Christian – Vaishnava Dialogue in the US

- An action-research minor field study

Av: John Doherty
Handledare: Jørgen Straarup
Abstract

Religious diversity is the inevitable corollary of globalization and with it comes the challenge and opportunities of greatly increased interaction with religious Others. The United States was founded on an Anglo-Saxon Protestant basis but has now become “the world’s most religiously diverse nation” according to one Harvard religious studies scholar. To deal with this development, American thinkers, mainly Christians, have devoted a good deal of scholarship in the past three to four decades construing strategies how to meet and interact with the religious Other. During the 70’s and 80’s, a typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism was developed by Christians as a response to religious diversity. Many see today that it is a necessity to find an alternative to hostility and violence and therefore dialogue is the order of the day. Since Christians are still by far the largest faith-group, and the US has economic resources, US Christians have a natural predominance in dialogue. Is that good or bad from the stand point of the minority Other? One such minority is a major sub-division of Hinduism, namely Vaishnavism. Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in the US is a new phenomenon in the past two decades and an emerging minority representative is a globalized Vaishnava organization ISKCON, popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement, which has its Western roots in the counter-culture of the 1960’s. While ISKCON struggled for legitimacy in the 70’s and ‘80’s, it has in recent decades become a major factor in Hindu and especially Vaisnava representation. How American Christians respond today to Vaishnava dialogue and how this typology arose and functions as a theoretical basis for the on-going development of Christian-Vaishnava dialogue is the subject of this action-research minor field study.

Keywords: Christian predominance, Vaishnavism, ISKCON legitimacy, ecumenical, interfaith dialogue, boundary, exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, typology, religious diversity, faith/religion/religious
## Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 1

1. Foreword .......................................................................................................................... 4

2. Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 4

3. Aim ................................................................................................................................... 6

4. Outline ............................................................................................................................. 8

   Material .............................................................................................................................. 8

   Method ............................................................................................................................... 9

   Theory ................................................................................................................................ 13

   Background ...................................................................................................................... 17

5. Analysis ............................................................................................................................ 18

   PRESENT – Survey – “Start where you are.” Arthur Ashe ........................................ 18

   PAST - Typology Analysis – “Use what you have.” Arthur Ashe .......................... 23

   FUTURE - Dialogue Evolution - “Do what you can.” Arthur Ashe ..................... 30

6. Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 46

7. References ....................................................................................................................... 49

8. Appendices ....................................................................................................................... 51

   1. Questionnaire ............................................................................................................... 51

   2. Overview over survey results ...................................................................................... 58

   3. Interviews ..................................................................................................................... 60

      Rev. Richard Clark ......................................................................................................... 60

      Rev. Narcie Jetter .......................................................................................................... 60

      Rev. Thomas Mullin ...................................................................................................... 61

      Dr. Jon Pahl .................................................................................................................. 63

      Rev. Dr. J. Paul Rajashekar .......................................................................................... 64

      Rev. Thomas Roach S.J. .............................................................................................. 66

      Rev. Dr. J. Jayakiran Sebastian ..................................................................................... 67

      A Roman Catholic sister (name withheld) ................................................................. 68

      Father James Redington, S.J. ...................................................................................... 70

      Ravindra Svarupa dasa ............................................................................................... 76
1. Foreword

Stockholm’s Södertörn University Religious Studies Department encourages undergraduates to do an independent field study abroad to gather original material for a thesis. Raised in the US in a Christian family, I naturally have the resource of Christian family, friends and teachers but I was catapulted in my late teens by the Vietnam War into dialogue with Hinduism. At that time, I read Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography *Experiments with Truth* in 1970 to defend my conscientious objection from the Selective Service authorities’ threat of an impending jail sentence for draft-dodging and from the bullying of my elder brothers, both serving in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam conflict. A few years later, after joining ISKCON, popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement, the tables turned and I suddenly found myself in dialogue as a Vaishnava with Christians such as Rev. Thomas Roach, S.J. (with whom dialogue is resumed as per further down) when Father Roach kindly visited me at the Krishna temple in Philadelphia to console me at the time of my own father’s death in 1980. I also once met Dr. Jon Pahl of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in a Christian-Vaishnava dialogue context. These Christian dialogue partners and others are important to me as will be explained and I attempt by this thesis to cultivate dialogue with them without unduly influencing the research process. I give many thanks to these Christian mentors and friends in the US for their kind cooperation and encouragement in this project. This thesis will hopefully exemplify the wisdom of Arthur Ashe’s saying: “Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”

