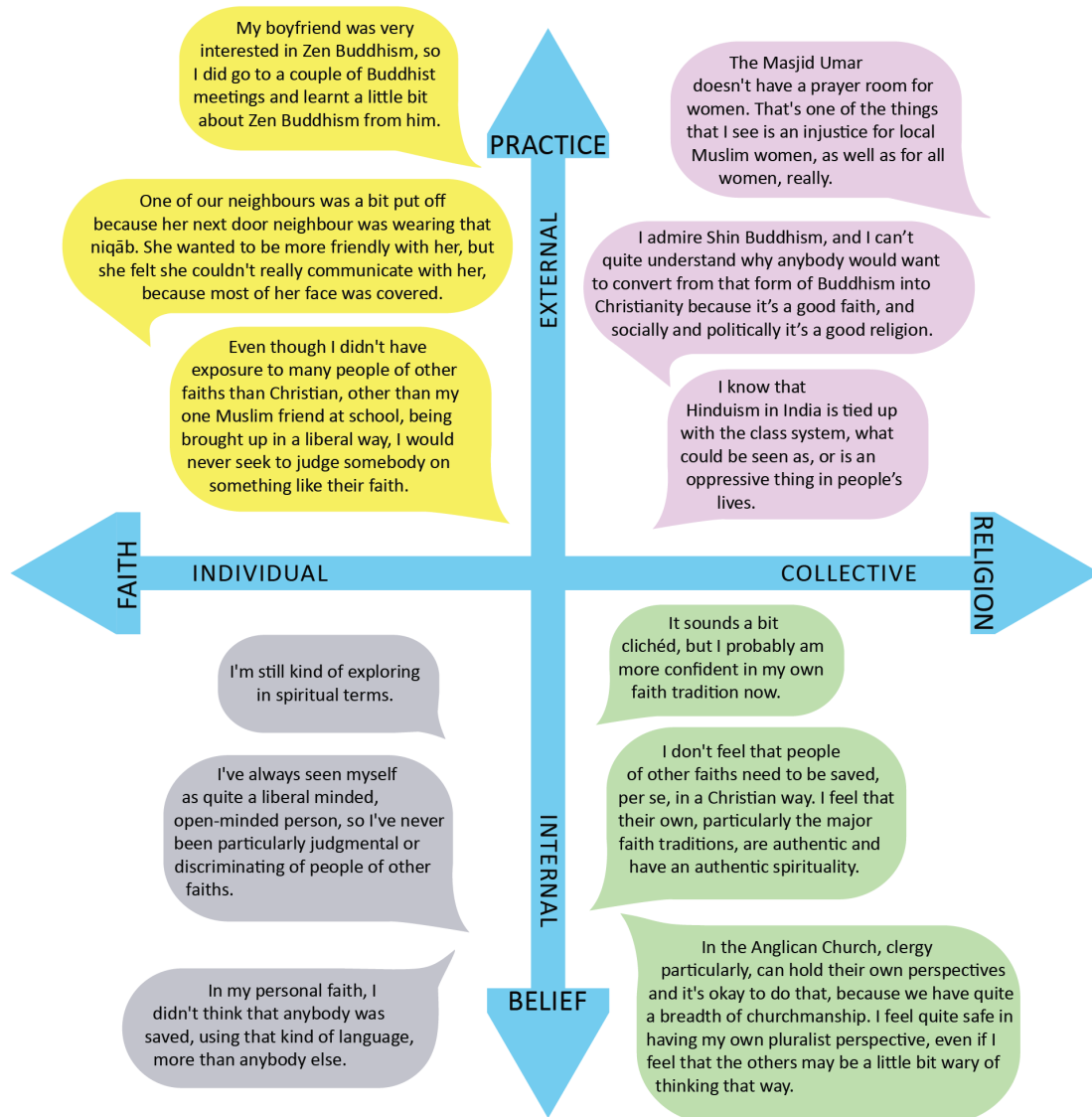


Figure 3: Mapping BARBARA to the model

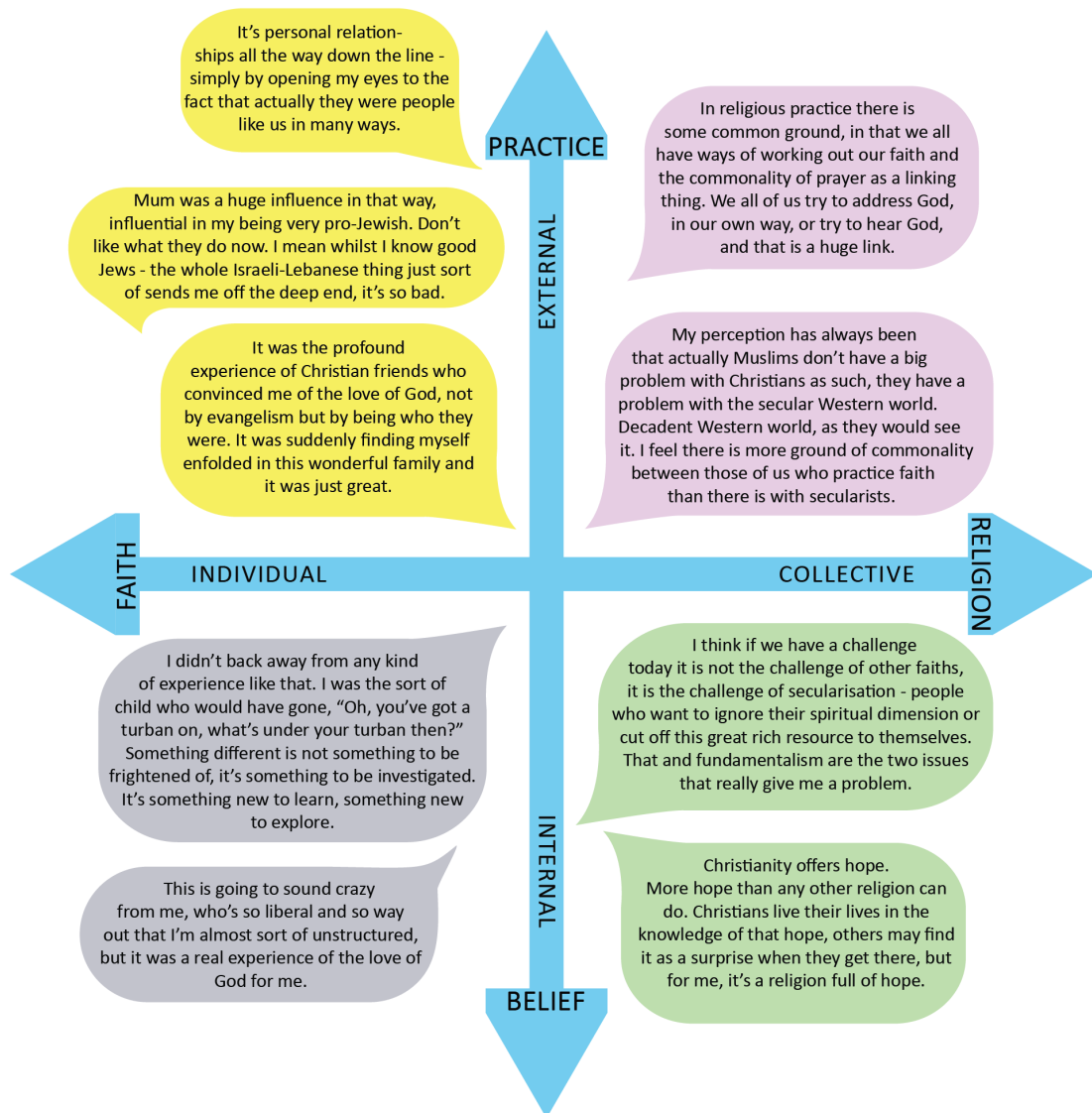


Figure 4: Mapping DAVID to the model

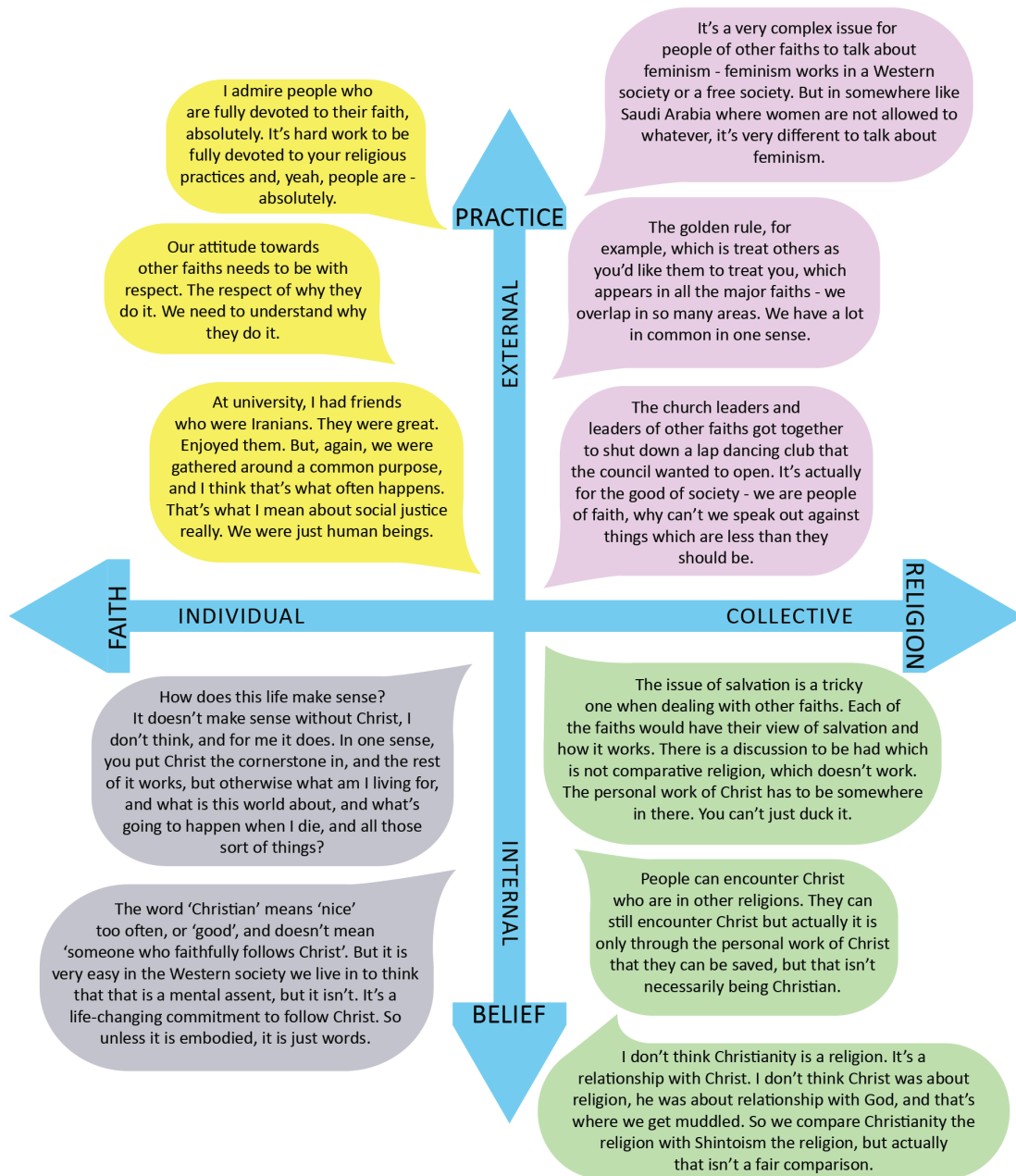
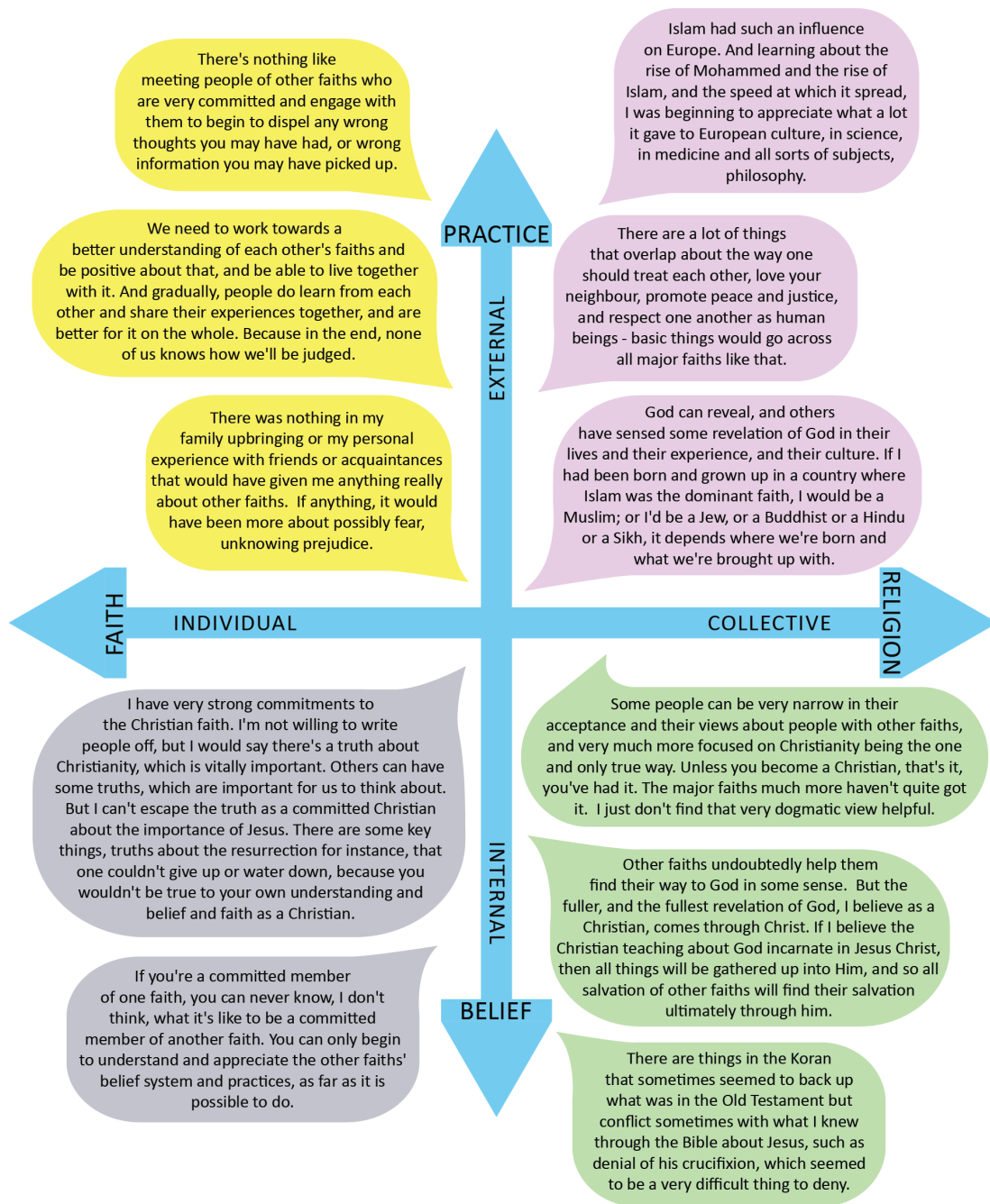




Figure 5: Mapping JAMES to the model



### 11.5. The themes

The model includes as a third element various themes that were identified in the data – ‘roots’ (10.4.1.), ‘respect’ (10.4.2.), ‘commonality of religions’ (8.3.1., 8.3.4., 9.2., 9.4., 10.4.2.), ‘uniqueness of Christ’ (10.2.4.), as well as the ‘Cure of Souls’ Framework of Ministry (10.3.) and Ministers’ Theology of Faiths (10.2.). The themes represent a common subject or motif in a substantial number of statements from a significant number of interviewees.

In the model (Figure 1) the themes have been placed into the plane into which many of the statements relating to the theme belong. For example, many of the statements relating to ‘respect’ fit into the *individual-external* plane: they refer to individuals of other religious traditions and the way they practise their faith. On the other hand, many of the statements relating to the ‘uniqueness of Christ’ correspond to the *collective-internal* plane: they refer to religious truths, what is held to be true, within the Christian tradition. However, although many statements for the ‘commonality of the religions’ relate to the *collective-external* frame, a smaller number could be mapped to the two adjacent planes, as this is a more complex and multi-faceted theme.

As discussed, the foundational framework – the overlapping green circles – are relevant to each theme but to different degrees. For example, although ‘roots’ is placed diagonally across from the *cultural & social* layer of the framework, cultural and social influences were highly significant for many ministers’ personal identity as a Christian (see 10.4.1.). Conversely, the *personal & psychological* layer – a minister’s personality, values and ideals – might have only a minor influence on their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ.

### 11.6. Conclusion

The breadth of the three research questions for this study has resulted in an equivalent breadth of findings. In order to link the various findings and explain their relationship to each other I have suggested an overarching model that illustrates the dimensions of CofE ministers’ beliefs about other religions against an underlying multi-layered foundational framework that influences the construction of these beliefs, and that provides a context for the specific themes and theological frameworks that have emerged from the data.

Although the model necessarily simplifies the complexities of beliefs, it is nevertheless comprehensive and flexible, with potential for further development in order to take account of additional data, and with possible uses in different contexts, for example to explore sets of beliefs of other social groups or relating to other issues.

This model draws together the findings of the study and as such is both a satisfying endpoint and a springboard for future research.

## **12. Conclusions**

### **12.1. Personal reflection**

A PhD thesis is, amongst other things, a testament of a personal journey. My journey was longer than many and at times felt interminable – as it must have seemed to my family and supervisory team! Much has changed since I started my research, in my personal circumstances but even more so in the wider social and political context (see 12.2.).

When starting out on PhD research I was daunted by the academic requirements of such a project yet at the same time underestimated its demands in terms of time and commitment.

Although I had research experience in a professional context and had written a dissertation for a Masters degree in Philosophy and Religion, academic research and writing was still a comparatively new area for me. Working part-time as an academic researcher in a different field – learning and teaching in Higher Education – alongside my PhD research gave me invaluable practical research experience, expanded my methodological repertoire and introduced me to a wider range of theoretical frameworks. For an interdisciplinary study such as this it has been enormously helpful to work with and facilitate the research of colleagues from different departments and disciplines. Useful input and inspiration for my own research came from some unexpected places, projects and people.

Employment alongside the PhD research did, however, add to the time pressures inherent in this project due to its interdisciplinary nature, which required literature reviews in different fields as well as extensive background reading, as my Masters degree had been in a related but different field. The amount of time taken to actually interview participants was negligible compared to that spent coding and analysing data, reading and writing – the solitary aspects of research.

Browsing any online forum for PhD students soon confirms that most find their research a lonely endeavour; this was also the case for me, especially compared to the research carried out in my professional role, which usually involved collaboration with colleagues, with all the joys and occasional difficulties this entails. Although some deadlines were put into place by the university and by the supervisory team that served to stimulate progress, the most difficult aspect of PhD research was to remain motivated over such an extended period of time, through phases of uncertainty and stagnation in my research and events and developments in my personal life.

A positive aspect of the extended duration of my PhD research was that it allowed ideas to develop and mature. Like any researcher I had brought preconceived notions and expectations to my project - I had to let go of some of these and this was not always a quick or easy process. An important aspect of this was abandoning more positivist notions of research and embracing the complex and constructed nature of data, of analysis and of theorising. Finding a voice as a researcher, as an academic, as a writer, is perhaps as important an outcome of PhD research as the actual thesis. On a personal level, my subject inevitably required a great deal of reflection on my own beliefs about other religions, my perceived formative influences and experiences, and my theoretical and theological frameworks. Engaging with philosophical and theological positions that challenged my own has taken my journey of faith along some unexpected and sometimes stony paths.

When I started exploring CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions, it was a subject I found fascinating and considered of relevance and importance in multicultural Britain. Yet other people who asked me about the topic of my thesis seemed to view my subject as quite interesting but rather specialist, and possibly even somewhat esoteric. Over time there has been a noticeable change in questioners' responses: most now enquire further and offer their own opinions and beliefs about other religions and the implications of an increasingly multi-religious society. While this evidence is anecdotal, proliferating media coverage also points to the increasing significance of the subject area in society.

## **12.2. Reflection on the study**

In recent years, events and developments in the wider world have brought the issue of interreligious relations into much sharper focus, most recently through the substantial influx of mostly Muslim refugees and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern African countries into Western and Northern Europe. Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán, describing this development as a threat to Europe's Christian identity (*The Guardian*, 03/09/2015), has been a prominent commentator amongst many others to focus on the religious identity of the new arrivals. It has become ever more evident that people's beliefs about religions, particularly religions other than their own, matter – not least because these beliefs find expression in behaviours and actions. This is, of course, particularly true for individuals in positions of power and influence, such as politicians and journalists, but arguably also for individuals whose sphere of influence is much more limited, such as teachers and clergy, who nevertheless play a part in shaping the beliefs of those they encounter in the course of their daily work.

This study has explored several aspects of the beliefs of CofE ministers about other religions, of their formation, and of the theological frameworks supporting them.

Firstly, this study has shown the complexity of CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions: one aspect of this complexity is the differentiation between religious individuals, 'persons of faith', on one hand, and the religions as institutionalised and enculturated systems of belief and practice on the other - the individual and collective dimensions of beliefs about other religions; and the differentiation between internal beliefs, what is held to be true, and religious practice, how theological tenets are expressed in relation to others - the internal and external dimensions of these beliefs. Another aspect of this complexity is the range of perspectives contained within an individual's set of beliefs: while on one hand ministers' beliefs principally expressed a Christian perspective, informed by their Christian faith and theology, this is balanced by and held in tension with perspectives originating from other aspects of their personal and social identities, for example as men or women, as professional clergy, as liberal or conservative, as low, high or broad church.

Secondly, this study has shown the perceived centrality of relational and experiential factors in the formation of beliefs about other religions. Many of the encounters with people from other religious traditions described as influential took place in interviewees' formative years, long preceding their ministry, and were comparatively ordinary and circumstantial in nature. Outcomes of interviewees' encounters were generally described in positive terms and included increased and improved knowledge about other religions, recognition of the close link between culture and religion in general and of the influence of the cultural context on a person's religious faith, appreciation of the commonalities between people of different religious traditions, growing understanding of and empathy with people of other religions leading to relationships marked by mutual respect, and the enrichment of their own faith.