2. Introduction

Vivekananda Swami made a big splash when he (without formal invitation\(^1\)) appeared at the World Congress of Religions (which was primarily an American Protestant event) in Chicago in 1892. This event is often credited as being the kick-off for Hindu-Christian dialogue in the US and the neo-advaita doctrine, perceived as vastly different from Christianity, espoused by the US Ramakrishna mission founded by Vivekananda was the predominant concept of Hinduism in the US up to the 1960’s. President Eisenhower signed the PL 480 food-aid law

\(^1\) Pfändner, Willy “Myten om det mystiska Indien” from Sorgenfrei (2013) pg 164. ”Utan formel inhjutan besökte Vivekananda religionernas världsparlament i Chicago 1893…”
in 1955 benefiting India with subsidized USDA surpluses payable in Indian currency resulting in millions of non-negotiable rupees. The US government invested these rupees in Indological studies. US scholars – Dr. Larry Shinn, Professor Diana Eck and Professor Francis Clooney S.J. to name a few - soon uncovered that Hinduism was much more than the non-theistic neo-advaita espoused by the Ramakrishna mission. Rudolf Otto had previously discovered this in his encounter with the monotheistic, devotional bhakti tradition in the Sri Vaishnava community in South India resulting in Otto’s *Die Gnadenreligion Indiens und das Christentum: Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesensdeutung* (1930) *The Indian Religions of Grace and Christianity: Compared and Contrasted*. Otto’s findings that Christianity and Hinduism were theologically comparable were later corroborated by US scholars in the second half of the 20th century. Vatican II’s *Nostra Aetate* opened the door to dialogue for Catholics in the mid-60’s and similarly a few years later the World Council of Churches’ policy statement encouraged dialogue for Protestants. A water-shed development for Vaishnava-Christian dialogue was inadvertently facilitated by President Johnson’s signing of the INA act in 1965, repealing the Oriental Exclusion Act. That same year the soon-to-be founder of ISKCON, arrived “nearly penniless” on American soil and was fortuitously given permanent residency in the US, like many of his countrymen at that time and since. Although initially accused of being a brainwashing cult, the ISKCON that Swami Bhaktivedanta founded in 1966 soon gathered a sizable Indian ex-pat congregation and, as religious diversity gradually won footing in the US in subsequent decades, ISKCON emerged as a significant Vaishnava dialogue partner in the US and represents the US Indian community in this capacity to this day. This history impacts US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in general and specifically my recent field study in NYC, Philadelphia and Scranton Pa., Potomac Md. and the Deep South as will be explained in the analysis section further down.

\[\text{Eck, D. (2001) pg. 116}\]
\[\text{\(^3\) “At the time of the 1970 census, six thousand Indian immigrants had settled in New York City. By 1990 the number had grown to ninety-four thousand; by 2000, the number was one hundred seventy thousand.” Ibid. pg 120}\]
3. Aim

The aim of this minor field study is to produce a multi-faceted picture of US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue, anchored in the present public interest (or lack of it) to such dialogue in relation to intellectual responses in the past to, and to the future of, how American Christians face the inexorable fact of religious diversity. To accomplish this I study signs of public dialogue-interest among Christians complemented with a study of theoretical strategies developed in recent decades to deal with religious diversity and a discussion of some possibilities for the US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue’s on-going development.