Thirdly, this study has offered a theological framework – Ministers' Theology of Faiths – that accounts more successfully for CofE ministers' beliefs about other religions than the traditional framework of academic theology of religions. The study also points to the central role that ministers' understanding of the nature of their ministry, namely a 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry, plays in underpinning and shaping their theological framework relating to other religions.

Finally, and closely connected to the third point, this study has given a voice to CofE parish ministers. Although many parish ministers preach most Sundays, and indeed in several services, ironically the opportunities to be heard as an individual, a person, rather than as

someone fulfilling a particular role, as representative of the institution, seem to be rare. The interviews carried out as part of this study have produced a rich and fascinating tapestry of stories. Readers of the transcripts will, I believe, find themselves at various times surprised, moved, inspired, challenged, alarmed and perhaps even offended.

### **12.3. Contribution of the study**

The essential requirement for a PhD thesis is that it makes an original contribution to the field of study. What then does this study contribute to the field of interreligious studies?

The first contribution is to identify an area for investigation that has not been previously addressed by academic research in this way, namely CofE parish ministers' beliefs about other religions, the perceived significant influences on these beliefs and the theological frameworks underpinning them. The findings of this study thus contribute knowledge to the developing academic discipline of interreligious studies, which in turn informs a wider field of increasing social and political significance, interreligious relations.

The second contribution is methodological: fundamentally this study has been carried out using a well-established qualitative research methodology, namely constructivist grounded theory; however, I have developed an innovative multifaceted approach to data collection in order to secure and enhance the quality of the data by combining several research methods and tools, namely focus groups and semi-structured interviews, the nominal group technique, prompt cards and a questionnaire.

The third contribution is a review and critical analysis of official CofE documents relating to other religions. Drawing on the classic theology of religions approach I establish what theological positions on other religions are expressed in these documents, and as a result clarify this particular aspect of the institutional framework in which CofE parish ministers carry out their ministry.

The fourth and main contribution of this study is the development of three theoretical models, grounded in the data of this study, to identify, describe and explain different aspects of ministers' beliefs about other religions.

The first of these is a theological framework entitled Ministers' Theology of Faiths. In order to develop this model I have used an existing theoretical framework from academic theology of religions, identified central characteristics of this existing model, and offered an alternative, complementary model that more effectively takes account of the data than the existing model. I suggest that Ministers' Theology of Faiths draws on a more holistic understanding of

salvation and judges other religions predominantly with regard to their beneficent potential, their effect on human flourishing of individuals and communities. The proposed model therefore also implicitly challenges the relevance of the existing model of the theology of religions beyond the narrow boundaries of academic theology.

I also suggest that Ministers' Theology of Faiths is closely linked to their particular understanding of their ministry, which I describe as a 'Cure of Souls' Framework of Ministry, the second model proposed in this study. I suggest that this framework defines CofE ministers' self-understanding as parish ministers and is marked by three common elements: a clear sense of vocation as a calling by God independently from a particular institutional context, a calling to serve all people they encounter of any religion and none, and a calling into the specific geographical context of their parish. The second and third elements in particular combine to express themselves in a perceived duty and expressed willingness to serve people of other religions in their parish in whatever way is needed, practically and pastorally – in effect to contribute to the flourishing of individuals and communities of other religious traditions.

As this study was designed as exploratory research, with three broad research questions, several additional themes were identified in the data alongside these two frameworks. In order to take account of the complexity of ministers' beliefs evident in the data, and the various emerging themes, I developed a third model, which describes the dimensions of interviewees' beliefs about other religions in the context of a foundational framework that informs and underpins these beliefs. This working model integrates the various findings of this study and illustrates their relationship to each other. It is explanatory rather than predictive but nevertheless comprehensively designed to allow for the integration of additional themes and elements identified in future research.

Beyond these contributions to the academic field of interreligious studies, and related academic fields, this thesis also has the potential for a contribution outside academia: the findings of this study could inform the Church of England's approach to clergy training and ministerial development in the area of interreligious engagement, particularly as many participants in this study considered the training they received in this area inadequate. Given the positive outcomes of personal encounters with people of other religions described by interviewees, the study also suggests the importance of enabling and facilitating opportunities for ministers to encounter and engage with people of other religions.



#### **12.4. Limitations of the study**

The process of research involves numerous choices, sometimes between more or less advantageous options, more often between options with different advantages and disadvantages. As a result of these choices, every study has limitations as well as strengths, and these are often inextricably linked: using a particular methodology introduces both its strengths and weaknesses into a study; using a particular theoretical framework allows some aspects of the data to be explored but excludes others.

One set of limitations is related to the methodology chosen and I have previously discussed this in the chapters on research design and methodology, data collection, sampling and data analysis (Chapters 5-7). The main limitation of constructivist grounded theory is the fracturing of narratives through thematic analysis of the data: individual participants with all their complexity 'get lost amongst the themes', as short quotes are spread throughout the thematically organised text and it is difficult for the reader to mentally combine them into an authentic reflection of a person. This I have attempted to balance at least in part through the inclusion of extensive sections of interview transcripts in Appendix Q.

A related limitation results from interviewing each participant only once, thus limiting their contribution to that particular time and context, even though follow-up interviews might have added depth and complexity to the data. However, the advantages of a second round of interviews with some participants from the first round were outweighed by those of including new interviewees, with a wider range of participants resulting in greater breadth and comprehensiveness of data.

Furthermore, it would have been interesting to introduce elements of ethnographic or action research by observing interviewees, particularly those involved in interreligious engagement, and to consider their stated beliefs in the light of their actual practice. However, introducing a very different methodology to explore the relationship between interviewees' accounts and practice was beyond the scope of this study.

Another set of limitations of this study results from its interdisciplinary nature, located at the intersection of and reaching into several academic fields. This makes a full overview and comprehensive understanding of each field and its literature a daunting, if not unmanageable task. A closer focus on an intersection of different fields also makes it necessary to ignore other, more 'distant' or even central areas of these. The judgment of what, and who, is relevant to a particular interdisciplinary study is highly subjective and heavily influenced by academic discipline and personal perspective, as was apparent in many supervision sessions.

This problem is compounded by the word count limits for a PhD thesis - this document includes around two thirds of the original full-length chapters. In the end I had to have what in German, in one of those expressive constructs peculiar to the language, is called 'Mut zur Lücke' – literally, 'courage for the gap' – implying an acceptance of incompleteness and provisionality. In line with a constructivist paradigm this study offers my unique but limited perspective as a researcher: there is no claim to completeness or definitiveness; instead, with this study I aim to offer a methodologically sound, valid, relevant and original contribution to the field.

Essentially, the limitations acknowledged are in fact opportunities for further research, for example by focusing on a differently formulated research question, using a different methodology, involving different or additional participants, or bringing a different theoretical perspective to bear on the data.

### **12.5. Directions for future research**

I have described my research project as an explorative study and this implies the assumption that it will serve as a starting point for future research and the expectation that various aspects of it will be taken forward in due course. There are four broad categories of potential future developments: the first category involves the exploration of related areas through variations of the research questions, the second category consists of methodological modifications and developments, the third category relates to aspects of the data which were noted and described but not fully explored in this study, and the fourth category consists of approaches to refine and develop the proposed theoretical models.

Regarding the first category, in this study I have addressed three research questions and each of these leads to other, related questions. Having asked in this study what CoFE ministers believe about other religions, future research could usefully explore and compare the beliefs about other religions of ministers from other Christian traditions, for example Catholic and Orthodox priests, or those of Christian laypeople, in the Anglican and other Christian traditions. Alternatively, different social or professional groups could be studied: the beliefs of teachers about the religions would be a highly relevant area for study, considering their influence on children and young people. It would also be fascinating to 'reverse direction' and explore the beliefs of clergy or religious leaders from non-Christian religious traditions about religions not their own, including Christianity.

The second research question – 'What factors do Church of England ministers consider the main influences on their beliefs about religions?' – similarly opens other avenues for

exploration, such as the perceived significant influences on the beliefs about other religions of Christian lay people, or other social or professional groups, or indeed of ministers of other Christian denominations or clergy of different religious traditions. Future research could also investigate the perceived influences on CofE ministers' belief about other issues – including perennial favourites such as questions of sexual and medical ethics – in the light of the evidence in this study of the significance of relational and experiential factors.

The third research question – 'What theological frameworks inform Church of England ministers' beliefs about other religions?' – could be followed up by exploring the theological frameworks of lay people, particularly those actively involved in interreligious engagement. On the other hand, it could be taken forward to explore the theological frameworks underlying other aspects of ministers' worldviews, for example their political beliefs.

The second category of future directions, methodological developments, also offers many opportunities for future research. I have already mentioned the useful contribution different methodologies could make: for example, ethnographic approaches could bring more understanding of the relationship between beliefs and professional practice; narrative approaches could deepen understanding of individuals' interpretation of their experiences. It would also be very fruitful to bring other theoretical perspectives to bear on the existing data: sociological and psychological models such as social identity theory and self-categorization theory would contribute additional insights into the complex belief systems evident in the data.

The third category of future directions for research relates to aspects of the data not fully explored in this study. In Chapter 9 I have highlighted several aspects of the data that could be usefully pursued further. These include subjects as varied as the influence of friends on the religious beliefs of mature Christians, the difference between men's and women's perceptions of their family's influence on their beliefs, the role of Christian mentors and leaders, and clergy perceptions of the media. Interviewees' statements on clergy training and professional development relating to other religions clearly invite further research, including a detailed review of current provision in different training institutions and its usefulness to ordinands. It would also be interesting to explore further how ministers process and account for negative experiences with other people in general, not necessarily just people of other religions.

With regard to the fourth category of future directions of research, namely the refinement and development of the theoretical models, the proposed models offered as part of the

findings are grounded in the data collected for this particular study. Additional data, different methodological approaches and other theoretical perspectives would allow the three models – Ministers’ Theology of Faiths, the ‘Cure of Souls’ Framework of Ministry and the Dimensions of CofE ministers’ Beliefs about other Religions – to be refined with additional elements, and potentially developed to apply to other social groups, or different contexts and beliefs.

This study has produced a wealth of original data leading to some notable findings, and it contributes three theoretical models to the academic debate in interreligious studies, as well as providing an example of a rigorous qualitative methodology. Beyond academia, its findings could inform practice in CofE clergy training and professional development and it could contribute to the public debate about interreligious relations. It is my hope that this study will have outcomes beyond a slot on my university’s library shelves, and will make a contribution to a better understanding between the religions, and thereby to the common good.

Sabine Bohnacker-Bruce  
January 2016

## REFERENCES

- 1 Corinthians 15: 24-28, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- 1 John 4: 7, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- ACC see Anglican Consultative Council
- Acts 10: 34-35, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Acts 17: 22-31, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Acts 4: 12, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Agee, J. (2009) 'Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(4), pp.431-447.
- Aldridge, A. (1994) 'Women priests: from exclusion to accommodation', *British Journal of Sociology*, 45(3), pp.501-510.
- Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON) (2008) *Generous love: the truth of the gospel and the call to dialogue*. London: Anglican Consultative Council. Available at: [http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/media/18910/generous\\_love\\_a4\\_with\\_foreward.pdf](http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/media/18910/generous_love_a4_with_foreward.pdf) (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON) (2012). *Land of promise? An Anglican exploration of Christian attitudes to the Holy Land, with special reference to 'Christian zionism'*. London: Anglican Consultative Council. Available at: [http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/media/18907/land\\_of\\_promise.pdf](http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/media/18907/land_of_promise.pdf) (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) (1994) *The truth shall make you free: the Lambeth Conference 1988 - the reports, resolutions & pastoral letters from the bishops*. London: Church House Publishing.
- Asad, T. (1993) *Genealogies of religion: discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Asad, T. (2011) 'Thinking about religion, belief and politics', in Orsi, R.A. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to religious studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.36-57.
- Astley, J. (2002) *Ordinary theology: looking, listening and learning in theology*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bagilhole, B. (2003) 'Prospects for change? Structural, cultural and action dimensions of the careers of pioneer women priests in the Church of England', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 10(3), pp.361-377.
- Baptist Union of Great Britain (no date) *Good neighbours: a study guide on living in a multi-faith society*. Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Good%20neighbours.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Barbour, R. (2007) *Doing focus groups*. London: Sage Publications.
- Barnes, M. (2002) *Theology and the dialogue of religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Barnes, M. (2010) 'Discussing the divine', *Thinking Faith (May 2010)*. Available at: [http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20100518\\_1.htm](http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20100518_1.htm) (Accessed: 08/01/2016).
- Barth, K. (1957) *Church dogmatics - Vol II: The doctrine of God, Part 1*. Translation of *Die kirchliche Dogmatik II: Die Lehre von Gott 1* (1940) by T.H.L. Parker, W.B. Johnston, H. Knight and J.L.M. Haire. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Basinger, D. (2002) *Religious diversity: a philosophical assessment*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Beatty, J.E., Leigh, J.S.A. and Lund Dean, K. (2009) 'Finding our roots: an exercise for creating a personal teaching philosophy statement', *Journal of Management Education*, 33(1), pp.115-130.
- Beckford, J.A. (2003) *Social theory and religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bengtson, V.L., Copen, C.E., Putney, N.M. and Silverstein, M. (2009) 'A longitudinal study of the intergenerational transmission of religion', *International Sociology*, 24(3), pp.325-345.
- Bibliography of guidelines for inter faith dialogue* (2008) Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Bibliography%20of%20OGuidelines%20for%20Inter%20Faith%20Dialogue.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016)
- Bishop, D.H. (1969) 'Religious confrontation, a case study: the 1893 Parliament of Religions', *Numen*, 16(1), pp.63-76.
- Blaikie, N. (2007) *Approaches to social enquiry*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Cambridge: Polity.
- Blaikie, N. (2010) *Designing social research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bowie, N. (2008) 'Has anti-black racism been replaced by islamophobia?', *Yale Daily News* (30/10/2008). Available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/column-has-anti-black-racism-been-replaced-by-islamophobia/> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Braybrooke, M. (1983) 'Christianity and other religions', in Richardson, A. and Bowden, J. (eds) *A new dictionary of Christian theology*. London: SCM Press, pp.94-99.
- Braybrooke, M. (1992) *Pilgrimage of hope: one hundred years of global interfaith dialogue*. London: SCM Press.
- Brecht, M. (2014) *Virtue in dialogue: belief, religious diversity, and women's interreligious encounter*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications (Wipf and Stock).
- British Council of Churches (1981, rev. 1983) *Relations with people of other faiths: guidelines for dialogue in Britain*. London: Church House Publishing.
- Byrne, P. (2004) 'It is not reasonable to believe that only one religion is true' (Reply to Yandell), in Peterson, M.L. and VanArragon, R.J. (eds) *Contemporary debates in philosophy of religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.201-210 + pp.215-217.
- Cantwell Smith, W. (1962) *The meaning and end of religion*. Reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Cantwell Smith, W. (1963) *The faith of other men*. Reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- Cantwell Smith, W. (1980) *Towards a world theology: faith and the comparative history of religion*. London: Macmillan.

- Capper, C. A. (2000) 'Life lessons and a loving epistemology: a response to Julia Laible's loving epistemology', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(6), pp.693-698.
- Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (2010) *Meeting God in friend & stranger: fostering respect and mutual understanding between the religions*. London: The Catholic Truth Society.
- Chao, E.C. (2015) 'The-truth-about-Islam.com: ordinary theories of racism and cyber islamophobia', *Critical Sociology*, 41(1), pp.57-75.
- Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications.
- Charmaz, K. (2009) 'Shifting the grounds: constructivist grounded theory methods' in Morse, J., Noerager Stern, P., Corbin, J., Bowers, B., Charmaz, K. and Clarke, A. *Developing grounded theory: the second generation*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, pp.127-193.
- Chaves, M. (2011) 'Religious trends in America', *Social Work & Christianity*, 38(2), pp.119-132.
- Cheetham, D. (2008) 'Inclusivisms: honouring faithfulness and openness' in Race, A. and Hedges, P.M. (eds) *Christian approaches to other faiths*. London: SCM Press, pp.63-84.
- Christian Muslim Forum (no date) *Ethical guidelines for Christian and Muslim witness in Britain*. Available at: [http://www.bcdd.org.uk/docstore/Ethical\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.bcdd.org.uk/docstore/Ethical_Guidelines.pdf) (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Christian Muslim Forum (2009) *Local Christian-Muslim friendship: building relationships between mosques and churches*. Available at: [http://www.christianmuslimforum.org/downloads/4CF\\_Christian-Muslim-Friendship.pdf](http://www.christianmuslimforum.org/downloads/4CF_Christian-Muslim-Friendship.pdf) (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Christians, C.G. (2005) 'Ethics and politics in qualitative research', in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp.139-164.
- Church of England (Mission and Public Affairs Council) (no date) *Guidelines on civic services/events involving people of different faiths*. Available at: <http://www.manchester.anglican.org/upload/handbook/Faith%20Communities%20in%20Civic%20and%20Parish%20Events%20-%20Cof.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016)
- Church of England (Board for Mission and Unity) (1984) *Towards a theology for inter-faith dialogue: report of the Inter-Faith Consultative Group of the Board for Mission and Unity*. London: CIO Publishing.
- Church of England (General Synod Board of Mission) (1992) *'Multi faith worship'? - questions and suggestions from the Inter-Faith Consultative Group*. London: Church House Publishing.
- Church of England (Doctrine Commission of the Church of England) (1995) *The mystery of salvation: the story of God's gift*. London: Church House Publishing.
- Church of England (Inter Faith Consultative Group) (1996) *Communities and buildings: Church of England premises and other faiths*. London: Church House Publishing. Available at: <http://presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Synod%20Report%20on%20Use%20of%20Church%20Buildings.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).

- Church of England (Inter Faith Consultative Group) (1998) *Room for religion: shared facilities for religious use*. Available at: [http://www.nhs-chaplaincy-spiritualcare.org.uk/Room\\_for\\_Religion.pdf](http://www.nhs-chaplaincy-spiritualcare.org.uk/Room_for_Religion.pdf) (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Church of England (Inter Faith Consultative Group) (2001) *Sharing one hope? - The Church of England and Christian-Jewish relations: a contribution to a continuing debate*. London: Church House Publishing.
- Church of England (2003) *The Hind report: formation for ministry within a learning church – the structure and funding of ordination training*. Available at: <https://search.churchofengland.org/results.aspx?k=The%20Hind%20report> (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (Inter Faith Consultative Group) (2004) *Guidelines for the celebration of inter faith marriages in church*. Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Inter%20Religious%20Marriage%20-%20Church%20of%20England%20Guidelines.pdf> (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (Inter Faith Consultative Group) (2005) *Presence and Engagement: the churches' task in a multi faith society*. Available at: [www.churchofengland.org/about-us/interfaith.aspx](http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/interfaith.aspx) (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (Archbishops' Council) (2007) *Church of England clergy with disabilities audit 2005*. Available at: [www.churchofengland.org/media/38091/disabilityreport.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/38091/disabilityreport.pdf) (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (2008) *Multi-faith worship - a guidance paper*. Available at: [search.churchofengland.org/results.aspx?k=multi%20faith%20worship](http://search.churchofengland.org/results.aspx?k=multi%20faith%20worship) (Accessed 10/01/2016).
- Church of England (Presence and Engagement Task Group) (2009a) *Staying present and engaging faithfully*. Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/staying-present-and-engaging-faithfully> (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (Presence and Engagement Task Group) (2009b) *Learning pathways: equipping ministry in multi religious contexts*. Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/presence-and-engagement-learning-pathways> (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Church of England) (2009c) *Use of closed church buildings for worship by bodies other than the Church of England: excerpt from 'Pastoral measure 1983: code of recommended practice – 5<sup>th</sup> edition (2009)* Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Use%20of%20Church%20Buildings%20for%20Worship.pdf> (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (Cathedral and Church Buildings Division) (2009d) *Recent surveys/mapping exercises undertaken across the English regions, Scotland and Wales to measure the contribution of faith groups to social action and culture*. Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Regional%20reports%202009.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Church of England (House of Bishops Task Group) (2010a) *Sharing the gospel of salvation: report to General Synod (GS Misc 956)*. Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/39745/gsmisc956.pdf> (Accessed 15/01/2016).



- Church of England (Archbishops' Council) (2010b) *Countering far right political parties, extremist groups and racist politics: a guidance note*. Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Countering%20Racist%20and%20Far-Right%20Groups.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Church of England (Presence and Engagement Task Group) (2011) *Generous love for all: Presence and Engagement for the new quinquennium*. Available at: [http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/72\\_resource.pdf](http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/72_resource.pdf) (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (Archbishops' Council) (2012) *Church statistics 2010/11*. Available at: [https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1477827/2010\\_11churchstatistics.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1477827/2010_11churchstatistics.pdf) (Accessed: 10/01/2016).
- Church of England (Archbishops' Council) (2014) *Statistics for mission 2013*. Available at: [www.churchofengland.org/media/2112070/2013statisticsformission.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/2112070/2013statisticsformission.pdf) (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Church of England (2016a) *Facts and stats*. Available from: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/facts-stats.aspx> (Accessed: 09/01/2016).
- Church of England (2016b) *Church schools and academies*. Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/education/church-schools-academies.aspx> (Accessed: 09/01/2016).
- Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations (1994) *Christians and Jews: a new way of thinking*. Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland.
- Church Urban Fund (2016) *Near Neighbours*. Available at: [www.cuf.org.uk/how-we-help/near-neighbours](http://www.cuf.org.uk/how-we-help/near-neighbours) (Accessed 10/01/16)
- Clooney, F.X. (1990) 'Reading the world in Christ: from comparison to inclusivism', in D'Costa, G. (ed.) *Christian uniqueness reconsidered: the myth of a pluralistic theology of religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, pp.63-80.
- Clooney, F.X (2010) *Comparative theology: deep learning across religious borders*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cobb, J.B. Jr. (1990) 'Beyond "pluralism"', in D'Costa, G. (ed.) *Christian uniqueness reconsidered: the myth of a pluralistic theology of religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, pp.81-95.
- CofE see Church of England
- Collins, B.W. and Sturgill, A. (2013) 'The effects of media use on religious individuals' perceptions of science', *Journal of Media & Religion*, 12(4), pp.217-230.
- Corbin, J. and Strauss, A.L. (2008) *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London: Sage Publications.
- Cornille, C. (2008) *The im-possibility of interreligious dialogue*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Corsini, R.J. (1999) *The dictionary of psychology*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Cragg, K. (1977) *The Christian and other religion: the measure of Christ*. London: Mowbrays.
- Cragg, K. (1986) *The Christ and the faiths: theology in cross-reference*. London: SPCK.