The motivation for this study is my interest in good dialogue practice by earnest endeavor at establishing relationships in action-research across boundaries to the end of learning more about people of faith and how to correctly approach and learn from them how to better understand my own faith. This is particularly relevant in view of the fact that I had the good fortune of interviewing learned theologians and faith leaders who have worked diligently since decades to develop dialogue in the US. By the purpose of action-research, I mean:

> An action research strategy's purpose is to solve a particular problem and to produce guidelines for best practice. (Denscombe, 2010, p. 6)

The problem I attempt to solve is Christian exclusivism by means of dialogue. For this purpose, I chose to approach my survey respondents and interviewees in my traditional Vaishnava attire, i.e. a white dhoti robe and vertical clay tilak lines on my forehead. My motivation for this was to explicitly state to my Christian contacts that, aside from the academic purpose of this thesis research, my research itself is seen by me to be a serious attempt at dialogue. “To produce guidelines for best practice” as Denscombe defines action-research presents a methodological challenge for descriptive religious studies which will be discussed in the Method section further down.

The main question I focus on is the nature of Christian predominance and Hindu representation with reference to ISKCON’s struggle for legitimacy. Does Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in the US take place on a level playing field? Post-modern/post-colonial theoreticians have critiqued Christian dominance in indigenous countries during the colonial

---

4 This appearance has been my regular *habitus* for 40 years.
period. Since then, globalization entails an unprecedented meeting of religions in the US, and conscientious thinkers, particularly Christians, have dealt with diversity by developing a typology - exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism - particularly since the early 1980’s. This diversity discussion is profound since some thinkers propose that the age of Christian dominance since Emperor Constantine in the third century CE has now been succeeded by the age of religious diversity. The problem I address is that this above mentioned typology was not expressly developed for the purpose of dialogue but more as an intellectual project to deal with the inevitable fact of religious diversity. My aim is to question the extensive attention the typology has enjoyed in recent decades with the help of the Christians I contact in the US with the aim of analyzing its dialogue-suitability and investigating the path to a more dialogue-friendly paradigm for the on-going development of Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in the US, and in due course, worldwide.

An essential element of the dialogue picture I aim to present is the answer to this question: what do American Christians think the difference is between interreligious dialogue and ecumenical dialogue in regard to the typology in question when asked by an American Vaishnava? In other words, the concern is this: where do these American Christians draw the line between “Them” and “Us”? My questions then are:

- How do the US Christians I contact regard ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, on the micro and macro levels, if at all?
- Where did the “virtually canonical” exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism typology come from and what function does the typology have for Christian-Vaishnava dialogue?
- Where do the US Christians I meet draw the line between “Them” and “Us”? Or, phrased in a slightly different way, do they accept their Vaishnava dialogue partners as equals?
- What direction will the dialogue take?

---

6 Christopher Newport University Religious Studies Professor Kenneth Rose in “Religious Pluralism and the Upanishads” Journal of Vaishnava Studies Vol. 20 nr 2 Spring 2012, pg.25
4. Outline

Material
During the period March 18 to April 11, 2015, I made eight structured interviews: 3 theologians at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, one Roman Catholic pastor in his office and one nun at her college in the Philadelphia area. I interviewed two Protestant pastors at their respective institutions in Gainesville, Florida and one Roman Catholic priest at his rectory at the University of Scranton in upstate Pennsylvania. The interviewees, presented in appendix 3, have all extensive experience in Christian leadership: three theologians, three pastors and two members of their respective community’s international leadership teams. Two of the interviewees have known me since childhood, another taught me German in high school, one I became acquainted with in recent years through the ISKCON Philadelphia temple’s interreligious neighborhood dialogue and the remaining four I contacted through “snowball effect”, i.e. colleagues, friends and acquaintances of my contacts.

Additionally, I made two semi-structured interviews about the future of Christian-Vaishnava dialogue with two experienced dialogue partners: a Jesuit priest with a PhD in Vaishnavism on one hand and a Vaishnava theologian with a PhD in religious studies on the other.

Aside from the interviews, I made a survey with 105 respondents. Most of the respondents (70) were students, congregation members and colleagues of the above mentioned interviewees. 15 respondents were my family and friends. 20 respondents (which serve as a control group for the reliability of my data) were fellow travelers I met randomly on an AMTRAK train service from Florida to Pennsylvania on April 6 and in the waiting area at Newark Liberty airport outside NYC on April 11.

An alternative would have been to focus for the sake of consistency on the survey exclusively or the interviews alone. I combined however different types of material in order to approach my questions with a triangular method for the sake of comprehensiveness. The common denominator is religious diversity which suddenly demands a momentous rethinking of the American religious landscape. My assertion is that my thesis project of capturing a real picture of this diversity-dialogue dynamic necessitates the challenge of integrating methodological contrasts. Denscombe’s *Good research guide: for small-scale social research*

---

7 Snowball effect: a situation in which something increases in size or importance at a faster and faster rate. *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press 2013
projects recommends the combination quantitative studies with qualitative studies. A survey for example has the advantage of providing an overall view but the weakness of lacking an in-depth insight in particulars. The combination of interview material provides that missing aspect provided these disparate views are fruitfully integrated. I leave it to the reader to judge if I am successful in reconciling the survey and the typology discussion with the dialogue prospects, the three angles I employ.

**Method**

My method is to compare, contrast and integrate the material with a chronological, triangular perspective:

- **Present:** survey of Christians about micro/macro dialogue in ecumenical and interfaith contexts
- **Past:** interviewing Christian theologians, pastors and community leaders about the well known “exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism” typology
- **Future:** US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue prospects

The three angles are a public, quantitative survey and secondly, qualitative interviews of theologians and faith-leaders as to their attitudes to the typology of inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism and thirdly the juxtaposition of conversations with two experienced Christian and Vaishnava dialogue participants and the creative typology interpretation of a religious studies professor. My motive for this combination is the observation that there is a relationship between the present public interest in dialogue manifested in the survey with the extensive intellectual discourse on diversity in the form of the typology in the past decades. I hold however that the present dialogue interest findings in the survey provide substance to analyzing the historical typology discourse as more than merely theoretical which in turn lends itself as a basis to investigating what direction dialogue will take in the future as fruitful comparative standpoints.

---

8 Denscombe, M. 2009, pg. 157-159
9 To investigate the question of causality in this connection would be an interesting, related topic but it is beyond our present scope.
Method triangle

Present
Survey: attitudes to dialogue

Past
Interviews: typology discourse

Future
dialogue prospects

Present - survey
I formulated five multiple choice survey questions in an attempt to take the pulse of a representative group of present-day US Christians. The questions (including age and gender) asked for opinions on the macro and micro levels about the spiritual validity of Christian ecumenical and interfaith (specifically Hindu) dialogue. I used the word Hindu instead of Vaishnava in the public survey for the sake of clarity. The multiple choice questions offered suggestions for answers on a continuum ranging from “totally agree” to “totally disagree”. (See Appendix 1.) To give space for individual expression, I appended two “why do you agree/disagree?” questions about micro/macro, interreligious/ecumenical Christian dialogue.

To test the validity of the data I gathered from relatives, friends and “snowball effect” contacts, I questioned also a “control group” of random strangers, i.e. people unknown to me whose responses could be compared to the other group. Thirty-five of the survey responses I gathered from students at three seminars, which I was graciously allowed to sit in on at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia on March 19, 24 & 25, with time allotted by the respective professors for the students to respond. Another forty responses I gathered by giving survey-forms to two pastors and the two University administrators who kindly