- D'Costa, G. (1986) *Theology and religious pluralism: the challenge of other religions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- D'Costa, G. (2000) *The meeting of religions and the trinity*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- D'Costa, G. (2009) *Christianity and world religions: disputed questions in the theology of religions*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Davie, G. (2013) *The sociology of religion: A critical agenda*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Sage.
- Davie, M. (2009a) *A Church of England approach to the unique significance of Jesus Christ*. Available at: [www.churchofengland.org/media/38970/mdpaper.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/38970/mdpaper.pdf) (Accessed 12/01/2016).
- Davie, M. (2009b) *The witness of Scripture, the Fathers and the historic formularies to the uniqueness of Christ*. Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/38970/mdpaper.pdf> (Accessed 12/01/2016).
- Davies, D.J. (1993) 'Spirituality, churchmanship, and English Anglican priests', *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 6(1), pp.5-18.
- Delbecq, A.L. and Van de Ven, A.H. (1971) 'A group process model for problem identification and program planning', *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 7(4), pp.466-492.
- Denscombe, M. (2010) *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*. 4<sup>th</sup> edn. Maidenhead, UK: McGraw-Hill Education & Open University Press.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) (1994) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) (2005) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) *Religious education in English schools: non-statutory guidance 2010*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/190260/DCSF-00114-2010.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190260/DCSF-00114-2010.pdf) (Accessed: 15/01/2016).
- Dillon, M. (2014) *Introduction to sociological theory: theorists, concepts, and their applicability to the twenty-first century*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.
- DiNoia, J.A. (1992) *The diversity of religions: a Christian perspective*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.
- Diocese of Soutwark (no date) *Guidelines on civic services/events involving people of different faiths*. Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Worship%20-%20Civic%20%26%20Other%20Services%20Guidelines.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Doe, M. (2008) *An Anglican understanding of mission and evangelism*. Available at: <http://www.rethinkingmission.org.uk/pdfs/bpdoejun08.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Duffy, S.J. (2005) 'Experience of grace' in Marmion, D. and Hines, M.E. (eds) *The Cambridge companion to Karl Rahner*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.43-62.
- Dupuis, J. (1997) *Toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Dupuis, J. (2002) *Christianity and the religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

- Economic and Social Research Council (2010) *ESRC framework for research ethics* (2010, updated January 2015). Available at: [www.esrc.ac.uk/files/funding/guidance-for-applicants/esrc-framework-for-research-ethics-2015/](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/files/funding/guidance-for-applicants/esrc-framework-for-research-ethics-2015/) (Accessed 10/01/2016).
- Ellemers, N. and Haslam, S.A. (2011) 'Social identity theory', in Van Lange, P.A.M., Kruglanski, A.W., Higgins, E.T. (eds) *Handbook of theories of social psychology: Vol. 2*. London: Sage, pp.379-398.
- Ephesians 1: 10, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Fitzgerald, T. (1997) 'A critique of "religion" as a cross-cultural category', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 9(2), pp.91-110.
- Fitzgerald, T. (2007) *Discourse on civility and barbarity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fletcher, J. Hill (2005) *Monopoly on salvation: a feminist approach to religious pluralism*. New York: Continuum.
- Fletcher, J. Hill (2008) 'Feminisms: syncretism, symbiosis, synergetic dance', in Race, A. and Hedges, P.M. (eds) *Christian approaches to other faiths*. London: SCM Press.
- Flick, U. (2007) *Managing quality in qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Flor, D.L. and Knapp, N. Flanagan (2001) 'Transmission and transaction: predicting adolescents' internalization of parental religious values', *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15(4), pp.627-645.
- Fontana, D. (2003) *Psychology, religion and spirituality*. Leicester: British Psychological Society and Oxford: Blackwell.
- Francis, L.J. (2010) 'Five loaves and two fishes: an empirical study in psychological type and biblical hermeneutics among Anglican preachers: original research', *HTS: Theological Studies*, 66(1), pp.1-5.
- Francis, L.J. (2012) 'What happened to the fig tree? An empirical study in psychological type and biblical hermeneutics', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 15(9), pp.873-891.
- Francis, L.J., Butler, A., Jones, S.H., Craig, C.L. (2007) 'Type patterns among active members of the Anglican church: a perspective from England', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10(5), pp.435-443.
- Francis, L. J., Robbins, M. and Jones, S. H. (2012) 'The psychological-type profile of clergywomen in ordained local ministry in the Church of England: pioneers or custodians?', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 15(9), pp.919-932.
- Francis, L.J. and Turton, D.W. (2002) 'Are charismatic clergy more satisfied with their ministry? A study among male parochial clergy in the Church of England', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 5(2), pp.135-142.
- Fredericks, J.L. (2004) *Buddhists and Christians: through comparative theology to solidarity*. New York: Orbis.
- Frazier, J. (2011) *Bridges and barriers to Hindu-Christian relations: a report by the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies commissioned by the Hindu Christian Forum, UK*. <http://www.ochs.org.uk/sites/g/files/g383876/f/building-bridges.pdf> (Accessed: 15/01/2016).

- Gaston, R. (2015) 'Christian responses to islamophobia: a practical theological reflection', in Hedges, P.M. (ed.) *Contemporary Muslim-Christian encounters: developments, diversity and dialogues*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gaston, R. (forthcoming - 2016) 'The typology and theological education: towards a practical theology of inter faith engagement', in Harris, E., Hedges, P.M. and Hettiarachchi, S. (eds) *Twenty-first century theologies of religions: retrospection and new frontiers*. Leiden: E.J.Brill/Rodopi.
- Geertz, C. (1966) 'Religion as a cultural system' in Banton, M. (ed.) *Anthropological approaches to the study of religion*. London: Tavistock Publications, pp.1-44.
- Geivett, D.R. and Phillips, W.G. (1996a) 'A particularist view: an evidentialist approach', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.213-245.
- Geivett, D.R. and Phillips, W.G. (1996b) 'Response to Clark H. Pinnock', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.133-140.
- Gillis, C. (2012) 'John Hick: theologian or philosopher of religion?', in Sugirtharajah, S (ed.) *Religious pluralisms and the modern world: an ongoing engagement with John Hick*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp.137-151.
- Glaser, B.G. (1992) *Basics of grounded theory analysis: emergence vs forcing*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Goring, R. (ed.) (1992) *Chambers dictionary of beliefs and religions*. Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd.
- Griffiths, P.J. (1997) 'The properly Christian response to religious plurality', *Anglican Theological Review*, 79(1), pp.3-26.
- Gross, R. (2005) 'Excuse me, but what's the question?' in Knitter, P.F. (ed.) *The myth of religious superiority: a multifaith exploration*. Maryknoll: Orbis, pp.75-87.
- Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research', in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp.105-117.
- Guidelines for inter faith encounter in the churches of the Porvoo Communion* (2003) Available at: <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/interfaith/resources.aspx> (Accessed: 15/01/2016).
- Habermas, J. (1990) *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. Translation of *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln* (1983) by C. Lenhardt and S. Weber Nicholse. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hamilton, M.B. (1995) *The sociology of religion: theoretical and comparative perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Hammersley, M. (1992) *What's wrong with ethnography: methodological explorations*. London: Routledge.

- Healey, N.M. (2013) 'Ordinary theology, theological method and constructive ecclesiology', in Astley, J. and Francis, L.J. (eds) *Exploring ordinary theology: everyday Christian believing and the church*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp.13-22.
- Heath, A. (2012) 'Has multiculturalism failed in the UK? Not really', *The Guardian* (10/08/2012) online. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/aug/10/multiculturalism-uk-research> (Accessed 15/01/16).
- Hedges, P.M. (2001) *Preparation and fulfilment: a history and study of fulfilment theology in modern British thought in the Indian context*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Hedges, P.M. (2008) 'A reflection on typologies: negotiating a fast-moving discussion', in Race, A. and Hedges, P.M. (eds) *Christian approaches to other faiths*. London: SCM Press.
- Hedges, P.M. (2010) *Controversies in interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions*. London: SCM Press.
- Hedges, P.M. (2013) 'Interreligious studies', in Runehov, A. and Oviedo, L. (eds) *Encyclopedia of sciences and religion*. New York: Springer, pp. 1176-1177.
- Hedges, P.M. (2014) 'Why are there many gods? religious diversity and its challenges', in Hedges, P.M. (ed.) *Controversies in contemporary religion: education, law, politics, society, and spirituality, Vol. 1: Theoretical and academic debates*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, pp.191-218.
- Hedges, P.M. (ed.) (2015) *Contemporary Muslim-Christian encounters: developments, diversity and dialogues*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Heim, S.M. (1994) 'Salvations: a more pluralistic hypothesis', in *Modern Theology*, 10(4), pp.341-360.
- Heim, S.M. (1995) *Salvations: truth and difference in religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Hick, J. (1980) *God has many names*. London: Macmillan.
- Hick, J. (1989) *An interpretation of religion: human responses to the transcendent*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Hick, J. (1995) *A Christian theology of religions: the rainbow of faiths*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press. First published as *The rainbow of faiths: critical dialogues on religious pluralism*. London: SCM.
- Hick, J. (1996a) 'Response to Alister E. McGrath', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.181-186.
- Hick, J. (1996b) 'Response to R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.246-250.
- Hick, J. (1996c) 'A pluralist view', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.27-92.
- Hick, J. (1996d) 'Response to Clark H. Pinnock', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.124-128.
- Hick, J. (2005) *The metaphor of God incarnate*. London: SCM Press.

- Hick, J. (ed.) (1974) *Truth and dialogue: the relationship between the world religions*. London: Sheldon Press.
- Hill Collins, P. (1998) *Fighting words: black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Hinnells, J.R. (ed.) (2005) *The Routledge companion to the study of religion*. London: Routledge.
- Homan, R. (1991) *The ethics of social research*. London: Longman.
- Horwath, J., Lees, J. and Sidebotham, P. (2012) 'The influence of religion on adolescent family life in England: an explanatory study of the views of young people and parents', *Social Compass*, 59(2), pp.257-275.
- Howarth, C. and Andreouli, E. (2012) 'Has multiculturalism failed?' *The importance of lay knowledge and everyday practice*. Institute of Social Psychology Research Paper. Online at: <https://chaire-mcd.uqam.ca/upload/files/Publications/Veille/has%20multiculturalism%20failed.pdf> (Accessed: 15/01/2016).
- Huberman, A.M. and Miles, M.B. (1994) 'Data management and analysis methods', in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp.428-444.
- Hwang, S. (2008) 'Utilizing qualitative data analysis software: a review of Atlas-ti', *Social Science Computer Review*, 26(4), pp.519-527.
- Inter faith marriage guidelines* (no date). Available from: [www.churchofengland.org/about-us/interfaith/resources.aspx](http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/interfaith/resources.aspx) [Accessed 18/07/2013] (Accessed: 15/01/2016).
- Inter Faith Network for the UK (1993, 2005, 2010) *Building good relations with people of different faiths and beliefs*. Available at: <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/about-ifn/values-of-ifn> (Accessed: 15/01/2016).
- Iprgrave, M. (ed.) (2002) *The road ahead: a Christian-Muslim dialogue*. London: Church House Publishing.
- Iprgrave, M. (ed.) (2004) *Scriptures in dialogue: Christians and Muslims studying the Bible and the Qur'an together*. London: Church House Publishing.
- Isiorho, D. (2003) 'Black clergy discontent: selective interviews on racialised exclusion', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 18(2), pp.213-226.
- Jackson, A.Y. and Mazzei, L.A. (2012) *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: viewing data across multiple perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Jagessar, M.N. (2009) 'Is Jesus the only way? Doing black Christian God-talk in a multi-religious city (Birmingham, UK)', *Black Theology*, 7(2), pp.200-225.
- Janesick, V.J. (1994) 'The dance of qualitative research design: metaphor, methodolatry and meaning' in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Jantzen, G.M. (1984) 'Human diversity and salvation in Christ', *Religious Studies*, 20(4), pp.579-592.
- John 14: 6, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.

- Jones, T. (2011) 'The stained glass closet: celibacy and homosexuality in the Church of England to 1955', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 20(1), pp.132-152.
- Kay, W., Francis, L. and Robbins, M. (2011) 'A distinctive leadership for a distinctive network of churches? Psychological type theory and the apostolic networks', *Journal Of Pentecostal Theology*, 20(2), pp.306-322.
- Kärkkäinen, V-M. (2003) *An introduction to the theology of religions: Biblical, historical and contemporary perspectives*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Kiblinger, K.B. (2008) 'Buddhist stances towards others: types, examples, considerations' in Schmidt-Leuckel, P.(ed.) *Buddhist attitudes to other religions*. St. Ottilien, Germany: EOS Verlag, pp.24-46.
- King, A.S. and Hedges, P.M. (2014) 'What is religion? Or, what is it we are talking about?' in Hedges, P.M. (ed.) *Controversies in contemporary religion: education, law, politics, society, and spirituality: Vol. 1: Theoretical and academic debates*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, pp.1-30.
- King, U. (1998) 'Feminism: the missing dimension in the dialogue of religions', in D'Arcy May, J. (ed.) *Pluralism and the religions: the theological and political dimensions*. London: Cassell, pp.40-55.
- Knitter, P.F. (1987) 'Preface', in Hick, J. and Knitter, P. (eds) *The myth of Christian uniqueness: towards a pluralistic theology of religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p.vii-xii.
- Knitter, P.F. (1995) *One earth, many religions: multifaith dialogue and global responsibility*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Knitter, P.F. (2002) *Introducing theologies of religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Knitter, P.F. (2005a) 'Introduction', in Knitter, P. (ed.) *The myth of religious superiority: a multifaith exploration*. Maryknoll: Orbis, pp.vii-xi.
- Knitter, P.F. (2005b) 'Is the pluralist model a Western imposition?: a response in five voices', in Knitter, P. (ed.) *The myth of religious superiority: a multifaith exploration*. Maryknoll: Orbis, pp.28-44.
- Knitter, P.F. (2009) *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian*. London: Oneworld.
- Knitter, P.F. (2013) 'Inter-religious dialogue and social action' in Cornille, C. (ed.) *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp.133-148.
- Küng, H. (1977) *On being a Christian*. Translation of *Christ sein* (1974) by E. Quinn. London: Collins.
- Küng, H. (1987) 'What is true religion? Toward an ecumenical criteriology', in Swidler, L. (ed.) *Toward a universal theology of religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, pp.231-250.
- Küng, H. (1991) *Global responsibility: in search of a new world ethic*. London: SCM Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2010) 'The rise and fall of multiculturalism? New debates on inclusion and accommodation in diverse societies', *International Social Science Journal*, 61(199), pp.97-112.
- Laible, J.C. (2000) 'A loving epistemology: what I hold critical in my life, faith and profession', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(6), pp.683-692.

- Lapadat, J.C. (2000) 'Problematizing transcription: purpose, paradigm and quality', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(3), pp.203-219.
- Lee, R.M. and Esterhuizen, L. (2000) 'Computer software and qualitative analysis: trends, issues and resources', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(3), pp.231-243.
- Leirvik, O. (2014) *Interreligious studies: a relational approach to religious activism and the study of religion*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Lewins, A. and Silver, C. (2007) *Using software in qualitative research: a step-by-step guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lewins, A. and Silver, C. (2009) *Choosing a CAQDAS package*. 6<sup>th</sup> edn. Available at: <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/791/1/2009ChoosingaCAQDASPackage.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic enquiry*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lindbeck, G. (1984) *The nature of doctrine: religion and theology in a postliberal age*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Lopez, D.S. (1998) 'Belief', in Taylor, M.C. (ed.) *Critical terms for religious studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.21-35.
- Luke 7: 9b, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Maclaren, E. (1976) *The nature of belief*. London: Sheldon Press.
- MacMillan, K. and Koenig, T. (2004) 'The wow factor: preconceptions and expectations for data analysis software in qualitative research', *Social Science Computer Review*, 22(2), pp.179-186.
- Markham, I.S. (1993) 'Creating options: shattering the exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist paradigm', *New Blackfriars*, 74(867), pp.33-71.
- Markham, I. S. (2010) 'Theological education in the twenty-first century', *Anglican Theological Review*, 92(1), pp.157-165.
- Mason, M. (2010) 'Sample size and saturation in PhD Studies using qualitative interviews', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3), Art. 8.
- Masuzawa, T. (2005) *The invention of world religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Matthew 15: 28a, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Matthew 28: 18-20, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Matthew 8: 11, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J. and Miller, T. (2002) *Ethics in qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- McCarthy, K. (2009) 'Women's experience as a hermeneutical key to a Christian theology of religions', in Race, A. and Hedges, P.M. (eds) *Christian approaches to other faiths: SCM reader*. London: SCM Press, pp. 75-74.



- McCormick, R. (1979) 'Does religious faith add to ethical perception?', in Hamel, R.P. and Himes, K.R. (eds) *Introduction to Christian ethics: a reader*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press International.
- McCutcheon, R.T. (1997) *Manufacturing religion: the discourse on sui generis religion and the politics of nostalgia*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McCutcheon, R.T. (2007) *Studying religion: an introduction*. London: Equinox.
- McDermott, G.R. and Netland, H.A. (2014) *A Trinitarian theology of religions: an evangelical proposal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McGrath, A.E. (1996) 'A particularist view: a post-enlightenment approach', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.151-180.
- McGrath, A.E. (2011) *Christian theology: an introduction*. 5<sup>th</sup> edn. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- McGhee, D. (2005) *Intolerant Britain? Hate, citizenship and difference*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- McGowan, A. (2015) 'After heartbreak: Anglicanism and the end of Christendom', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 13(2), pp.125-132.
- Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Sage Publications.
- Morgan, David (2010) 'Introduction: the matter of belief', in Morgan, D. (ed.) *Religion and material culture: the matter of belief*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Moyaert, M. (2011) *Fragile identities: towards a theology of interreligious hospitality*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Musson, D.J. (2001) 'Male and female Anglican clergy: gender reversal on the 16PF5?', *Review of Religious Research*, 43(2), pp.175-183.
- Nason-Clark, N. (1987) 'Ordaining women as priests: religious vs. sexist explanations for clerical attitudes', *Sociological Analysis*, 48(3), pp.259-273.
- Needham, R. (1972) *Belief, language and experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Netland, H.A. (1991) *Dissonant voices: religious pluralism and the question of truth*. Leicester: Apollos.
- Netland, H.A. (2002) *Encountering religious pluralism: the challenge to Christian faith and mission*. Leicester: Apollos.
- Newbiggin, L. (1989) *The gospel in a pluralist society*. London: SPCK.
- NIFCON see Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns
- Nixon, D. (2008) 'No more tea, vicar'. An exploration of the discourses which inform the current debates about sexualities within the Church of England', *'Sexualities'*, 11(5), pp.595-620.
- Northedge, A. (2003) 'Rethinking teaching in the context of diversity', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(1), pp.17-32.
- Nye, M. (2003) *Religion: the basics*. London: Routledge.

- Ó Féich, P. and O'Connell, M. (2015) 'Changes in Roman Catholic beliefs and practices in Ireland between 1981 and 2008 and the emergence of the Liberal Catholic', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 30(2), pp.231-247.
- Office for National Statistics (2011) *2011 Census: QS210Ew religion (detailed), local authorities in England and Wales*. Available online: [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk) (Accessed 06/01/2016).
- Office for National Statistics (2012) *Religion in England and Wales 2011*. Available at: [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html) (Accessed 06/01/2016).
- Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (1996) 'Introduction', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.7-26.
- Oliver-Dee, S. (2009) *Religion and identity: divided loyalties?* London: Theos. Available at: <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Reports/TheosFaithandIdentity.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Ozorak, E. Weiss (1989) 'Social and cognitive influences on the development of religious beliefs and commitments in adolescence', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 28(4), pp.448-463.
- Palmer, A. (2012) 'Multiculturalism has left Britain with a toxic legacy', *The Telegraph* (11/02/2012). Available at: [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/9075849/Multiculturalism-has-left-Britain-with-a-toxic-legacy.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/9075849/Multiculturalism-has-left-Britain-with-a-toxic-legacy.html) (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Panikkar, R. (1987) 'The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: three kairological moments of Christic self-consciousness', in Hick, J. and Knitter, P.F. (eds) *The myth of Christian uniqueness: towards a pluralistic theology of religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, pp.89-116.
- Parris, M. (2015) 'Anti-Muslim prejudice is real; and it's scary', *The Spectator* (21/03/2015). Available at: <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/03/anti-muslim-prejudice-is-real-and-its-scary/> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- Peters, V. and Wester, F. (2006) 'How qualitative data analysis software may support the qualitative analysis process', *Quality & Quantity*, 41(5), pp.635-659.
- Peyton, N. and Gatrell, C. (2015) 'The sacrificial embrace: exploring contemporary English parish clergy lives', *Expository Times*, 126(8), pp. 378-388.
- Pinnock, C.H. (1996a) 'An inclusivist view', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.95-123.
- Pinnock, C.H. (1996b) 'A response to Alister E. McGrath', in Okholm, D.L. and Phillips, T.R. (eds) *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp.187-191.
- Pirner, M.L. (2009) 'Religious socialization by the media? An empirical study and conclusions for practical theology', *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 13(2), pp.275-292.

- Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991) *Dialogue and proclamation: reflection and orientations on interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html) (Accessed 10/01/2016).
- Pope Paul VI (1964) *Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic constitution on the Church)*. Available at: [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm) (Accessed: 12/01/2016).
- Pope Paul VI (1965) *Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions)*. Available at: [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm) (Accessed: 12/01/2016).
- Potter, M., Gordon, S. and Hamer, P. (2004) 'The nominal group technique: a useful consensus methodology in physiotherapy research', *NZ Journal of Physiotherapy*, 32(3), pp.126-130.
- Punch, K. F. (2005) *Introduction to social research: quantitative and qualitative approaches*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Sage Publications.
- Quinn, F. (2012) 'Toward 'Generous Love': recent Anglican approaches to world religions', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 10(2), pp.161-182.
- Race, A. (1983) *Christians and religious pluralism: patterns in the Christian theology of religions*. London: SCM Press.
- Race, A. (2001) *Interfaith encounter: the twin tracks of theology and dialogue*. London: SCM Press.
- Race, A. (2008) 'Theology of religions in change: factors in the shape of a debate', in Race, A. and Hedges, P.M. (eds) *Christian approaches to other faiths*. London: SCM Press, pp.4-16.
- Rahner, K. (1975) 'Nature and grace', in McCool, G.A. (ed.) *A Rahner reader*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, pp.173-204. Excerpt from Rahner, K. (1966) *Theological investigations: Vol. IV*, pp.166-169, 174-184. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- Randall, K.J. (2004) 'Burnout as a predictor of leaving Anglican parish ministry', *Review of Religious Research*, 46(1), pp.20-26.
- Randall, K.J. (2012) 'Changing perceptions of churchmanship', *Modern Believing*, 53(3), pp.264-272.
- Reicher, S., Spears, R. and Haslam, S.A. (2010) 'The social identity approach in social psychology', in Wetherell, M.S. and Mohanty, C. Talpade (eds) *The Sage handbook of identities*. London: Sage, pp.45-62.
- Ring, N.C., Nash, K.S., MacDonald, M.N., Glennon, F. and Glancy, J.A. (1998) *Introduction to the study of religion*. Maryknoll (NY): Orbis Books.
- Robbins, M. (2001) 'Clergywomen in the Church of England and the gender inclusive language debate', *Review of Religious Research*, 42(4), pp.405-414.

- Roberts, A.E., Koch, J.R. and Johnson, D.P. (2001) 'Religious reference groups and the persistence of normative behavior: an empirical test', *Sociological Spectrum*, 21(1), pp.81-98.
- Ruel, M. (1982) 'Christians as believers', in Davis, J. (ed.) *Religious organization and religious experience*. London: Academic Press, pp.9-31. Reprint (abridged) in Lambek, M. (ed.) (2002) *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.99-113.
- Ruel, M. (1997) *Belief, ritual and the securing of life: reflexive essays on a Bantu religion*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Schmidt-Leukel, P. (2005) 'Exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism: the tripolar typology – clarified and reaffirmed', in Knitter, P.F. (ed.) *The myth of religious superiority: a multifaith exploration*. Maryknoll: Orbis, pp.13-27.
- Schmidt-Leukel, P. (2007) 'The struggle for peace: can religions help?', *Interreligious Insights*, 5(2), pp.49-63.
- Schmidt-Leukel, P. (2008) 'Pluralisms: how to appreciate religious diversity theologically', in Race, A. and Hedges, P.M. (eds) *Christian approaches to other faiths*. London: SCM Press, pp.85-110.
- Schwartz, K. Dean (2006) 'Transformations in parent and friend faith support predicting adolescents' religious faith', *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 16(4), pp.311-326.
- Seale, C. (1999) *The quality of qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Secretariat for Non-Christians (1984) *Dialogue and mission (The attitude of the Church towards the followers of other religions: reflections and orientations on dialogue and mission*. Available at: <http://www.cimer.org.au/documents/DialogueandMission1984.pdf> (Accessed: 10/01/2016).
- Sharpe, E. (1974) 'The goals of inter-religious dialogue', in Hick, J. (ed.) *Truth and dialogue: the relationship between the world religions*. London: Sheldon Press, pp.77-95.
- Silverman, D. (1993) *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Singh, D. (2005) 'Sikhism and religious pluralism', in Knitter, P.F. (ed.) *The myth of religious superiority: a multifaith exploration*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Smart, N. (1969) *The religious experience of mankind*. New York: Charles Scribners' Sons. Reprint, London: Collins Fount, 1977.
- Storm, I. (2015) 'Why are Muslims less accepted than other minorities in Britain?', *Manchester Policy Blogs*. Available at: <http://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/featured/2015/04/why-are-muslims-less-accepted-than-other-minorities-in-britain/> (Accessed 15/01/2016).
- Smith, J.Z. (1998) 'Religion, religions, religious', in Taylor, M.C. (ed.) *Critical terms for religious studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.269-284.
- St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace (2009) *The Spectrum: a guide to building inter-religious relationships*. Available at: <http://spectrum.stethelburgas.org> (Accessed 14/01/2016).

- Strange, D. (2002) *The possibility of salvation among the unevangelized: an analysis of inclusivism in recent evangelical theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers. First published by Paternoster.
- Strange, D. (2008) 'Exclusivisms: "Indeed their rock is not like our rock"', in Race, A. and Hedges, P.M. (eds) *Christian approaches to other faiths*. London: SCM Press, pp.36-62.
- Strauss, A.L. (1987) *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, A.L. and Corbin, J. (eds) (1997) *Grounded theory in practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Suchocki, M. Hewitt (2003) *Divinity and diversity: a Christian affirmation of religious pluralism*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Sudworth, R. (2009) 'Towards a theology of mission amongst Muslims in post July 7th Britain', *Practical Theology*, 2(2), pp.161-204.
- Sullivan, F.A. (1992) *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the history of the Catholic response*. London: Geoffrey Chapan.
- Sunley, R.C. (2005) *Realising the spiritual dimension in secondary education: listening to the voice of secondary teachers*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Bristol.
- Swales, J.M. (1990) *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swidler, L. (ed.) (1987) *Toward a universal theology of religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Tajfel, H. (ed.) (1978) *Differentiation between social groups: studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Taliaferro, C. (1998) *Contemporary philosophy of religion*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Taliaferro, C. (2009) *Philosophy of religion: a beginner's guide*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- Tanesini, A. (1999) *An introduction to feminist epistemologies*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- The Grubb Institute (2010) *Faith communities and regeneration in the Thames Gateway*. Available at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Thames%20Gateway.pdf> (Accessed 14/01/2016).
- The Methodist Church in Britain (2016) *The Methodist quadrilateral*. Available at: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/the-methodist-quadrilateral> (Accessed: 11/01/2016).
- Thomas, G. and James, D. (2006) 'Reinventing grounded theory: some questions about theory, ground and discovery', *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(6), pp.767- 795.
- Thomas, O.C. (1969) *Attitudes toward other religions: some Christian interpretations*. London: SCM Press.
- Thornberg, R. (2012) 'Informed grounded theory', *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 56(3), pp.243-259.
- Tilley, T.W. (1999) 'Christianity and the world religions: a recent Vatican document', *Theological Studies*, 60(2), pp.318-337.

- Tilley, T.W. (1995) 'The challenge of religious diversity', in Tilley, T.W. with J. Edwards, T. England, H.F. Felice, S. Kendall, C.B. Morris, B. Richey and C. Westman *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, pp.155-168.
- Timothy 2: 3-6, Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Towler, R. and Coxon, A.P.M. (1979) *The fate of the Anglican clergy*. London: Macmillan.
- Turner, J.C. (1978) 'Social categorization and social discrimination in the minimal group paradigm', in Tajfel, H. (ed.) *Differentiation between social groups: studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. London: Academic Press, pp.101-133.
- Turner, J.C. (1999) 'Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorization theories', in Ellemers, N., Spears, R. and Doosje, B. *Social identity*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.6-34.
- Turner, J.C. and Reynolds, K.J. (2011) 'Self-categorization theory', in Van Lange, P.A.M., Kruglanski, A.W. and Higgins, E.T. (eds) *Handbook of theories of social psychology: Vol. 2*. London: Sage, pp.399-417.
- Turton, D. W. and Francis, L. J. (2007) 'The relationship between attitude toward prayer and professional burnout among Anglican parochial clergy in England: Are praying clergy healthier clergy?', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10(1), pp.61-74.
- Vardy, P. (2010) *Good and bad religion*. London: SCM Press.
- Vélez de Cea, A. (2011) 'A cross-cultural and Buddhist-friendly interpretation of the typology exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism', *Sophia*, 50(3), pp.453-480.
- Vidich, A.J. and Lyman, S.M. (2000) 'Qualitative methods: their history in sociology and anthropology', in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp.37-84.
- Village, A. (2012) 'Biblical literalism among Anglican clergy: what is the role of psychological type?', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 15(9), pp.955-968.
- Village, A. (2010) 'Psychological type and biblical interpretation among Anglican clergy in the UK', *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 23(2), pp.179-200.
- Village, A., & Francis, L.J. (2010) 'An anatomy of change: profiling cohort difference in beliefs and attitudes among Anglicans in England', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 8(1), pp.59-81.
- Voas, D. and Crockett, A. (2005) 'Religion in Britain: neither believing nor belonging', *Sociology*, 39(1), pp.11-28.
- Voye, L. (1999) 'Secularization in a context of advanced modernity', *Sociology of Religion*, 60(3), p.275-288.
- Ward, K. (1991) *A vision to pursue: beyond the crisis in Christianity*. London: SCM.
- Webster, J.B. (1993) 'Faith', in McGrath, A.E. (ed.) *The Blackwell encyclopedia of modern Christian thought*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Weller, P. (2008) *Religious diversity in the UK: contours and issues*. London: Continuum.
- Weller, P., Purdam, K., Ghanea, N. and Cheruvallil-Contractor, S. (2013) *Religion or belief, discrimination and equality*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Werbner, P. (2010) 'Religious identity', in Wetherell, M.S. and Mohanty, C. Talpade (eds) *The Sage handbook of identities*. London: Sage, pp.233-257.
- Williams, R. (2000) *On Christian theology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wingate, A. (2005) *Celebrating difference, staying faithful: how to live in a multi-faith world*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Woodhead, L. and Catto, R. (2012) *Religion and change in modern Britain*. London: Routledge.
- World Council of Churches (1986) *My neighbour's faith - and mine: theological discoveries through interfaith dialogue*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- World Council of Churches (2002) *Dictionary of the ecumenical movement article on interfaith dialogue*. Available at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/ecumenical-dictionary-interfaith-dialogue> (Accessed: 15/01/2016).
- www.french.about.com (2016) *Le bricolage*. Available at: <http://french.about.com/od/vocabulary/g/bricolage.htm> (Accessed: 10/01/2016).
- Yandell, K.E. (2004) 'How to sink into cognitive quicksand: nuancing religious pluralism', in Peterson, M.L. and VanArragon, R.J. (eds) *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.191-201.
- Yandell, K.E. (2004) 'Reply to Byrne', in Peterson, M.L. and VanArragon, R.J. (eds) *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.211-214.
- Young, P. Dickey (1995) *Christ in a Post-Christian World: How Can We Believe in Jesus Christ When Those Around Us Believe Differently – Or Not At All?* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press.
- Zinnbauer, B.J. and Pargament, K.I. (2005) 'Religiousness and Spirituality', in Paloutzian, R.F. and Park, C.L. (eds) *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp.21-42.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Researcher's stories of significant experiences

*The first person I thought of was A., a primary school friend of Turkish parentage. Her parents had immigrated to our small, Southern German village as part of the first wave of Turkish immigrants to Germany in the 1960s, settling in the village with a couple of other Turkish families, her father taking a job as a labourer with a local building firm. The mother retained traditional dress, wearing long skirts and a headscarf on the infrequent occasions that she left the home. The children, on the other hand, including A. and her sisters, wore Western-style dress, specifically trousers, when attending the village primary school. As we lived on the same road and were both what was then described as 'tom-boys' we played together throughout our primary school years and were friends, though not particularly close. We rarely visited each other's houses, as children then generally tended to play in public spaces and only occasionally went to each other's homes in bad weather.*

*When we reached the end of our primary school education at age eleven, we went to different secondary schools in different towns. We no longer played in the road but still occasionally met in passing. Soon after we had left primary school I encountered A. wearing a floor-length skirt and a headscarf. I remember being startled at this transformation and at the time there was no doubt in my mind that this would have been against her own wishes. I assumed that she had started menstruating and was therefore obliged by her family to wear 'women's clothes', like her mother and other female adults. I felt outrage and pity, however, I cannot recollect even considering any intervention on her behalf, accepting it as a cultural requirement for Turkish, and by implication Muslim, women. Equally, it did not occur to me that she might herself have chosen to identify with her community by adopting this style of dress.*

*Some years later, a situation arose that led to a more extensive discussion of Islam within our family. My father had an architectural practice and also carried out site supervision for local building firms, which employed a substantial number of Turkish labourers. Over the years, a relationship of mutual respect had developed and my father was regularly asked to design, plan and supervise building projects for their family homes. Eventually, the local Turkish community acquired a big residential property in the nearby small town with the intention of establishing a community centre with prayer rooms. Representatives approached my father with the request to plan and site-manage the conversion of the building, which he readily agreed to do. The project met with strong resistance from the property's neighbours and other local people, however. They confronted my father in the street, accusing him of betraying his Christian faith and putting financial gain over loyalty to his own community. By that time my older sisters and I were teenagers and family meals regularly involved spirited discussions of a wide range of issues. When my father asked our opinion about the matter, we quickly realised that we knew very little about Islam and about what Muslims actually believe. We merely knew about some basic aspects of religious practice, such as not eating pork (missing out on German sausages!) and fasting during Ramadan, and were aware that the Turkish Muslim men and women we knew did not mix socially outside their own community. Nevertheless, in our family, as in many local families at the time, there was respect for the*



*work ethic of the Turkish labourers and for their commitment to live according to their faith. Our family discussion was inconclusive, and my father decided to consult the minister of our church. Our family was part of a Pentecostal Free Church, with theological roots in the Lutheran tradition and, in those days, with an entirely and explicitly exclusivist theology of religions. However, to his credit, the minister supported my father in his initial decision and he carried out the work on that occasion, and others since. Looking back, this was the first occasion I actively had to think about the implications of my own beliefs for relating to people with a different religious belief.*

*In my early twenties my sister and I went on a backpacking holiday to Israel. This was not just a slightly adventurous summer holiday for us; there was also an aspect of pilgrimage. Our religious upbringing had taught us that the Jews were God's chosen people and in spite of the New Covenant retained a special position with Him. The large-scale destruction of Germany at the end of the Second World War was interpreted as God's punishment for 'touching the apple of His eye', the persecution and killing of Jewish people. In this interpretation there was no doubt that the founding of the state of Israel was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Israel was also the place where Jesus carried out his ministry, and the birthplace of the Christian church. We went with idealistic and romanticised expectations, fully expecting deep and transformative spiritual experiences. Instead we found ourselves taken aback by sharing overland buses with young Israeli soldiers, both male and female, carrying guns. We frequently felt unwelcome, treated with disinterest, if not outright rudeness, and occasional hostility. We found we were charged more for water and food than local people and felt this to be unjust. What we found most disturbing though was the recurrent harassment from Arab men of all ages, many of whom seemed to consider female tourists, particularly young Western backpackers, fair game. We observed the way Arab women walked behind the men, and were shocked that the women's presence did not stop some of these men from approaching us on several occasions. Our most positive experience of meeting local people during this trip was being welcomed into the home of a Druze family in the Golan Heights and invited to share a meal.*

The significant experiences with members of other religious traditions related here were with Muslims or, to a lesser extent, with Jews. The only members of a non-Abrahamic faith I encountered as I was growing up were Hare Krishna devotees, walking through city centres in their yellow-orange gowns and chanting. I cannot recollect having met any other Hindus, Buddhists or Sikhs until I moved to London in my mid-twenties.

## **Appendix B: Some alternative frameworks in the theology of religions**

### **B1. Perry Schmidt-Leukel**

Schmidt-Leukel (2005, p.18) develops Race's original three-fold typology 'from a descriptive, phenomenological typology into a logically precise and comprehensive classification' with four categories, or options. The decisive criterion for categorisation is the status of factor 'P', which stands for the 'mediation of salvific knowledge of ultimate/transcendent reality'. The possible options are that, firstly, P is not given among any of the religions, which describes the position of atheism; secondly, that P is given among the religions, but only once, which equates to exclusivism; thirdly, that P is given among the religions more than once, but with only one singular maximum, which equates to inclusivism; and fourthly, that P is given among the religions more than once and without a singular maximum, the position of pluralism.

While explicitly drawing on Race's typology, Schmidt-Leukel's model adds a non-religious, or possibly even anti-religious category (atheism). His typology thus closely resembles a model with four comparable but unnamed categories in relation to truth previously proposed by Hans Küng (1987).

As Schmidt-Leukel's model precedes the addition of a fourth category of particularities in later versions of Race's typology, he does not explicitly identify a place for these approaches in his model, and indeed argues that the logical comprehensiveness of his model precludes any further options (p.20).

Schmidt-Leukel's formulation, unlike Race's, is clearly centred on the salvific potential of religions, what he describes as 'mediation of salvific knowledge of ultimate/transcendent reality' (p.18). This focus on the functional aspect of the religions is arguably a shift from the focus on the essential nature of the religions in Race's original framework. Although Schmidt-Leukel's approach has the advantage of making the critical criterion explicit, the impermeable boundaries of his categories may be too limiting to account successfully for the complexity of actual theological positions on other religions.

### **B.2. Owen C. Thomas**

A framework offered by Thomas (1969) is of interest as it precedes Race's by fourteen years and so presents an earlier attempt to categorise different approaches. Thomas suggests that different Christian attitudes are marked by one or more of seven dimensions: these are 'Truth-Falsehood', which takes Christianity as truth and all other religions as false; 'Relativity',

rooted in a cultural relativism, which takes each religion to be an expression of its own culture; 'Essence', which affirms an identical underlying essence common to all religions; 'Development-Fulfillment' [sic], which sees other religions as incomplete or preliminary stages while Christianity represents the highest or final form of religious development; 'Salvation History', where other religions are considered ways towards salvation which has, however, been accomplished in Christ; 'Revelation-Sin' where God has revealed himself universally in nature, reason and conscience but the human response is distorted by sin; and 'New Departures' which include different approaches such as 'Christian presence', which calls for engagement with the religious other on the basis of common humanity and mutual openness and 'Christian secularity', which critiques all religion and calls for secular interpretation of the Christian and all other faiths. These seven different dimensions overlap and are variously combined in different approaches to other religions.

There are some parallels with Race's framework, for example 'Truth-Falsehood' and 'Revelation-Sin' are dimensions found in exclusivist approaches, while 'Relativity' parallels aspects of particularism, 'Essence' of pluralism and 'Development-Fulfillment' [sic] and 'Salvation History' of inclusivism. The larger number of dimensions makes this framework more sophisticated; as the dimensions can be combined in various ways, different positions can be more adequately described and distinguished. However, the numerous dimensions are less memorable, which may be why Thomas's framework did not find wider use.

### **B.3. Paul Knitter**

Knitter (2002) suggests a four-fold typology with the aim of presenting 'the major theological positions on the relation of Christianity to other religious Ways and on the role of the many religions in the divine plan' (p.2). The categories are respectively entitled 'replacement', 'fulfillment' [sic], 'mutuality' and 'acceptance' model and the criterion for assigning positions to the respective models is their approach to universality, God's universal love for and will to save all people, versus particularity, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ through his incarnation, death and resurrection. The two relevant theological concepts are revelation and salvation.

The replacement model describes approaches that consider Christianity the only true religion; accordingly other religions have either no value ('total replacement') or limited value ('partial replacement'), where some general revelation of truth in other religions is accepted but they are not seen to contain salvific potential. In this model particularity outweighs universality. Knitter associates the total replacement model with Fundamentalist, Evangelical

and Pentecostal streams of Christianity, while the partial replacement model is associated with more liberal New Evangelicals.

The fulfillment model describes approaches that accept other religions as offering both revelation and the possibility of salvation; however, these are partial and only completed or fulfilled through Jesus Christ. At the centre of this model is the limitless activity of the Holy Spirit, who 'blows where it will'. Universality is held in balance – and in tension – with particularity. The fulfillment model is closely linked to Roman Catholic orthodoxy, and particularly to the work of Karl Rahner. However, Knitter notes that the theological positions of the majority of 'mainstream' Protestant churches now also fall into this category.

The mutuality model describes approaches that prioritise the mutuality of dialogue between religions over doctrinal truth claims. While acknowledging the diversity of and difference between religions, they also assert a fundamental commonality, particularly in their ethical requirements but also in the experience of a divine mystery or reality. At the centre of these approaches is God, however named or defined, while Jesus Christ does not have a unique status as saviour: although he is 'wholly God' he is not 'the whole of God'. Universality outweighs particularity. Knitter suggests that unlike the previous two models this model can be found across the liberal wings of all the different denominations.

Finally, the acceptance model describes approaches that both assume and value the real diversity, the incommensurability, of different religions. Particularity cancels out universality - no universal truth-claims or metanarratives are accepted. Rooted in postmodern thought these approaches are associated with postliberal theological positions in different denominations.

Knitter's four models closely parallel and expand on Race's categories, and his framework has found some use in the field, particularly as his nomenclature can seem less contentious than Race's and his definition of the categories is more consistent. However, in more recent writings he adopts the terminology of Hedges's four-fold typology (Knitter, 2013).

#### **B.4. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen**

Kärkkäinen (2003) also offers a four-fold typology, in which approaches are respectively categorized as 'ecclesiocentric', 'christocentric', 'theocentric' and 'realitycentric', the first three categories employing terminology used earlier by Jacques Dupuis (1997).

Kärkkäinen (2003, p.166) describes ecclesiocentrism as the mainstream position of the pre-modern Christian church; it is defined as:

...the traditional position which maintains that God has revealed himself in a unique manner in the Scriptures and pre-eminently in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that apart from the gospel preached by the Christian church there is no salvation available.

He emphasises that the term ecclesiocentrism does not imply that the church as an institution, or its sacraments, are mediators of salvation, in the sense of the Roman Catholic church's centuries-long claim of 'outside the Church there is no salvation' (*'extra ecclesiam nulla salus'*). It rather acknowledges that while salvation is through Christ, the gospel of salvation has been uniquely entrusted to the Christian church, in its entirety, and is its *raison d'être*.

Kärkkäinen defines 'Christocentrism' to mean 'that salvation is available in and through Christ in such a way that it is not necessarily tied to the church' (2003, p.166), although he also acknowledges that for most theologians in this category there is at least some implicit connection between salvation and the church. The category of 'theocentrism' includes those positions that deny a claim of superiority for any religion, including Christianity, and where Christ is not uniquely or normatively required for salvation. Finally, a category of 'realitycentrism' is suggested, which effectively parallels 'theocentrism' but where the notion of a 'reality' replaces the more narrowly theistic notion of 'God', thus making it more relevant to non-theistic religions.

While the first three categories closely mirror Race's original categories, and like his are heuristic, flexible and allow for substantial internal variety, Kärkkäinen nevertheless suggests that they offer several advantages, namely a wider theological focus rather than a one-sided focus on salvation, and a less contentious nomenclature. However, considering the definitions offered, it seems that they are in fact more closely focused on salvation than Race's. It is also questionable whether his terminology is clearer, or less contentious; indeed, his extensive clarification of the implications of the term 'ecclesiocentrism' suggests that it is potentially as controversial as the term exclusivism, and Kärkkäinen himself acknowledges that the term 'Christocentrism' is ambiguous (p.168).

## **B.5. Discussion of the alternative frameworks**

The frameworks discussed have much in common: they are all deeply rooted in the Christian tradition and draw on central Christian theological concepts – salvation, truth, revelation, and the incarnation - as criteria for proposed categories.

A theology of religions aims to give an account of the origins, the nature and the functions of religions (2.3.2.) and the different frameworks vary in their focus on these different aspects.

The dimensions of Thomas's framework address the origins and nature of religions, whereas the frameworks offered by Race and Knitter predominantly focus on their nature, and those suggested by Schmidt-Leukel and Kärkkäinen on their function, particularly regarding salvation. As all three aspects are intricately linked, this difference in focus nevertheless leads to largely overlapping categories, as is evident by the identification of the same theologians and scholars with the respective comparable categories.

Schmidt-Leukel's framework offers a clear and logical approach with explicit criteria; however it relies on a narrow definition of salvation and seems to simplify the complexities of beliefs.

Thomas's framework differs from the others in drawing more extensively on non-theological concepts, such as culture. For this reason, although it is the oldest of the frameworks described, it would perhaps most suit the developing interdisciplinary field of interreligious studies. An investigation of the applicability of Thomas's model to this field might be a useful project to pursue.

Knitter's framework can perhaps be considered the most successful alternative to Race's: the criteria he suggests – the balance between universality and particularity – are pertinent, the central concepts of revelation and salvation theologically relevant, and his proposed nomenclature mostly descriptive and fairly noncontroversial. However, perhaps his framework did not offer enough improvement on Race's already well-established typology to displace it in the scholarly discourse.

Kärkkäinen proposes his framework in response to Race's and in order to address what he considers its weaknesses, namely a narrow focus on salvation and contentious terminology. However, as I have suggested above, Kärkkäinen's framework does not resolve either of these issues successfully, and has not found widespread use.

## Appendix C: Definitions of approaches in the theology of religions

### C.1. Definitions of exclusivism

	Definition of exclusivism
<b>Race</b>	'It counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions, including Christianity, can be understood and evaluated.' (1983, p.11) '...exclusivist theories...see the declaration of the absoluteness of Christ (and therefore, potentially, the church) as an integral part of the concern to defend the total supremacy of the sovereign freedom of God to act as he wishes.' (1983, p.27)
<b>Schmidt-Leukel</b>	'Christian <i>exclusivism</i> would mean that saving revelation is found only within Christianity and not within any other religion. This does not necessarily entail that all non-Christians are lost. Soft or moderate exclusivists could hold that there are ways by which God could save non-Christians as <i>individuals</i> (for example, through post-mortem encounter with the gospel). But, according to the definition given above, Christian exclusivism would deny any positive salvific role for other religions.' (2005, p.21)
<b>Hedges</b>	'Exclusivism, therefore, refers to those systems that excluded non-Christians from salvation. That is to say its advocates believed that unless one expressed a personal faith in Jesus, or belonged to the correct wing of the Church, the only alternative was damnation and hellfire. Generally, for an exclusivist, God only revealed himself through one means (Jesus) and through one tradition (Christianity).' (2008, p.17f)
<b>Hick</b>	<i>Re salvation</i> : '...exclusivism asserts that salvation is confined to Christians, or even more narrowly, in the traditional Catholic dogma, that <i>extra ecclesiam nulla salus</i> , outside the church there is no salvation.' (1995, p.19) <i>Re truth</i> : 'God as known within one particular religion, namely one's own, is the real God and ... all the others are unreal.' (1996c, p.38)
<b>Geivett &amp; Phillips</b>	'Christianity is uniquely true, and explicit faith in Jesus Christ is a necessary condition for salvation.' (1996a, p.243)
<b>Strange</b>	'The Exclusivist tradition... is fundamentally concerned to affirm two central insights. The first is that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to bring salvation into the world and that this salvation is both judgement and mercy to all human beings who are deeply estranged from God. Salvation comes from faith in Christ alone – <i>solus Christus</i> ...Second, this salvation won by Christ is only available through explicit faith in Christ which comes from hearing the gospel preached ( <i>fides ex auditu</i> ), requiring repentance, baptism and the embracing of a new life in Christ.' (2008, p.37)
<b>McDermott &amp; Netland</b>	'Although there is no uniformly accepted definition of the terms, <i>exclusivism</i> is typically understood as the position that maintains that religious truth and salvation are restricted to the Christian faith.' (McDermott & Netland, 2014, p.12)
<b>D'Costa</b>	'The exclusivist paradigm has been characterized as maintaining that other religions are marked by humankind's fundamental sinfulness and are therefore erroneous, and that Christ (or Christianity) offers the only valid path to salvation.' (1986, p.52)
<b>Tilley</b>	'Exclusivist positions find Christ normative for and constitutive of salvation, but at the cost of finding most of humanity damned to hell eternally by an all-good God because most human beings do not know Christ as normative.' (1999, p.323)

## C.2. Definitions of inclusivism

	Definition of inclusivism
<b>Race</b>	'...both an acceptance and a rejection of the other faiths, a dialectical "yes" and "no". On the one hand it [inclusivism] accepts the spiritual power and depth manifest in them, so that they can properly be called a locus of divine presence. On the other hand, it rejects them as not being sufficient for salvation apart from Christ, for Christ alone is saviour. To be inclusive is to believe that all non-Christian religious truth belongs ultimately to Christ and the way of discipleship which springs from him.' (1983, p.38)
<b>Schmidt-Leukel</b>	'...Christian <i>inclusivism</i> would hold that non-Christian religions sometimes entail elements of revelation and grace that are capable of supporting a salvific life. But since - according to Christian inclusivism - all salvation is finally through Christ, the revelation to which Christianity testifies is in a unique sense superior to any other form of knowledge of God, which in comparison with the Christian revelation remains necessarily fragmentary, incomplete, implicit, obscure.' (2005, p.21)
<b>Hedges</b>	'Inclusivism refers to those who wished to include believers from other religious traditions among the ranks of those who could be saved. Therefore, if someone obeyed the moral laws and norms of their community they knew of a 'natural law' that God had made available in the hearts of all people, and therefore was being led in the right direction, coming to salvation through their own tradition in this life, and being confronted with Christ, perhaps, at the Last Judgement.' (2008, p.18)
<b>Hick</b>	<i>Re salvation:</i> 'This [inclusivism] acknowledges that the salvific process is taking place throughout the world, within each of the great world faiths and also outside them, but insists that wherever it occurs it is the work of Christ. Salvation, on this view, depends upon Jesus' atoning death on Calvary, though the benefits of that death are not confined to Christians but are available, in principle, to all human beings.' (1995, p.20) <i>Re truth:</i> 'God as known within Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism are partial or distorted glimpses of the real God, who is fully known within Christianity.' (1996c, p.39)
<b>McDermott &amp; Netland</b>	' <i>Inclusivism</i> , by contrast, refers to a broad spectrum of views that hold the following principles in creative tension: (1) There is a sense in which Jesus Christ is unique and superior to other religious figures, and in some sense, it is through Christ that salvation is made available. (2) God's grace and salvation, which are somehow based on Jesus Christ, are also available and efficacious to sincere followers of other religions. (3) Thus, other religions should be regarded positively as part of God's purposes for humankind.' (2014, p.12f)
<b>D'Costa</b>	'[The inclusivist] approach has been characterized as one that affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God.' (1986, p.80)
<b>Pinnock</b>	'Inclusivism...explores the possibility that the Spirit is operative in the sphere of human religion to prepare people for the gospel of Christ. It believes that God, who is gracious and omnipresent, is redemptively at work in the religious dimension of human culture, just as he is in all other spheres of creation.' (1996, p.96)
<b>Cheetham</b>	'Christian inclusivism seeks to make sense of two vital features of the Christian faith: (1) the commitment to Christ as the unique and normative revelation of God, and (2) God's universal salvific will....it is not properly understood as a half-hearted version of pluralism or a watered-down exclusivism, rather it claims to represent a definite position that seeks to take account of the available evidence: biblical, experiential, historical, missiological and so on.' (2008, p.63)
<b>Tilley</b>	'Inclusivist positions find that Christ is normative for Christians and constitutive of salvation for all (even those who know him not), but do this at the cost of denying the possibility that God could have chosen otherwise.' (1999, p.323)



### C.3. Definitions of pluralism

	Definition of pluralism
<b>Race</b>	<p>'This underlines one essential feature of the theology we might term tolerant pluralism: knowledge of God is partial in all faiths, including the Christian. Religions must acknowledge their need of each other if the full truth of God is to be available to mankind.' (1983, p.72)</p> <p>'It is the belief that there is not one, but a number of spheres of saving contact between God and man. God's revealing and redeeming activity has elicited responses in a number of culturally conditioned ways throughout history. Each response is partial, incomplete, unique; but they are related to each other in that they represent different culturally focussed perceptions of the one ultimate divine reality.' (1983, p.78)</p>
<b>Schmidt-Leukel</b>	<p>'Christian pluralism would entail that some other religions – usually the major world religions (but perhaps only one other religion) – are in a theological sense on a par with Christianity. According to Christian pluralism these other religions testify to the same ultimate transcendent reality despite the different forms this testimony takes, and they do so with the same genuine authenticity and an equal salvific potential.' (2005, p.21)</p>
<b>Hedges</b>	<p>'Pluralism, however, holds that no one tradition has a monopoly on revelation or salvation, and that we have no way to adjudicate between the claims to be 'saved' by people of any faith, all of whom deeply and wholeheartedly adhere to their own tradition. Pluralists therefore suggest that each religion knows transcendent reality ('God') yet in partial perspective.' (2008, p.18)</p>
<b>Hick</b>	<p><i>Re salvation:</i> Pluralism posits 'an ultimate ineffable Reality which is the source and ground of everything, and which is such that in so far as the religious traditions are in soteriological alignment with it they are contexts of salvation/liberation. These traditions involve different human conceptions of the Real, with correspondingly different forms of experience of the Real, and correspondingly different forms of life in response to the Real.' (1995, p.27)</p> <p><i>Re truth:</i> 'God as known to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and others represent different manifestations in relation to humanity, different "faces" or "masks" or <i>personae</i> of God, the Ultimate Reality.' (1996c, p.38)</p>
<b>Knitter</b>	<p>'...a move away from insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity toward a recognition of the independent validity of other ways. Such a move came to be described by participants in our project as the crossing of a theological Rubicon.' (1987, viii)</p>
<b>McDermott &amp; Netland</b>	<p>'Religious <i>pluralism</i> breaks with both exclusivism and inclusivism by claiming that the major religions should be regarded as more or less equally effective and legitimate alternative ways of responding to the one divine reality...it goes beyond mere acknowledgment of diversity to include a claim about parity among the religions when it comes to issues of religious truth and soteriological effectiveness. Salvation, liberation, and enlightenment are said to be available in all religions. No single religion can legitimately claim to be superior to others, for all religions are in their own ways complex, historically and culturally conditioned human responses to the one divine reality.' (2014, p.12f)</p>
<b>D'Costa</b>	<p>'The pluralist paradigm has been characterized as one that maintains that other religions are equally salvific paths to the one God, and Christianity's claim that it is the only path (exclusivism), or the fulfillment of other paths (inclusivism), should be rejected for good theological and phenomenological reasons.' (1986, p.22)</p>
<b>Tilley</b>	<p>'Pluralisms answer, "All are or can be saved." However, they do so at a price of denying that Christ is constitutive or normative of salvation for all, while affirming that Christ is normative (and perhaps constitutive) of salvation for Christians. Pluralisms typically create an unbridgeable gulf between the divine and its manifestations so that no particular truth claims can be maintained.' (1999, p.323)</p>

## C.4. Definitions of particularism

	Definition of Particularism
<b>Race</b>	<i>Original typology does not include particularism</i>
<b>Schmidt-Leukel</b>	<i>Proposed framework does not include particularism</i>
<b>Hedges</b>	‘...this approach derives its emphasis from the distinct or <i>particular</i> nature of each faith. The orientation of particularity has affinities with exclusivist type approaches, in that it sees each faith as being “tradition-specific”, which is to say, it speaks its own unique language about its own unique goals and purposes. It also has affinities with inclusivisms, in that many particularists allow that the Holy Spirit may be at work in other faiths. It may also move towards some measure of overlap with pluralisms, for a number of particularists hold that other faiths display some purpose within the divine mystery and may hold truths from which Christianity can learn. However, as defined here, particularity is grounded in post-modernism, and it is this which provides its distinctive character.’ (2008, p.27)
<b>Hick</b>	<i>No definition given</i>
<b>D’Costa</b>	<i>No definition given</i>
<b>McDermott &amp; Netland</b>	<i>No definition given</i>
<b>Tilley</b>	‘Associated especially with postliberalism, it [particularism] takes differences most seriously. Like exclusivism, it finds each of the religious traditions substantially different. However, a particularist typically does <i>not</i> ask the soteriological question as an overarching one. Any complete answer to the question “who can be saved?” will be a universal answer which inevitably undermines the particular patterns of some religious traditions. Moreover, such an answer is presumptuous in the extreme, making a claim to know how God finally disposes of everything there is. Hence, particularism rejects reductive pluralism and is suspicious of phenomenal pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism, much preferring to espouse more modest particular theological claims.’ (1995, p.158f)
<b>Cobb</b>	‘I see no a priori reason to assume that religion has an essence or that the great religious traditions are well understood as religions, that is, as traditions for which being religious is the central goal. I certainly see no empirical evidence in favour of this view...I call for a pluralism that allows each religious tradition to define its own nature and purposes and the role of religious elements within it.’ (1990, p.84)
<b>DiNoia</b>	‘...Christian theology of religions should adopt a doctrinally specific view of religious differences. Thus,..., the availability of salvation outside the embrace of explicit Christian faith should be expressed in ways that respect the distinctiveness and integrity both of the Christian tradition and of the traditions of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Judaic communities, especially as these bear on the definition of the true aim of life.’ (1992, p.42)
<b>McGrath</b>	‘(1) Christianity has a particular understanding of the nature, grounds, and means of obtaining salvation and the Christian understanding of salvation, like the Christian notion of God, is Christologically determined. Just as it is illegitimate to use the term God in a vague and generic sense, allowing it to be understood that all religions share this same divinity, so it is improper to use the term salvation as if it were common to all religions...“Salvation” is a particularity, not a universality. (2) Christianity is the only religion to offer salvation in the Christian sense of that term...’ (1996, p.174f)

## **Appendix D: Overview of Church of England website pages on ‘Work with other faiths’**

This appendix gives a brief overview of pages related to other religions on the Church of England website ([www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)) in April 2015.

The ‘About Us’ section of the Church of England website contains a subsection on ‘Work with other faiths’, which sets out the aim of the Church’s engagement with other religions as seeking to ‘build up good relations with people of other faith traditions, and where possible to co-operate with them in service to society’. The page contains a link to the P&E website and also links to two reports: *Presence and Engagement: the churches’ task in a multi faith society*, a report to General Synod in 2005, and an update on this first report entitled *Staying present and engaging faithfully*, delivered to General Synod in February 2009, both central Church of England documents on its relationship with other religions. The page further contains a reference to the *Four Principles of Inter Faith Dialogue*, ecumenically agreed by the British Council of Churches, and endorsed by General Synod in 1981. The ‘Work with other faiths’ page is in turn linked to three further pages, respectively entitled ‘Inter faith partners’, ‘Diocesan inter faith work’ and ‘Resources’.

The ‘Inter faith partners’ page confirms the Church of England’s commitment to working ecumenically and contains links to several national organisations and networks, including Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England, the Churches Inter Religious Network, The Inter Faith Network for the UK, the Council of Christians and Jews, the Christian Muslim Forum and the Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON).

The ‘Diocesan Inter faith work’ page informs about the network of diocesan Inter Faith Relations Advisors who support and promote interreligious engagement at diocesan and parish level, as well as in specialist areas of the churches’ ministry to people of other religions, in education, health care and prison work.

The ‘Resources’ page contains links to a range of documents, including reports, guidelines, books, lectures and other websites; Table B.1 below gives an overview of these documents.

**Table D.1. Documents listed in the 'Work with Other Faiths' - 'Resources' section of the Church of England website (Accessed March 2015)**

(Note: highlighted documents meet defined criteria of official Church of England documents)

<b>DOCUMENT (as listed on website)</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION (as listed on website)</b>	<b>FORMAT</b>	<b>DETAILS OF DOCUMENT (where available)</b>
<b>Porvoo Guidelines: inter faith encounter in churches of the Porvoo Communion</b>	The Porvoo Communion draws together Anglican churches from Britain and Ireland with Lutheran churches from Scandinavia and the Baltic. These guidelines emerged from a consultation held in Oslo in December 2003. They have no official status, but offer some practical pointers on pastoral issues.	Link to document	<i>Guidelines for Inter Faith Encounter in the Churches of the Porvoo Communion, 2003</i>
<b>Inter Faith Marriage Guidelines</b>	advice from a Christian perspective <i>(NOTE: This is a draft document giving practical advice on common experiences and difficulties experienced by Christians married to spouses from other religions.)</i>	Link to document	CofE, no date
<b>Sharing One Hope?</b>	<b>Church House Publishing 2001</b> Report exploring relations between Christians and Jews over the past two millennia, a relationship that has been described as 'the longest hatred'. Report challenges the CofE to find hopeful and honest ways to help in transforming that hatred into respect and trust.	Link to Church House Bookshop (inactive)	CofE, 2001
<b>Scriptures in Dialogue</b>	<b>Church House Publishing 2004</b> Edited by Michael Ipgrave, this book contains papers by Tom Wright, Esther Mombo, Mona Siddiqui and others and includes a major lecture on inter faith relations given by Rowan Williams. The book comes out of a seminar held in Doha at the invitation of the Amir of Qatar, the focus being the intensive study of passages from the Qur'an and the Bible addressing questions such as discernment of the Word of God, the place of women in their believing communities, and making space for the religious 'Other'.	Link to Church House Bookshop (inactive)	Ipgrave (ed.), 2004
<b>The Road Ahead: A Christian-Muslim Dialogue</b>	<b>Church House Publishing 2002</b> Drawing on the insights and expertise of Christians and Muslims from a wide variety of nations and cultures, this book offers a message of hope to all who seek to build bridges between those who follow the world's two biggest religions.	Link to Church House Bookshop (inactive)	Ipgrave (ed.), 2002
<b>Building Good Relations</b>	This useful leaflet published by the Inter Faith Network of the UK offers a code of conduct for encouraging and strengthening relationships between people of different faiths, with the emphasis on honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit.	Link (inactive)	Inter Faith Network for the UK; 1993, 2005, 2010
<b>Multi-faith Worship?</b>	The Inter-Faith Consultative Group discusses the various types of multi-faith worship, and considers the theological issues involved.	Link (inactive)	CofE, 1992
<b>Communities and Buildings</b>	A report that looks at the use of church buildings by those of other faiths, in agreement with the church; and what should happen to those church buildings which are no longer needed by local Christians.	Title of document (no link)	CofE, 1996
<b>Room for Religion</b>	Principles and guidelines for those asked for advice about the construction, adaptation or use of a building, a set of rooms or a single area which is to be used for worship and prayer by people from a variety of faith traditions.	Title of document (no link)	CofE, 1998

<b>Multi-Faith Worship</b>	Guidelines on the actual decisions which have to be made when some form of 'multi-faith worship' is proposed. Focuses on general principles, rather than attempt to spell out a detailed code for every occasion.	Title of document (no link)	Presumably refers to: <i>Multi-Faith Worship - A guidance paper.</i> CofE, 2008
<b>Multi-Faith Worship</b>	Questions and suggestions from the Inter Faith Consultative Group. Offers among other things, theological perspectives; guidance for when visiting a place of worship of other faiths; the legal position.		CofE, 1992
<b>Sharing one Hope?</b>	Paper presented as a contribution for carrying forward a growing tradition of reflection and debate - it presents a specifically CofE perspective and its focus is the Christian side of Christian-Jewish relationships.	Title of document (no link)	CofE, 2001
<b>Archbishop of Canterbury, inter faith related lectures</b>	As leader of the Anglican Communion as well as through his role as the senior religious figure in England, the Archbishop of Canterbury has addressed inter-faith concerns in several speeches at home and abroad.	Link (inactive)	

As this overview indicates, the 'Resources' page includes an eclectic list of documents and links, with the most recent document dating from 2009. The criteria for including or omitting particular documents are not stated, or evident. Many of the links were not functional at the time of visiting the website in March 2015; in fact, the pages still included exactly the same information as when visited two years earlier for a first draft of this chapter, although at that time most of the links were functional. The fact that many of the links on these pages are now inactive and the pages rather dated seems to indicate that this is not an area of priority for the Church of England, or at least the person, or persons, responsible for the website – perhaps because interreligious engagement is seen to be the responsibility of the P&E programme, which has a separate website.

Overall, the 'Work with other faiths' pages on the Church of England website have an applied rather than a theological emphasis; they focus on how to relate to and work with people of other religions, expressing principles and values rather than stating theological beliefs.

## **Appendix E: Overview of the Presence and Engagement website**

The Presence and Engagement (P&E) website ([www.presenceandengagement.org.uk](http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk)) was also reviewed in March 2015. The homepage is headed by the strapline 'The Church in a multi-faith society'. With a copyright date of 2013 this is a more recent website; it replaced the original P&E website which used the general Church of England strapline of 'A Christian presence in every community'.

The homepage contains tabs headed 'About', 'Resources', 'Blog' and 'Contact', as well as a number of images and features, including a link to a P&E FAQ section, a 'Parish Search' function allowing users to enter a postcode to access statistical data on religions in local parishes, a blog section, a video featuring the National Inter Religious Affairs Advisor for the Church of England, and a map of English dioceses giving access to 2011 census data on religions by diocese.

The 'About' page gives some historical background about P&E, as well as information about the Diocesan Inter Faith Relations Advisers, the four regional P&E Centres, namely Bradford Churches for Dialogue and Diversity, Centre for Theology & Community in London, Faithful Neighbourhoods Centre in Birmingham and St Philip's Centre in Leicester, as well as the Near Neighbours programme, a government-funded initiative managed by the Church Urban Fund, which facilitates multi-faith community programmes.

The 'Resources' page includes videos, publications, guidelines, reports, bible studies, sermons and photos. Of particular interest for this review of official Church of England documents are the publications, guidelines and reports, and a detailed overview of these documents is given below in Table E.1.

The 'Blog' page includes contributions and images from various members of the P&E network, described as follows:

The Presence and Engagement programme brings together a unique network of people from around the country deeply engaged in their local multi faith contexts. They are often in a position to be able to bring a nuanced perspective on events and issues rooted in those contexts. We are very pleased that this website can provide a platform for these voices to be heard. The authors of these posts speak on their own behalf and do not always represent the view of the Presence and Engagement programme. ([presenceandengagement.org.uk/content/presence-and-engagement-blog](http://presenceandengagement.org.uk/content/presence-and-engagement-blog), accessed on 22/03/2015)

At the time of the review the blog contained several postings from the previous week, so is in current use.

The 'Contact' pages include contact details for the National Inter Religious Affairs Advisor, the National Programme Coordinator for Presence and Engagement and for the four regional P&E Centres in Bradford, London, Birmingham and Leicester.

**Table E.1. P&E website – 'Resources' page: Publications, Guidelines and Reports (Accessed March 2015)**

(Note: highlighted documents meet defined criteria of official Church of England documents)

Document (as listed on website)	Description (as listed on website)	Reference
<b>PUBLICATIONS</b>		
<b>Bridges and Barriers to Hindu and Christian Dialogue</b>	This research project commissioned by the Hindu Christian Forum and the department for Communities and Local Government interviewed Hindus and Christians in London, Leicester and Preston. Its final report outlines preconceptions the different groups have about each other and sets out a range of ideas for future Hindu Christian interaction.	Frazier, 2011
<b>Generous Love</b>	Full text of 'Generous Love: the truth of the gospel and the call to dialogue.'	NIFCON, 2008
<b>Sharing the Gospel of Salvation</b>	This report presents a selection of case studies of the most vital and innovative inter faith work being done in the Church of England today.	CofE, 2010a
<b>Generous Love for All</b>	This is the new Presence and Engagement plan for the next quinquennium. It was prepared for a debate at Synod on July 11th 2011.	CofE, 2011
<b>Presence and Engagement: Learning Pathways</b>	This document sets out a manifesto for ideal patterns of inter Faith training within the Church of England. It describes the qualities and skills that those working for the Church should develop in order to practice effective ministry in areas where there are a high proportion of people from other faiths. Highly recommended for all training colleges.	CofE, 2009b
<b>Local Christian-Muslim Friendship</b>	This leaflet illustrates how friendships can develop within local communities through Mosque-Church twinning. It gives case studies and draws attention to the scriptural affirmation of relationships: 'We have created you male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so you may know one another' Surah 49, The Qur'an.	Christian Muslim Forum, 2009
<b>The Theos Report on Faith and Identity</b>	'Religion and Identity: Divided loyalties?' by Sean Oliver-Dee. Theos, a think tank for public theology, was launched in November 2006 with the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor.	Oliver-Dee, 2009
<b>St Ethelburgas - Spectrum</b>	St Ethelburgas - Spectrum. A detailed guide to building inter-religious relationships.	St Ethelburga's, 2009
<b>Book Review: Together &amp; Different</b>	Review of: Malcolm Torry & Sarah Thorley (eds.) <i>Together &amp; Different: Christians engaging with people of other faiths</i> , Canterbury Press.	Unpublished
<b>Anglican Understanding of Mission and Evangelism</b>	A recent contribution by +Michael Doe on Mission & Evangelism - An Anglican understanding.	Doe, 2008

GUIDELINES		
<b>New Religious Movements</b>	<i>Short description of New Religious Movements and link to relevant page on the Church of England website</i>	
<b>Guidelines for Christian and Muslim Witness</b>	Both Christians and Muslims are deeply committed to our their faiths and wish to bear faithful witness to them. This paper is offers guidelines for good practice.	Christian Muslim Forum, no date
<b>Use of Church Buildings for Worship by Non C of E Groups</b>	This is a legal document recently developed by the Church of England to set procedures by which other faith communities, under very rare circumstances as this is a sensitive issue, might be able to worship in Church Buildings. Church buildings are generally reserved for Christian worship, but if a Bishop and a local community are willing to advocate strongly for another faith community in the area then they may be allowed to use the Church building.	CofE, 2009c
<b>Synod Report on Use of Church Buildings</b>	A discussion on scriptural issues relating to holy places and property. Raises questions about hospitality and use/disposal of Church buildings.	CofE, 1995
<b>Multi Faith Worship</b>	Questions and Suggestions from the Inter-faith Consultative Group.	CofE, 1992
<b>Worship - Civic &amp; Other Services Guidelines</b>	If you are hosting a funeral or marriage involving people from different faiths, then these guidelines will help you prepare for the event.	Diocese of Southwark, no date
<b>Good Neighbours</b>	This guide to how to make friends with families from different faiths living in your neighbourhood was put together by the Baptist Union of Great Britain. One of the authors was Nicholas Wood a prominent member of the Christian Muslim Forum.	Baptist Union of Great Britain, no date
<b>Building Good Relations - Inter Faith Network for the UK</b>	A short booklet that gives some simple advice about creating an open and accepting environment for dialogue.	Inter Faith Network for the UK (1993, 2005)
<b>Countering Racist and Far-Right Groups</b>	The Archbishop's Council for Mission and Public Affairs has produced these guidelines for the Church's response to extremist right-wing parties. The BNP has recently been presenting itself as the defender of England's Christian heritage, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York responded by warning the public to be wary of voting for any political party 'whose core ideology is about sowing division in our communities and hostility on grounds of race, creed or colour'.	CofE, 2010b
<b>A Jesuit Journal on 'Meeting God in Friend and Stranger'</b>	This article summarises the longer Roman Catholic teaching document. One theme is that whenever we embrace the 'atmosphere of curiosity' that stimulates inter religious exchanges, we are participating in the very dialogue that God initiated with humankind.	Barnes, 2010
<b>Bibliography of Guidelines for Inter Faith Dialogue</b>	Should church halls be used for yoga classes and reiki healing? Should extracts from the scriptures of other faiths be read in services? In this short article a range of resources are presented for further research.	<i>Bibliography of Guidelines for Inter Faith Dialogue, 2008</i>
<b>Meeting God in Friend and Stranger</b>	This is the excellent new Roman Catholic teaching document on inter faith dialogue.	Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 2010
<b>Inter Faith Dialogue - Guidelines Between Mosques &amp; Churches</b>	Guidelines to encourage co-operation between mosques & churches, imams & clergy. <i>No author, 2008. Signed by the Bishop of Bradford and the President of JUB (The Deobandi 'Association of Muslim Scholars in Britain')</i>	



REPORTS		
<b>General Synod Uniqueness of Christ</b>	This summary of the Theological consultant to the Council of Bishops' paper on the Uniqueness of Christ was presented to the General Synod.	Davie, 2009b
<b>Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully</b>	A report presented to General Synod.	CofE, 2009b
<b>Davie's Report on the Uniqueness of Christ</b>	The theological consultant to the Council of Bishops Dr. Martin Davie's full response to the Uniqueness of Christ document.	Davie, 2009a
<b>Christian Contact Group on Islam: Protocols</b>	This describes the nature of the group, the commitments involved (bi-annual meetings) and membership requirements. <i>(no author, no date)</i>	
<b>Presence and Engagement Report</b>	This report combines quantitative sociological research and surveys of the individual experiences of parishioners to present an accurate impression of the life of the church in areas where over 10% of the local community are members of a non-Christian faith.	CofE, 2005
<b>Faith Communities and Regeneration in the Thames Gateway</b>	This report gives examples of several Christian churches that are working alongside social services to help marginalised communities. The Living Well is both Church and Primary Healthcare Facility. Hope Street Community Centre is a Church and a Citizens Advice Bureau, it also provides training for the unemployed. All Saints Community Centre, Chatham, works with Medway Council to provide child care. These are all exciting new ways of infusing spirit and power into activities that can become, when left purely to the state, institutionalised and impersonal.	The Grubb Institute, 2010
<b>Regional Reports Table April 2009</b>	Recent surveys/Mapping exercises undertaken across the English Regions, Scotland and Wales to measure the contribution of Faith Groups to Social Action and Culture.	CofE, 2009d

Like the 'Resources' section in 'Work with other faiths' on the Church of England website, the P&E website offers a very eclectic list of resources, from an even wider range of sources. Again, no criteria for inclusion or omission of documents are made explicit, and formal reports and documents by the Church of England are listed alongside publications from the Catholic Church, the Baptist Union and other external bodies, as well as informal and working documents from various sources. The most recent document is from 2011, which may indicate that this website, set up in 2013, mostly utilised existing resources from the original P&E website it replaced; the lack of more recent documents is somewhat surprising considering that the presentation of a reasonably up-to-date picture of the Church of England's engagement with other religions seems to be a central purpose of this website.

## **Appendix F: Information sheet for interview participants**

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Church of England Ministers' beliefs about other religions**

**The interview you are invited to participate in is part of a PhD research project in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Winchester. Before you decide to participate, it is important that you understand what the project involves and what you are asked to do. Please take time to read the following information and ask if anything is unclear.**

#### **Research subject**

The subject of the proposed PhD thesis is Church of England ministers' beliefs about other religions. The research will investigate what ministers believe about other religions, what experiences have influenced their beliefs, how tensions between different aspects of these beliefs are resolved and how these beliefs affect ministers' current ministry.

#### **Research participants and audience**

The research will be conducted by Sabine Bohnacker-Bruce, PhD candidate in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Winchester.

The participants in this part of the research project will be ordained Church of England ministers working in the Diocese of Winchester.

The initial audience for the research is the PhD supervisory team, headed by Dr Anna King (Director of Studies). The completed thesis will be accessible in the University of Winchester's library and parts of the research material may eventually be published in various forms, including papers in academic journals or other relevant publications.

#### **Research methodology**

Data will be collected through interviews with individual CofE ministers, lasting 60-90 minutes. During the interview a questionnaire and prompt cards will be used, which were developed from data collected in previous focus group research.

#### **Research ethics**

This PhD research project has been approved through the procedures outlined by the University of Winchester's Research & Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee. The conduct of the research will be according to accepted ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and the duty of care to participants. According to the Data Protection Act (1998) recordings and written material will be safely stored and, once the project is completed, will be destroyed.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw at any stage, without giving a reason and without penalty. They may also request to be provided with a transcript of the interview. All published data will be fully anonymised and participants will not be able to be identified.

**Contacts for further information**

For further information about this research, please contact the researcher, Sabine Bohnacker-Bruce on **sabine.bohnacker@winchester.ac.uk** or **Tel. 01962 827182**.

If you have any concerns about this research, please initially contact either the researcher, Sabine Bohnacker-Bruce (sabine.bohnacker@winchester.ac.uk) or the Director of Studies, Dr Anna King (anna.king@winchester.ac.uk).

If your concerns have not been resolved please contact the Chair of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee, Dr Bridget Egan (bridget.egan@winchester

## **Appendix G: List of prompt cards**

1. Bible
2. Charity work/engagement
3. Christian leaders
4. Church community
5. Churchmanship
6. Clergy training
7. Community
8. Culture
9. Education
10. Ethics/Morality
11. Evangelism
12. Faith
13. Family
14. Fear
15. Feminism
16. Friends & Acquaintances
17. Human Rights
18. Identity
19. Inter-faith engagement
20. Lack of experience
21. Media
22. Ministry
23. Mission
24. Negative experience
25. Personal experience
26. Personal relationships
27. Positive experience
28. Racism/xenophobia
29. Religious practice
30. Salvation
31. Social justice
32. Society
33. Theology
34. Travel
35. Truth
36. Work

## **Appendix H: Questionnaire**

### **BACKGROUND**

1. Name
2. Male/Female
3. Age
4. Ethnic background
5. Do you have a disability?
6. Family status
7. Children
8. Faith of spouse
9. Faith of parents
10. Faith of children
11. Did you ever have a non-Christian religious faith or non-religious belief system?
12. When and how did you become a Christian?
13. What type of church did you attend when you first became a Christian?
14. What other churches have you attended since?
15. What type of church are you currently part of?
16. When did you decide to go forward for ordination?
17. When were you selected or started training?
18. Please briefly describe your calling to ministry

### **RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS**

19. Do you have family members or close friends who are not Christians?
20. Do any of them have another faith or follow another religion? If yes, which?
21. Do you talk about your respective faiths to each other?
22. Has your relationship been affected – positively or negatively - by your different faiths?
23. Have you had classmates, fellow students or work colleagues who follow another faith?
24. If yes, which faith?
25. Did you talk about your respective faiths to each other?
26. Was your relationship with them affected – positively or negatively - by your different faiths?
27. Are there other people in your neighbourhood or wider social circle who follow another faith?
28. If yes, which faith?
29. Have you had any conversations about your respective faiths?
30. Has your relationship with them been affected – positively or negatively - by your different faiths?
31. Can you think of any encounters or experiences with people of another faith that you consider memorable or significant? What were they?

### **TRAINING**

32. Where did you train?
33. Were you taught about different views on salvation?
34. Were you taught about mission?
35. Were you taught about evangelism?
36. Was there any other teaching that you think was relevant to your beliefs about other religions?
37. Were you taught about inter-faith work (joint projects with people of other faiths)?

## **MINISTRY**

38. How long have you been a minister?
39. Have you personally been involved in Evangelism?
40. Are you currently involved in Evangelism?
41. Is the church you are working in involved in Evangelism?
42. Have you personally been involved in Mission?
43. Are you currently involved in Mission?
44. Is the church you are working in involved in Mission?
45. Have you personally been involved in inter-faith activities?
46. Are you currently involved in inter-faith activities?
47. Is the church you are working in involved in inter-faith activities?
48. Has the Race Relations Act affected your ministry in any way?

## **THEOLOGY**

49. In brief: how would you describe God?
50. Who or what is a Christian?
51. What is unique about Christianity in comparison with other religions?
52. What does Christianity have in common with other religions?
53. How would you define the concept of salvation?
54. Who is saved?
55. How is a person saved?
56. What does salvation mean to you?
57. Do you think there is an official CofE position on salvation?
58. If yes, how would you describe it?
59. Do you think there are other religions that offer salvation to people? If yes, which ones and why?
60. If no - what happens to people who follow other religions?
61. Are there any other religions you admire and why? If yes, why?
62. Are there any other religions you find it difficult to relate to? If yes, why?

## **CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

63. Do you think there is an official CofE position on other religions?
64. If yes, how would you describe it?
65. How would you describe the position of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, or other senior bishops, on other religions?
66. Have you been approached by parishioners or people outside the church regarding these positions?
67. How did you respond?
68. Have you ever had any disagreements with fellow clergy in the diocese about your respective beliefs about other religions?
69. Have you ever had any disagreements with a parishioner about your respective beliefs about other religions?
  
70. Any other comments?

## Appendix J: Recruitment of participants in Winchester diocese

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Recruitment method</b>
1.	Personal acquaintance
2.	Personal acquaintance
3.	Personal acquaintance
4.	Volunteered in response to second advert in clergy newsletter
5.	Volunteered on recommendation of fellow PhD student
6.	Approached on recommendation of mutual friend
7.	Volunteered in response to a request from Interviewee 5
8.	Introduction by supervisor
9.	Introduction by supervisor
10.	Approached on suggestion of Interviewee 8
11.	Personal acquaintance
12.	Introduction by supervisor
13.	Approached on suggestion of Interviewee 6
14.	Approached on suggestion of Interviewee 8
15.	Personal acquaintance
16.	Approached on suggestion of Interviewee 6

**Appendix K: Prompts selected as most important influences by interviewees**

<b>WINCHESTER</b>	<b>1. Prompt</b>	<b>2. Prompt</b>	<b>3. Prompt</b>
<b>Susan</b>	Clergy training	Theology	Interfaith engagement
<b>James</b>	Religious practice	Interfaith engagement	Theology/Travel
<b>David</b>	Friends & acquaintances	Religious practice	Culture
<b>Robert</b>	Travel	Personal relationships	Salvation
<b>William</b>	Travel	Personal relationships	Religious practice
<b>Mary</b>	Travel	Friends & acquaintances	Negative experience
<b>Mark</b>	Bible	Personal experience	Racism
<b>John</b>	Media	Interfaith engagement	Lack of experience/ Culture
<b>Michael</b>	Interfaith engagement	Charity work	Mission
<b>Richard</b>	Positive experience	Interfaith engagement	Education
<b>Nancy</b>	Theology	Education	Family
<b>Tom</b>	Clergy training	Travel	Personal relationships/ Friends & acquaintances
<b>Barbara</b>	Positive experience	Friends & acquaintances	Personal relationships
<b>Charles</b>	Clergy training	Friends & acquaintances	Media/Education
<b>Chris</b>	Religious practice	Community	Identity
<b>Amy</b>	Culture	Positive experience	Lack of experience
<b>LEICESTER</b>			
<b>Lawrence</b>	Personal experience	Bible	Culture
<b>Linda</b>	Racism/xenophobia	Feminism	Friends & acquaintances
<b>Lisa</b>	Community	Interfaith engagement	Faith
<b>Laura</b>	Personal experience	Ethics	Interfaith engagement
<b>Lee</b>	Friends & acquaintances	Social justice	Society



## Appendix L: Prompts selected as most important in order of frequency

Winchester	No.	Leicester	No.	Combined	No.
Friends & acquaintances	5	Friends & acquaintances	2	Friends & acquaintances	7
Interfaith engagement	5	Interfaith engagement	2	Interfaith engagement	7
Travel	5	Personal Experience	2	Travel	5
Personal relationships	4	Bible	1	Culture	4
Religious practice	4	Community	1	Personal relationships	4
Clergy training	3	Culture	1	Religious practice	4
Culture	3	Ethics	1	Clergy training	3
Education	3	Faith	1	Education	3
Positive experience	3	Feminism	1	Theology	3
Theology	3	Racism/ xenophobia	1	Personal experience	3
Lack of experience	2	Social justice	1	Positive experience	3
Media	2	Society	1	Bible	2
Bible	1			Community	2
Charity work	1			Lack of experience	2
Community	1			Media	2
Family	1			Racism	2
Identity	1			Charity work	1
Mission	1			Ethics	1
Negative experience	1			Faith	1
Personal experience	1			Family	1
Racism	1			Feminism	1
Salvation	1			Identity	1
				Mission	1
				Negative experience	1
				Salvation	1
				Social Justice	1
				Society	1

## Appendix M: Frequency of prompt combinations

PROMPT COMBINATION	FREQUENCY
'Human rights' – 'Social justice'	10
'Human rights' – 'Feminism' 'Christian leaders' – 'Churchmanship'	8
'Christian leaders' – 'Clergy training', 'Fear' - 'Racism/Xenophobia' 'Salvation' – 'Evangelism' 'Salvation' – 'Truth'	7
'Clergy training' – 'Churchmanship' 'Community' – 'Church community' 'Media' – 'Fear' 'Mission' – 'Bible' 'Negative Experience' – 'Fear' 'Positive Experience' – 'Personal experience' 'Truth' – 'Faith' 'Theology' – 'Clergy training'	6
'Evangelism' – 'Churchmanship' 'Evangelism' – 'Clergy training' 'Faith' – 'Bible' 'Identity' – 'Community' 'Ministry' – 'Clergy training' 'Personal experience' – 'Friends & Acquaintances' 'Personal relationships' – 'Friends & Acquaintances' 'Social justice' – 'Feminism' 'Theology' – 'Bible' 'Theology' – 'Faith' 'Theology' – 'Ministry' 'Truth' – 'Bible'	5

## Appendix N: Thematic groups of codes

### A THEOLOGICAL THEMES

#### 1. Theologies of Religion

A1: Exclusivism  
A2: Inclusivism  
A3: Particularism  
A4: Pluralism  
A5: Difference/Particularity  
A6: Similarity

#### 2. Theology

Q49 Describe God  
Q50 Who or what is a Christian?  
Q51 What is unique about Christianity  
Q52 What does Christianity have in common with other religions?  
P01 Bible  
P33 Theology  
P35 Truth  
E4: Gospel

#### 3. Salvation

P30 Salvation  
Q53 Define concept of salvation  
Q54 Who is saved?  
Q55 How is a person saved?  
Q56 What does salvation mean to you?  
Q57 Official CofE position on salvation?  
Q58 Official CofE position on salvation  
Q59 Salvation through other religions?  
Q60 What happens to followers of other religions?  
B4: Universalism

#### 4. Faith vs. religion

E2: Religion  
E3: Fundamentalism  
E5: Respect  
E6: Humanity  
B2: Spirituality - spiritual experience  
P12a Faith -as personal belief  
P12b Faiths - as religions  
O2 Worship  
P29 Religious practice

### B. EXPERIENTIAL THEMES

#### 5. Formation of beliefs

B1: Formation of beliefs  
B3: Self-identifying statements

#### 6. Formative spiritual experiences

Q12 Conversion  
Q18 Call to ministry – how

#### 7. Formative personal influences

P09 Education  
O1 Intellectual curiosity  
P13 Family  
P16 Friends/Acquaintances  
P26 Personal relationships  
P34 Travel  
P36 Work

#### 8. Cultural Influences

P07 Community  
P08 Culture  
P14 Fear  
P18 Identity  
P21 Media  
P32 Society  
P28 Racism/xenophobia  
Q48 Race Relations Act

#### 9. Experience with other religions

P20 Lack of experience  
P24 Negative experience  
P25 Personal experience  
P27 Positive experience  
Q19 Non-Christian friends/family (NCFE)?  
Q20 FF of other religions  
Q21 NCFE -Talking about respective faiths?  
Q22 NCFE Relationship affected?  
Q23 Non-Christian CC?  
Q24 Classmates/colleagues (CC) of what religion?  
Q25 CC - Talking about respective faiths?  
Q26 CC relationship affected?  
Q27 Neighbours/acquaintances (NA) of other religions?  
Q28 NA of what religion?  
Q29 NA - Talking about respective faiths?  
Q30 NA - relationship affected?  
Q31 Significant encounters

## **C. RELIGIOUS THEMES**

### **10. Views on Other Religions**

Q61 Religions admired  
Q62 Religions found difficult  
R Buddhism  
R Christianity  
R Hinduism  
R Islam/Muslim  
R Judaism/Jewish  
R Other  
R Sikhism

### **11. Moral Aspects**

P02 Charity work  
P10 Ethics/Morality  
P15 Feminism  
P17 Human rights  
P31 Social justice  
O3 Faith leaders  
O4 Hospitality

## **D. ECCLESIASTICAL THEMES**

### **12. Church of England**

C1: Other CofE Clergy  
C2: Church as institution  
P03 Christian leaders  
P04 Church community  
P05 Churchmanship  
Q13 Churchmanship - First church  
Q14 Churchmanship - churches attended  
Q15 Churchmanship - current church  
Q63 Official CofE position on other religions?  
Q64 Official CofE position on other religions  
Q65 Position of bishops  
Q66 Questioned by parishioners?  
Q67 Your response  
Q68 Disagreements with fellow clergy  
Q69 Disagreements with parishioners

### **13. Clergy Training**

P06 Clergy training  
Q16 Call to ministry - when  
Q17 Selection/training - when  
Q32 Training college  
Q33 Taught different views of salvation?  
Q34 Taught about mission?  
Q35 Taught about evangelism?  
Q36 Teaching relevant to beliefs on other religions?  
Q37 Taught inter-faith work?  
C3: CPD

### **14. Engagement with other religions**

P11 Evangelism  
P23 Mission  
P19 Inter-faith engagement  
P22 Ministry  
Q39 Evangelism - past involvement  
Q40 Evangelism - current involvement  
Q41 Evangelism - church involvement  
Q41 Mission - past involvement  
Q43 Mission - current involvement  
Q44 Mission - church involvement  
Q45 Inter-faith - past involvement  
Q46 Inter-faith - current involvement  
Q47 Inter-faith - church involvement

### **OTHER**

B5: Definitions  
B6: Metaphors  
Q70 Other comments  
E1: 'Interesting question'  
D: Comments on Methodology

### **Socio-demographics**

Q02 Gender  
Q03 Age  
Q05 Disability  
Q06 Marital Status  
Q07 Children  
Q08 Faith of spouse  
Q09 Faith of parents  
Q10 Faith of children  
Q11 Previous faith  
Q38 Length of ministry

## Appendix O: List of documents from CofE website for Leicester interviewees

Document	I am <u>not</u> aware of this document	I know about this document	I have read this document
Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue (1988)			
Communities and Buildings (1994)			
The Mystery of Salvation: The story of God's gift: A Report by the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England (1996)			
Christians and Jews: A New Way of Thinking (1994)			
Sharing One Hope? - The Church of England and Christian-Jewish relations: a contribution to a continuing debate (2001)			
Porvoo Guidelines (2003)			
Guidelines for the celebration of inter Faith marriages in church (2004)			
Presence and Engagement: the churches' task in a multi faith society (2005)			
A Generous Love – an Anglican theology of inter faith relations (2008)			
Staying present and engaging faithfully (2009)			
A Church of England approach to the unique significance of Jesus Christ (A paper by Dr Martin Davie for the House of Bishops' Theological Group) (2009)			
Multi-faith Worship?			
Room for Religion			
Building Good Relations with People of different Faiths and Beliefs			

## Appendix P: Interviewees' travel experiences

*Going into a mosque, the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, had a profound [effect] on me simply because as a churchgoing Christian it helped me to appreciate how entering a church might feel for local people who've never been in a church before, and that feeling of being in a place whose rules you don't understand and which has a very particular culture that you're not a part of. That struck me very forcibly; I rather thought that every Christian minister should go into a mosque or some other place of worship from another religion to have the experience of not belonging. So that informed me in my own Christian life and work and witness. (AMY)*

*I went to Israel once, I have grave reservations about things like the wall that's been built there but it's very hard for us with minimal experience of the bombings that they have had to put ourselves into that situation. But again there's experiencing the hospitality of Islam. We didn't go into the West bank or the Gaza Strip but we experienced - we went into Palestinian homes and - openly talking. It is probably more of a closed situation now than it was then. The wall didn't exist then. So you could walk from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. There were some checkpoints but there wasn't a solid great wall. There was a tower somewhere. From a Biblical point of view it was great, seeing how geographically it hangs together. There were some very startling things. For example in an umbrella stand in a café there were machine guns - it was just bizarre. I have heard bombs going off in the distance before but I have never been near that sort of firepower before, that sort of stuff. Also there was a naivety - with the tourism guide as to who was occupying and actually if he believed what he was saying - he was towing the party line. And actually it would have been nicer to - well we did wander round a bit and got chatting more to other people. I think it rammed home the divisions - you know the Wailing Wall and the Mosque on top. It did show the negative side of religion related to identity and power. Ahm - it probably led me to feel more negative about the Zionist expression of Judaism. And more sympathetic towards Islam.*

*There were some great things, for example the guy who guarded the door to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where there are about nine different Christian groups. And he is a Muslim because he is the only one the Christians trust not to give his own group extra time with some shrines or whatever. And things like that were quite fun. But it was quite - when you see the machine guns in Starbucks - it wasn't Starbucks but a place like it - when you see that, you realise it is not a normal society. And when they talk about democracy - to what extent can that be a democracy? (MARK)*

*I've travelled to both Uganda and to India, to Uganda with the church here and actually that revealed the closed nature of part of what I experienced in terms of the Christian church there, and was in many ways very unsettling, but it was followed by a visit to Rajasthan in North West India where I saw the influence of Gandhi and his extraordinary inclusive approach to people of faith, and how though it isn't as it were an acknowledged faith network, it still hugely affects the life of people there. As I understand it, Christianity and Islam are the only two proselyting world faiths, and I think that raises huge questions in the world we're in. And I would want there to be a very respectful approach to people whose convictions are different from those that I might hold because I think probably, not to put too fine a point on it, the*

*future security of the world may depend on it. I suppose my trips to India bringing together those where I saw how the need for just basic necessities like water transcends all religious conviction, and mentioning again the Gandhian philosophy, that was part of what many of the NGOs were philosophically motivated by. There was a passion for social justice and everybody needed, for example, water. The travelling around took me to different places and experiences of that, and it was in a way connected with all that I do. So to say morning prayers with those of other faiths and none in the middle of the desert was very memorable. (MICHAEL)*

*We were in Jerusalem, and it was really very interesting. And we were in the middle of the Muslim quarter, that's where [the Anglican cathedral] sits. And we felt incredibly safe. And the guy who was out there - I think he's still there actually, at St George's, and at the University perhaps, but a very interesting man. We walked out the first night, from this little compound, we were staying in the Education Centre, and we walked out, and we couldn't get 20 yards down the road without somebody throwing their arms around X: 'So good to see you,' and shaking his hand. And this happened again and again. And then he took us to his favourite restaurant and we went there for supper, and there were all these people shaking his hand and giving him hugs and things. All Muslims, not Christians! And it was very interesting, so different from - what has happened as a result of 9/11 really has changed the whole perspective. (NANCY)*

*My main experience was to go to Jordan and Israel. We went to the Garden Tomb in Israel and met a messianic Jew there. He was American. We were a group of seven and it was quite quiet. It was seven years ago and there was a lot of trouble in Israel at the time. There were very, very few tourists, very few Western tourists. The markets were empty; there was no one around. There were a lot of bombings on the buses at that time. To get to the Garden tomb you have to go - there were lots of Arabs there, there were braziers. There was an atmosphere of fear there, you couldn't get a taxi anywhere and we had someone in a wheelchair. It was a difficult time to be there. We got to the Garden Tomb and as we walked in, there was a group of people singing hymns. We were invited to join in. It was a group of messianic Jews from America. They made us very welcome. They gave us little wooden cups that we used for communion. That was nice, I still have got mine at home on my desk. And Misty, that was her name, Misty offered to show us around. She had been in Jerusalem for about six weeks. Her father was Jewish and she was trying to get Jewish national status. She had been there for about six weeks and she offered to show us around. So she had been to parts of Jerusalem that we wouldn't have discovered on our own. That gave me an insight into the Jewish faith and messianic Judaism, what it is like to be a messianic Jew. And our experience of just being in Jerusalem itself.*

*I remember one evening during that particular visit, I have been back again, but on this particular visit, we approached the Western wall and we had been searched by the Israeli soldiers to get into that particular area. It was dusk and all the lights were on. There were headlights and it was very bright. There were lots of men and women at the Western wall praying, and a Hassidic Jew came in one direction and then a camel came the other direction and it was just - I would have loved to have taken a picture of that because it was - quite*

*strange actually. It summed up what Jerusalem was like at that time. Part of our experience was going to the Temple Mount. At that time it was open I don't think it is open now. We were allowed to go up there. And there was a young Muslim girl, as you know it is a Muslim mosque and it is guarded by Muslims. We were allowed to go up there, not into the Mosque itself but into the grounds. I had a small handbag with me, it was summer and very, very hot and we didn't have many clothes on, but I had a little handbag with me and it was obvious by looking in it that there wasn't a Bible in there. But she was convinced that I had a small Bible and it just made me realise how afraid people are of the Bible, how important it is as a text because we had to go through a narrow passageway up to the Temple Mount and they had a table and she was a guard and on the table it was piled high with Bibles that they had confiscated. They could come back and collect them afterwards, they could come all the way round and get them but you were not allowed to take a Bible up to the top of the Mount. I had a little handbag and she was convinced that I had a little Bible in it. She kept saying to me: Are you sure you do not have a Bible in here. And I said: no - being quite honest about it, I didn't have one. It made me realise how they viewed the Bible. They did not want the Bible to go into their holy place. (SUSAN)*



## Appendix Q: Transcript excerpts

### Q.1. NANCY

*I was a teacher and I taught Religious Studies, and we had other faiths we were expected to teach about, and that came in during my career. And I can remember it being discussed, and, 'Was this necessary?' And I felt it was necessary. I had to argue that with the school, that it was important to have other faiths. But I felt very strongly that other faiths should be recognised and taught as separate entities, rather than teaching, say, a theme like light, and talking about Advent alongside Diwali and alongside other things, so that everything became a sort of mishmash, and children would go away, not knowing the difference. I felt it was important that they understood that there were differences in these religions, but they were all valid. (...)*

*I taught a Muslim family, they came new to the school...the little boy was coming into my class. And we talked about Religious Studies, because they have a legal right to withdraw their children from Religious Studies, but it was an independent school, and it was a Christian school...so the assumption is, and was for most of the other children who -we had Sikhs, we had Muslims, we had Hindus - don't think we ever had any Jews that I was aware of but those three. And the children were just all treated the same, they all came to Religious Studies classes, and we tried not to say things like, 'We believe,' but, 'Christians believe' and that sort of kept everybody happy. But this family were very much more overtly devout Muslims. She wore a veil, tended to wear clothes, which were of her Arab background, rather than European. Very bright woman, husband was a GP. And the boy was the issue. The girl would have been fine, being taught anything, but the boy was the one who had to be sort of protected from Christian views. So, we had an interesting conversation, it was coming towards Christmas, and I said, 'I wanted to talk to you about this, and run by you, what we do in the classroom and see how - because we always had a nativity play, you know, did the usual things? And it was agreed that as long as I didn't say that our salvation was dependent on Jesus, then they were happy. And actually I don't think I had another family who were more supportive of me in my role as Religious Studies teacher, which was extraordinary really. And when I, that year, went to Israel for the first time...she was the most excited, of all my friends, family and acquaintance, that I was going, and immediately understood why it was of significance to me, as a Christian, although obviously it wasn't the same significance for her. And when I got back, really wanted to know what I'd been doing. Yes. So, yes, it was very interesting. We had good conversations; she was a lovely person. (...)*

*There was a child in Year Two, who piped up, very early on in the year, as I started teaching them through the syllabus, that there was no God, and it was all a figment of my imagination, sort of thing. And he'd obviously been well trained by his parents to hold these beliefs. And I think he was hoping - he'd been in my nursery class, he'd been in Reception, he'd been in Year One, and now he was in Year Two, and think he was exerting a bit of muscle, and wanting to show that he wasn't just the nice little boy I thought he was! And, it was actually a really interesting year group to teach, because he would, from time to time, come up with fairly controversial things, but I used to say, 'But that's fine, because this class is the one class where the teacher isn't always holding all the answers, you have answers too. And what I like*

*is a discussion. You're not allowed to rubbish it, you're not allowed to rubbish anybody else's opinions, and you're not allowed to say, 'That's not true!' because we're in an area of faith...'. This child had been encouraged to take on board his parents' belief, or lack of belief, which was about having no experience of God, or not recognising the experience of God that he had. And, I think by the end of the year, all the children had really grown in their understanding of faith, if not in their own personal faith, I can't answer for that.*

*Researcher: Did you feel he grew in his understanding of faith?*

*Interviewee: Yes, absolutely yes.*

*Researcher: So he'll probably turn round and say to his parents -*

*Interviewee: Oh probably he'll have a dog collar in 20 years time, much to his parents' mortification! Yes, he was a very bright child, and he just needed to ask the questions, and he was lucky that I wasn't threatened by him asking the questions, so it was a good experience. So it's sort of turning a negative into a positive really. (...)*

*The Muslim community that meet at the Guildhall had a lunch and a sort of open day, and they wanted people from all the churches, and all the mixed faith groups around, to go, and see some presentations, and they did some plays, and they had all sorts of things going on children and one thing and another. I met a young couple, a young woman - no, it was a very interesting thing because there was a great segregation of sexes at this thing. Where you would go to something, in a normal church environment, and you'd see, probably, husbands and wives together - I mean you might see a wife zip off and talk to somebody else, but you tend to see family groups - whereas this, I caught up with the wives and the children, but I could never work out where the husbands were, they were in a different group, and I didn't feel quite so comfortable with that group. Yes, so I got talking to this woman, and she had a friend whose son had gone blind overnight. And she was really struggling to find anybody who could give her some help, and because I was a teacher, she thought maybe I would know about things. And for a while I was emailing around, and we were trying to sort out how she could have access to some help for this friend's son. And he was there, an absolutely engaging little boy, and - extraordinary, you'd never have known he couldn't see. Now, looking back on it, I think how amazing it was. But they were so lovely, really nice people. And it's that sort of thing. It's just so important, and yet we don't have, always, the opportunities to mix with people who just come from that different background and see that it's actually just the same as us - just a bit different, but really no different from all the other differences that there are between us. (...)*

*Xenophobia - if we talk about it as being a sort of like an inbuilt fear of others who are different, well, it's not really surprising I think, because particularly since 9/11, I think we have been taught to be on our lookout for what might harm us. And it was an extraordinary experience to go through. But I sometimes, if I go up to London, and I sit on a London bus, and I see a young Arab-looking man, with a backpack, well I usually think, 'I wonder what it feels like to be a young Arab looking man, with a back pack, and have everybody look at you?'. Because it probably happens. I always smile at women in scarves, headscarves, in town, which they probably think is bizarre, because here's a woman in a dog collar! But I think - and there are a few more around in Winchester than there were. And I just think it's about - that's about conquering fear, it's about putting people before nonsense! (...)*

*There was a rather strange, sort of Indian religion we were taken to when I did my World Religions module, the first one. We were taken to various places. We were taken to the Buddhist monastery in Chithurst, and my friend and I, both being Christian women, decided we wanted to opt out of the meditation. Because we had both come from the sort of evangelical background that said, 'You don't do yoga, and you don't do this kind of thing.' I don't think that anymore, but I did then. And I regretted, actually, not joining in and discovering a bit more about it, so I think that was foolish... We went into an ordinary semi-detached house in a Southampton suburb, and there, sitting around, were - it looked like a house group meeting, but they were all worshipping this picture, of a particularly repellent looking man, with lots of black, curly hair, and a very, very greasy face. Looked like - I don't know, sort of Indian, I should think... And they were talking, all of them, about him, like they had just come away from - a sexual experience is the only way I can describe it! And there was the most repellent atmosphere in the place, and I just couldn't stand it, I could not cope with it. And I had to go out. It was completely suffocating, and really troubling. Really troubling.*

## **Q.2. LEE**

*The right of asylum seekers would be the area where I've been involved. I'm in a place where initially I had a lot of applications for people to get married and things like that, from all kinds of different backgrounds, and often the stories, when you actually spend time with the people and ignore the Daily Mail headlines you discover that it's a lot more complex than you first thought. But that's just another example of actually people's response to, we tend to categorise people as being - free thinking here - you tend to categorise people into being all sorted out Christians, all sorted out Muslims, all sorted out Hindus who have got this kind of set of objective stuff that they're all working with but actually on the ground it isn't quite how it works in people's lives.*

*Similarly, we kind of think of people when it comes to things like marriage and things like that, we think of people who are doing shock, horror things such as marrying in order to get status in this country, and we forget the fact that that's exactly what wives of professional footballers do in order to get money, you know, some. What are the actual motivations behind someone who marries a professional footballer? How can we be sure of those motivations? How can we be sure of our own motivations in forming relationships with other people? We can never be sure; there's always mixed motivation, and so the very fact that sometimes people are two different immigrant groups coming together - they do attract sometimes each other because they're both outsiders - and, yes, it may well be that it's to their benefit that they do get married to someone who can help them with a sense of status but that doesn't exclude the possibility that actually God's at work in that relationship.*

*So I suppose what I'm saying is that in that area of human relationships things are often a lot more complicated because people are just trying to live their lives, they're just trying to get through the week, they're just trying to get through the year, they're trying to better themselves, and for their children as well and that's what's motivating them more than anything else... there's a commonality about that, and again as I said earlier, the question of how Jesus comes to people and how people respond. We have a mission partner in Pakistan and she's working very sensitively for the Church Mission Society - there are schools that she's*

*opened; 84 schools she's opened in 12 years for the Diocese of Hyderabad – and what they are very, very clear about is that they do not, in any shape or form, do forced conversions or cross the line in that way. They are very much just giving people the opportunity to respond along the way to, without any kind of organised evangelism or anything else like that, and I think that's how people were with Jesus, that people responded from where they were. And sometimes they would have crossed the line and become organised members of some kind of grouping but sometimes they didn't. (...)*

*I think there are many people who respond to Jesus who would stay within their own religious context, and in fact that's sort of an increasing thing that's been focussed on, I think is just to what extent you find that people are sitting within a religious ritual framework, but actually very open and holding to different questions of faith. Just as within the Church you have people who are all over the place – holding to horoscopes – holding to all kinds of things that actually you might think, well they're not actually part of the Christian faith really, but actually you seem to be talking about these things. I think the boundaries are very - the boundaries in what people's own experience, the way they live their lives, the things that motivate them, the things that are important in their lives, I think it means that actually religious boundaries are a lot more fluid than we would sometimes think. (...)*

*I've just mentioned evangelism, and it's not a word that I use that much, although of course its roots, it's a very encouraging word in terms of what the original meaning of the word is, but of course it seems to be used where you are almost aggressively bringing something to somebody to make them change their position, and that's why I wouldn't use that so much as a word, and certainly in the approach we have.*

### **C.3. LAURA**

*My ministry has always been in areas of deprivation...I grew up overseas in a colonial environment and in a family where we were constantly being reminded that our position was one of luck and not entitlement. We were very much encouraged to have a kind of ethical broad approach to other people. My decision to work in the parishes where I've worked really comes from a kind of deep down sense of that that I had a very privileged, secure childhood and upbringing and a sense that what you do with that is that you use it to serve other people. I've felt huge privilege and pleasure from working among some of the most deprived people in this city really in the last twelve years. Partly because these are folk who actually do know their need of God and don't very often have that experience of people being prepared to live alongside them and work alongside them. When I lived on [X estate] I was the only, apart from another clergy colleague, I was the only professional who lived in the environment and I can remember one of the policemen saying to me, 'I don't know how you do it, you know, I go home at the end of the day to a nice leafy suburb'. I lived in a flat on the second floor of what had been the pub and the shouty lady and the barky dog and the reggae were there overnight. It never bothered me, I enjoyed it, but clearly for some people that was really a challenging one.*

*In terms of what does that mean towards kind of developing attitudes towards folk of other faiths, I suppose one of the things one has to notice in this country and in this city is that until, you know, what my experience has been that those of other faiths are encountered among*

*the poorest, so that my encounters have predominantly been with people in deprived communities and only peripherally with those in leadership roles. Where they have been with those in leadership roles they've generally been within the context of social concern, local activism rather than a conversation about faith. (...)*

*My sense of what the Bible does for us is very much around it builds us into a community. We become the community that the Bible, you know, that reads those stories and we also identify with the community about which the Bible tells the stories. So at its most basic that's my kind of take. For me the whole sense of we are a community because of the narratives that we tell about ourselves and the narratives we share. For me, in both my previous church and my current church, that is a really rich but very complex narrative of many threads woven together. Because both of the churches I've spent my entire ordained ministry have been churches where a number of different cultural strands and stories have come together. So the first parish where I ministered was an accumulation of seven Victorian parishes. When I first went there, even though the parish had been formed out of those seven parishes more than ten years before, people would still say to me I'm really an old St Michael's person or I'm really an old St Mark's person.*

*So all these strands had come together alongside strands of migration and what is very typical of the bits of Leicester where I've ministered which is people who have never moved, so who die in the house they grew up in or not far off, alongside people who have arrived in this country in the last ten, fifteen years, whose stories are very different who may have family scattered all over the world. How do you make those people into a community? You make them into a community that can tell a common story and you see that common story as being linked to the biblical story. That biblical story is the story about our identity in Christ but it's also a story of complexity.*

*It's also a story that's full of strands of multiculturalism and people living in alien environments and, you know, recognising that in a city like Leicester everybody feels like an alien sometimes. If you walk around some parts of this city as a white English person you are in a significant minority, there are streets you can walk down and you won't see another white face, and yet compared to, for example my experience, I spent three weeks in Chicago a few years ago, and that was even more extremely ghettoised. Leicester isn't quite like that but nevertheless you get these woven strands. So we all live in that kind of minority-majority dichotomy I think.*

*So how we tell the story of that and how the story of our hospitality to one another seems to me absolutely crucial to what I see us being as the church in this place. Again, we do that both as a majority and minority in that at a city level, there's no doubt, I don't think we are making it up, that our Bishop is looked on, not only as the leader of Christians, but the spokesperson of the faith communities. So at one level, you know, and we're still the established church. You come to me if you've got faith or no I can marry you, I can change your legal status, that's the one bit.*

*On the other hand my parish has a population of 13,000 people of whom forty are in my church on a Sunday. It's not exactly a majority pursuit, you know, we're a tiny minority you don't really make a lot of sense to the people outside it. Particularly in Leicester, and in the environments where I've worked, a dog collar is not going to buy you any status, in fact*

*exactly the opposite. It will be treated as an object of suspicion; you have to prove your right to be at the table.*

*I sit on Surestart partnership boards and charitable trusts and I attend neighbourhood meetings and so on. People do not see me as somebody who has an automatic kind of public leadership role. I have to earn my place to do that. I think it's possible to earn that place because you live in the area, you do get to know people, there's a level of stability. I've been in my current parish for eight years, well none of the head teachers have been there that long, one of the GP's, one of the ward counsellors, but after a while just sheer longevity...You're part of the street furniture, that's right, oh it's her again. But I think particularly in deprived urban areas where projects come in and your youth worker or your whatever is there for three years or five years, you know the fact that actually the church has stuck it out has become significant. So that's my kind of take on the community stuff. (...)*

*I think Presence and Engagement was a very interesting document and came out at a very interesting time in the life of the Church of England because it seems to me that it was almost the last cry of a certain kind of understanding of what it means to be the church in the sense of to be the church for all people in your community. As our resources are shrinking it's becoming more and more difficult, on many levels of conversation, to justify those resources being put into places where they are not going to have an impact on conversion, evangelism or the growth of congregations...how we understand resourcing ministry in places where that ministry is highly unlikely to grow new disciples. So that, for me that's where the personal and the public play out at this moment in time, in terms of personally I do believe that there is value in Christians living, working and ministering in areas where they are significantly in the minority. However, I also think that's a huge challenge when you're saying no we really do want a vicar in this area where their church is never going to grow significantly, as far as we can see the kind of cultural mix of that place at the moment, where if you put somebody in a different context a quarter of a mile up the road there might be potential for conversion or growth or discipleship. Those are the hard choices that we're in the process of making and I think, ironically that's for me, where my kind of personal experience and the changing culture and the broader story of what it means to be in a church which is certainly, I suspect, going to have to go through even greater decline before it can reinvent itself. Really you know where the rubber hits the road on that one. (...)*

*I am fascinated by living in the city I live in, I am curious about the people around me. I'm not a very risk adverse person. So I hope I'm not very often driven to make decisions by fear. I love living in Leicester, to me it's almost never been, you know, I very rarely have an experience of negativity about living in an environment where there's a lot of just day to day rubbing alongside people of other faiths. Those are, in a sense I'd say those feelings and fear things are not and, I would say, have not contributed to my theology and attitudes.*

*I would say that because of my own experiences as a young, as a teenager and adult of making a conscious decision to choose a faith path, which could have been other faith paths, my kind of underlying assumption is that anybody who's on a journey is going to be there in the end. I think broadly speaking I don't see my role as being one of converting people who already have a faith perspective. There's quite enough of a challenge bringing people to discipleship who have no sense of there being anything beyond really. But I've had to become*

more kind of interested and tolerant of that in the last two or three years at getting to know the community in this city, which is a predominantly Asian church which is mainly Asian converts, which is our mission community at All Saints Belgrave and they're an amazing bunch of people and they have just this extraordinary enthusiasm for the gospel. They are building a stonkingly big church and it's hugely impressive but they're doing that from within cultural equality. I think probably that's really important for me in observing and valuing what they're doing because they're not offering anything other than the gospel because everything else is the same. That feels kind of a different thing to saying, come and join us because we're culturally different to you and we have this weird religion that looks exotic and different because it's not what you're used to. So that's been good and I've really valued that experience and it's an amazing thing to watch really.

#### **C.4. ROBERT**

*I never had been anywhere except a daytrip to Calais until I was 19 and for my gap year - before there were such things - I spent quite a bit of it in Israel/Palestine and I'd gone with some sympathy for the Jews but I lived amongst Arab Christians largely and some Arab Muslims and I suppose that was my first encounter with a different culture, with a different country. You have got the three main monotheistic religions all operating together, so I think that that and the travelling around the country that that must have had - that exposed me first-hand to how religions operate, and how there are Christians in other cultures apart from England. (...) You see, this is in 1973, so it's a long time ago, but even then, although of course the Jews are nowhere near, the Israelis are nowhere near as bad as some occupying forces, then or even today, nevertheless they did, to my mind, they had an incredible arrogance, and they fairly discriminated against the Arab population, whether that population was Christian, of all its varying types, or Muslim, or Druse, a minority group that lives up in the north-east, in the Golan heights. So I came to appreciate - I was deeply positively influenced by the Christians that I met, the Arab Christians. So that is - you realise that Christianity isn't English for a kick-off and that actually ethnicity has nothing to do with being a Christian. That certainly gave me an international perspective on Christianity and it began to give me this mixed experience of - you will have good and bad adherents of each religion. (...)*

*In terms of my experience and post-travel and personal relationships, I would see that you can have devout practising believers of any faith and you can also have the most hypocritical false examples of any faith. And it wouldn't matter which one it was. I am sure I have seen examples of that a lot. So on the one hand I think about the fantastic hospitality that a Muslim family would extend to you. And the way in which some of those men, if they were in a different culture, would behave very differently towards women, for example. You would find that amongst those who are nominally from a Christian country as well. So there are some of the observations I have [made].*

*But in terms of salvation - that if you see that God's biggest problem was how can He possibly forgive us for basically turning our back on Him, orientating ourselves around ourselves and consequently malfunctioning in His world, that basically all religions tend to work on the basis of, if I do x, y and z, I will build up enough merit in order to kind of buy my way back into His good books, whereas in Christianity that's a kind of non-starter, you will never get anywhere*

on that basis. So He has to, out of His grace, somehow work out a way in which His justice can be satisfied and He is free to forgive us. And so, to my mind, Him coming in the person of [Christ], living a perfect life, dying for our sins, if you like to use biblical language – propitiating God’s adverse reactions towards human sin and rebellion, then through that substitutionary sacrifice His justice is satisfied and he is in a position to be able to forgive us and it is all by grace. The only thing we contribute is, William Temple said, our sins towards our salvation. Now no other religion operates like that, as far as I am aware, and they are all on the Brownie point system, which is what Christianity often degenerates into. And so to my mind, that’s the fundamental difference – how God can forgive us.

Now, when you say: okay that’s, if you like, the theory and how He achieves it, that’s the objective salvation, but if you were to ask me: where does that put people who aren’t Christians, I would say – that puts them really exactly where people like Abraham and other people in the Old Testament are. What God is looking for from us is our response, and we have varying degrees of understanding. The key response is to throw ourselves on His mercy and ask for forgiveness of our sins, thinking: He must somehow be able to do it. Abraham didn’t know how God could forgive his sins but he threw himself on His mercy and so God said: you are justified by faith. Just by trusting that the God that he had had revealed to him so far must be a God who can somehow forgive his sins, even though he did not know how.

And so in my mind there are plenty of people around the world who may never have heard much about Christ and that through him God is able objectively to forgive sins but if their gut instinct is that there is a God, and they are in the wrong with Him, and that if they just ask for forgiveness, He will somehow forgive them, then, if you like, they are accepted. But if they discover more, then I would expect them to respond positively as they get greater knowledge and revelation. I have seen that in a Chinese guy – he came to Paris to do his PhD, he came to London to work, and he came down here and he had been brought up of course as a good communist, a good atheist, and when he was in London he began to encounter the Christian thinking – he always thought there was probably some kind of God - and then he moved here and he came to embrace that, because he’d started off on the right track. And when he discovered more information, he began to see how it all fit together. Then he discovered in a letter from his brother that, as he put it: the Christians have arrived in his home village in the middle of nowhere. (...)

When you see people of different religions acting seemingly contrary, morally, to what you think are their moral tenets, you then think, is this all rather nominal and external? And do they really think it works? Or – that would be, if you like, my negative experiences...I can also see that in some expressions of Christianity, too. [Long pause] So if you are in a place like Thailand, why are there loads of Arabs with loads of money? Collecting lots of prostitutes for example. If they were to do that in their own country – well, goodness knows what would happen to them. But I am sure where they are, they are all good boys, you know, in the mosque, bowing down and all that. But you do get that in all religions – hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another. So I guess that balances out some of my positive experiences. The negative is largely from observation whereas the positive is from closer knowledge of some individuals. (...)



*I used to go and visit the ships in Avonmouth Docks. And I went with this guy and we used to give out Christian literature and Christian records and tapes, and that was quite interesting because it was still the days of communism and how you realised, the captain wasn't in charge of the ship, it was the political officer. And yet – they would say No, and as you were escorted on and off, different sailors would ask: what do you want? And also things like – there was a Ghanaian I remember who – he'd ask on one visit, he wanted to become a Christian but he got three wives, so what should he do about it. And that was one of the rare occasions when I thought – a little bit of early church history would be helpful, in which they used to say, well, don't get rid of them but don't get any more. And I thought - I still think that's probably the best advice to give to a polygamous convert to Christianity. Don't get rid of the wives you have got but don't acquire any more really... I think that is what they do in places like Africa where they come across people who are polygamous, that's what they say. They probably don't have them in church leadership. (...)*

*I think that often Christian societies, although some of our history has been pretty appalling, but Christianity can cope with other religions easier than they can cope with us because I think we expect people to be at a starting point where they are not connected with God. And through Christ. And we allow people to exist, we don't force them to embrace the faith and we operate by dialogue, persuasion and so we can allow them to exist and practice their faith. We engage in debate and discussion with them and there may well be people from a Christian background who embrace another religion. I would expect the same reciprocity.*

*In fact, what I found was quite interesting, once was I was invited to a large Muslim gathering, if it was run by Christians you would call it a guest supper, they supplied us with food and then they had a Syrian academic Muslim from Southampton explain something about Islam and they had two – well they were white English girls. One worked in the police and one was a medical doctor. And they were all dressed in – you could see their face but not the rest and they explained – both of them in a sense gave their testimony, and both of them had been impressed by the hospitality they had received when travelling in Muslim countries, where they said they had felt safe as women. And that that had, I suppose, got them into the faith. I suspect that they probably got into the faith by marriage as well but they didn't give the full story, so you couldn't tell. I am quite happy for them to do that, as long as there is reciprocity, that we are all allowed to do that, and that we are all allowed to talk about our faith and the reason why we believe this and that. And that there is freedom for people if they choose to, that they can switch religion if they want to. Although I don't think theirs works. I think there is a lot of going through the motions, that they never have a settled knowledge that they are acceptable to the Divine, they are always very unsettled about that, cause they don't know that they have enough Brownie points on that.*

*So I think that we need to say in our education system that everybody is allowed to practice their own religion and that through education teachers should be descriptive of different religions but not prescriptive about them, if they have a mixed class. So they can describe what other religions do and practice, they can watch a film if you like of what their rituals are, but they shouldn't ever make the children participate in something that is outside their own religion, they should in fact honour that. I think that would be an infringement of a family's primary duty and they would be usurping that. But to describe it, and to stress that we can all debate the merits and otherwise is a good thing. And therefore, in our society there should be*

*no religious or racial discrimination other than the sensible thing – if you, if somebody, if a mosque needed a Muslim youth worker that they can get a Muslim...it's idiotic really to insist that they should have a Christian Muslim youth worker, that would be ridiculous and no political party would operate like that. You would not get a right-winger to run the Labour youth movement, would you? So there is that degree of sensibility. (...)*

*So if you were talking about things like the death and the resurrection of Christ with a Muslim – what I do, I'd say: well, if we look at the evidence, we have a number of multiple sources, mostly Christian but also secular, non-Christian sources from the first century who do claim that [Jesus] was killed and they – even the secular ones refer to the fact that at least the Christians think that he did rise from the dead. What you say is that somebody 400 years later has got a totally different take on that. And I say, it is a bit like somebody today would pop up with the idea that Henry VIII had seven wives when there is no – there are no other earlier sources than today that have come up with that. But I generally find that that kills the conversation. But it's important not to be rude to people but I think that if you do get to the point of dialogue or discussion, you do have to – just as I'd expect them to force me, that I must push them, really. Give them something to think about, really.*

## **C.5. RICHARD**

*My family didn't go to church and I got involved in the church from quite young, eight, nine, partly singing in the choir but then as other friends left it in their teenage years, I just stayed put and became more involved in the church. And just, I suppose I was quite a quiet child, almost introverted. I just thought a lot about faith and the world and God and what they are meaning and all that sort of thing. So in that sense – probably even as a teenager, although I was very committed as a Christian, I was interested to know: so what about all those other faiths. Whether it was Buddhism or whether it was Islam, what is it that we are all experiencing that we are calling God and what are the similarities and what are the differences...By the time I was sixteen or seventeen, eighteen there was quite a strong youth group and some of the people involved in that were quite open to other faiths, I mean this would have been in the early seventies, so it was before it became a much more popularised thing. I think there was a – some of the people who were quite influential were people who were aware of and had a similar view to me. I suppose that probably influenced my view as well. So it wasn't that I was receiving that through the church as such. And then, when I was at university, again, my experience of the university Christian community was of that much more closed minded, you know, evangelical view. And again that influenced me in the sense of making it more - I was more clear that that wasn't where I was. So it was reacting against that. I knew that wasn't where I wanted to be and it didn't make sense to me. So by the time I left university and then I went back to work in South London, initially in social work, again working with people of other faiths, working with people with no faith, it was already an issue I was interested in in a positive way. (...)*

*[Clergy training opened] up the need to learn about other faiths, the need to acknowledge the reality of other faiths and the need to openness as opposed to - I mean there are some people here in X, some churches where their view of – they actually run courses to learn about Islam, for example, very specifically so as to be able to try and persuade Muslims to become*

*Christian. That's the only purpose for learning about Islam; it's to persuade a Muslim to become a Christian. That's just so far away from where I am. So that experience, when I was studying, was very much about opening up to other faiths and just try to work out – the reality of God, is that a universal experience? Can Christianity – can we as Christians recognise that something of the truth of God is there in another faith? And for me that's very much the case. And the next area that is obvious for me, really, when I was ordained, in a couple of jobs that I have done, one was when I was a university chaplain and therefore co-ordinating the religious support for all faiths, and then...a prison chaplain, and even more so there, it was absolutely expected that what our role was to be able to support people of any faith as well as people of no faith. And also to be able to link with people, with faith leaders who would then come into prison or into university to support people who needed that particular faith. (...)*

*I am well aware that in our own church here there would be some people who are much more sceptical about the interfaith work that I do. I think the tradition of this particular church is fairly liberal but I know that there are some people in it who would be closer to the line of – you get to know people of other faiths because you want to bring them to Jesus, you want to make them Christians. Which is just not where I am. So – yeah, it's not so much that I react against that but I am very clear that's where I'm not. So I'm not sure that I would say that's an influence just that I am aware of that and people that I know – if I'm absolutely honest, in terms of personal friendships, it's just one of those interesting things, the vast majority of our closest friends are not church people at all. They are not people of any particular faith. Which probably helps keep me sane. So the people that I work with in the church, the parishioners and people that I am close to in church, those that I would disagree with on that level, it's not that they have been an influence on me, I don't think, one way or the other, I'm just very clear where I am and I know that sometimes we just don't talk about it too much because we know that we would disagree... I think we do talk about this a lot amongst the [staff] team because it is an important issue around the area. On the whole I think we agree. We have different shades of where we are but I think on the whole – there are sometimes things where we disagree, we had one or two events in the church where I'd been quite content to move one or two of the crosses because what we were doing and the way we were doing it, to have the Christian symbol in the midst of what was going to be an interfaith thing seemed a bit unfair and imposing. So we are in a church anyway, so it was very obvious that this is a Christian context that we invited people into. But I was prepared you know – one of my colleagues was very unhappy about that. So there was quite a healthy discussion about that – where do you draw the line between: this is where I am, I am a Christian here but being sensitive not to overdo it. (...)*

*I have spent a bit of time in the Holy Land over the last twenty years or so and it's – I feel very strongly about some of the things that are going on in the Holy Land. Now that's on one level a political issue but it's inevitably overlaid with the faith issue. So, the Holy Land is clearly a place where Christians, Jews and Muslims live side by side, not always getting on with each other and there's a whole history of that and because I feel very strongly supportive of the Palestinian people and their cause if you like, but at the same time want to see myself as a friend of Israel, then I sort of get caught in the crossfire. But having spent time out there that inevitably influences my, not only experience, but understanding. So again, having spent time out there, on the whole I had a very positive experience of Palestinian Muslims, of Palestinian*

*Muslims and Palestinian Christians working together because of their common experience, so I have quite a positive view of Islam and what that means. In the Middle East, as opposed to a generalised picture that you get through the media of Arabs – that Muslim means terrorist. I had a very positive experience, through travel and staying out there. And again, if I'm absolutely honest, quite challenging at times that some Jewish people that I have met there are very aggressive and very, I can't quite think of a word, but it's much more difficult to feel sympathetic towards them, or have a dialogue with them. And then you try not to take one side or the other – so the travel and living out there and having the experience of that certainly influenced how importantly I see the work of interfaith and dialogue continuing...I don't think it has in any sense given me a negative view of Judaism. And I very strongly recognise how Christianity is grown from Judaism and what we share in common. But I think some Jewish groups and some Jewish leaders are as insular in their views as some evangelical Christians and that's what I find very difficult and that's what in that context in particular is preventing a sense of hope and working towards peace and bringing the communities together. I think there are already things that are working against that. Now I think it is largely a political problem but it is overlaid by the religious problem. (...)*

*So although I would say that all the major faiths, we share something of the same experience of what we call God, there are, and it may well be through culture even when people try and say it's what scripture tells me or God tells me, I would suggest it's more through culture, then particular areas, particular teachings – the right way, the wrong way – then feminism, and not just in Islam but, you know, it's an obvious one at the moment, issues around what women can and can't wear, all those sorts of areas, now again, part of the problem there is that Muslims disagree amongst themselves. But it opens it up for the press to say: this is what Muslims do – they stone women, they suppress women. Now, I don't think that's fair but there are parts of the Muslim community where women have a much more difficult time. I would say that's not genuinely from the Muslim faith. I would say that's from cultural things and that's why Western people who are Muslim have quite a different view from Bangladeshi families, for example, here. Some of the women in Bangladeshi families here have a much more difficult time and I would say that's a cultural thing where sometimes the faith is used as an excuse for keeping women, for want of a better word, suppressed.*

*Certainly over the years, it has happened often. There are people who come to faith, and that might be from no faith or they might have been brought up as a Christian and then ignored it or occasionally people from another faith who have decided they do want to become a Christian. And that's a great celebration and I have been involved in baptisms of people from other faiths. But if anything, my – part of my role in their journey is to help them stop and think. What I don't want is an emotional response to some sort of emotional experience, you know, in inverted commas, the "evangelical experience". Give people a big emotional experience and something of the power of that means that, yeah, they want to become a Christian. Yeah, that's really great and whoosh, away we go. What tends to happen with me is, if people come from another faith or whatever and say they want to become a Christian, part of my job is to slow it down. And then to help them reflect and think through and talk through – but absolutely not to stop them. It's just for them to go deeper into what they're looking for and what Christianity is. And if in the end of that process they want baptism, then*

that's great, absolutely great. So I am happy to do that, but that's not the motive for reaching out.

Actually we've got a newish person in our congregation who is – she originally was a Hindu and has become a Christian. There is an Asian Christian fellowship in the city and that's one of the groups that works very definitely to convert people from another faith. And she is involved with a support group called Release International, which is for Christians who are persecuted for their faith in other countries. And that's generated quite a bit of discussion, because of course I would want to support Christians who are being persecuted for their faith but I wanted also to bring into the discussion that there are parts of the world where Christians are doing the persecuting and therefore we need to be aware of that as well. Nigeria is a place that's very complicated but in Nigeria there have been some horrendous things done by Christians in Nigeria to Muslims, as well as horrendous things done by Muslims to Christians. So – that person, I think she found it challenging, but we've talked it through and she's understood that, yes, of course we pray for Christians who are persecuted, but actually persecution is what we want to stop in the world. Any type of persecution. (...)

We have this issue within the Council of Faiths, when other groups want to join us and we then have to decide, well is that a faith or not. Unitarians. I would say Unitarians are sort of an offshoot from Christianity who have got Christianity slightly wrong. And there is Mormons – the Mormon community asked whether they could join the Council of Faiths but I would say they claim to be Christians but they have got a very different understanding of Christianity, so we talk it through and if we are not comfortable then we feel we can't include those as part of the Council of Faiths. The same within Islam, there are some sects within Islam like Sufi Islam, which the main mosques would be very unhappy with. I mean there are no Sufi Muslims in the city but if there were, and if they wanted to join the Council of Faiths, then I suspect the other mosques would be unhappy about that, because they see it not as separate faith but as a heresy within their own faith, and they would want to limit who can officially be on the Council of Faiths... There is not an easy answer but I think there are sometimes limits. I mean it's easy to say, modern sects like Scientology – as far as I am concerned, that's not a world faith, it's not a true religion so there would be no issue, they would not be invited to join the Council of Faiths. So I don't know if they have an understanding of salvation or not but – so within the faiths that I know about, the major faiths of the world, I would say, those faiths all have some understanding of salvation, of how human beings can find wholeness and healing through faith in God... And another group that asked to come along to our meetings and we were happy to invite them were the Humanists, the humanist community. And they came to a couple of meetings and we talked it through and in the end they were a bit unhappy but we said we don't feel we can invite you to join the Council of Faiths because Humanism is very explicitly saying that they don't believe in God, so it's not about faith. It's a view, you might call it a belief, but it's like a political belief, it's not belief in the sense of faith because they specifically say there isn't a God. So, yes we share the same values and believe in the same ways of living, the same ethical values but it is not a belief in the sense of faith. So there was a bit of discussion, some difficulty and, you know, we said: you are welcome to come to our meetings but actually not to join the Council of Faiths. But I think you are right: the other thing it highlighted was this: within each of the major faiths there are those who are quite

*tight about what's a proper Muslim and what isn't, and is there a boundary. So sometimes the tensions can be more about the tensions within a particular faith. (...)*

*There was something a year or two ago where Rowan made a comment about Sharia law and, of course, I'm a big fan of his, but because he is such a deep thinker, he sometimes says things that he knows what he means, that are quite complex, but then get picked up by the press and are simplified and end up not being what he means. So that was something – in effect he was saying that he doesn't have a problem with some elements, some aspects of Sharia law being part of the Law in this country. Well Sharia law is such a powerful phrase and people don't know what it means, that was horrendous. There were some people in the parish who were unhappy about that and again, all you can do is then try and take time to explain. Whatever you do to explain, I suspect to a lot of people, they might be polite and listen but they are not going to change their mind, once they've reacted, they will have that in their mind and that's not likely to change.*