10 The Protestant/Roman Catholic denomination adherence of most of the “snow-ball” respondents was to a great degree highly probable without asking due to the denomination-specific contexts (e.g. The Lutheran Seminary, a Roman Catholic college etc.) where the surveys were conducted. I therefore also noted these denomination sub-groupings.
distributed and collected the answered forms from congregation and colleagues. I comment the data and provide three charts:

- An overview of the answers to questions 1 – 5
- A breakdown of the answers from the control group vs. the others
- A breakdown of the answers with the denominational sub-groups

**Past – typology interviews**
The eight typology interviews were made on weekday working-time at the various interviewee’s institutions without prior warning as to the nature of the specific question, other than it was in general about Christian-Vaishnava dialogue. I made structured interviews, asking the same question: “Is the exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism typology equally applicable to both interreligious dialogue and ecumenical dialogue?”, I chose to question my interviewees about the well-known “exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism” typology developed first by Alan Race in the early ‘80’s on the theory that this topic is sufficiently open-ended that it would provide the interviewees with freedom to respond in their own ways and thus speak for themselves. I phrased the question, however, in regard to ecumenical vs. interfaith dialogue to discover boundaries, or lack of them. This hereby examines the Yale University theologian George Lindbeck’s Christian-family vs. non-Christian-stranger ecumenical favoritism, in “The Unity We Seek- setting the agenda for ecumenism”. Lindbeck laments the shift in Christian focus during the second half of the 20th century from ecumenical to interfaith dialogue:

> The new focus includes the so-called "wider ecumenism," which is concerned with interreligious rather than intra-Christian relations and is greatly outstripping the latter in popular interest. What is problematic about this focus is not interfaith dialogue but the failure to realize that this dialogue differs categorically from the search for Christian unity: the first is a matter of learning how to communicate with strangers, and the second, of overcoming estrangement within the family.12

The exclusivism expressed here by Lindbeck and the lack of Christian consensus for interfaith dialogue which Lindbeck postulates warrants the method in this thesis of questioning ecumenical vs. interfaith dialogue priorities among Christians.

---

11 “Race acknowledges his debt regarding this threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism to the nineteenth-century Christian missionary, John Farquhar.” Pfändtener 2005 also states that the typology was used by the Indian religion philosopher Savepalli Radhakrishnan in the 1920s and 1930s.
Asking permission to record, offering to provide a transcript for approval, I recorded the interviews. All interviewees gave permission to record and quote them, and only two asked to be given the transcript for approval. One of the learned interviewees, whose answer clearly indicated great familiarity with the typology in question, dismissed my offer to provide him with a transcript with a smile and said, “I know what I am talking about!” Six of the interviews lasted between 6 to 10 minutes. These brief interviews are limited to the typology question for the sake of focus, but the responses are compact. One lasted 17 minutes with extensive theological reflections and one 32 minutes, embellished with personal anecdotes. (See Appendix 3.)

My method with the typology interviews is to provide the transcript of the answers with a minimum of editing (see Appendix 3), and that only for the sake of clarity. In the long interview with the Roman Catholic sister (who is the only interviewee whose name is withheld), I interjected questions, presented in italics in the transcript. In section 4 “Past – Typology Analysis”, I compare and contrast certain themes which emerged in the interviews:

- Assessment of the typology’s function, especially in the past
- Reservations/outright critique of the typology

Other themes which the interviewees broached had to do with the typology or dialogue evolution, discussed in the next section.

**Future – dialogue evolution**

In this section, I begin by discussing other interviewee themes answering the future dialogue direction question:

- Dialogue as relationship-building
- The importance of knowing and articulating well one’s own position in a faith-tradition for competence as a dialogue partner
- The importance of respectfully acknowledging the otherness of one’s dialogue partner
- Openness to all unpredictable directions that dialogue spontaneously takes

Aside from these future-oriented themes from the typology-interviewees, the main focus of this section is that I conducted semi-structured interviews about the future of Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in the US with Rev. James Redington, S.J. (by telephone on May 11th and 16th) and Dr. William Deadwyler, Ph.D., (aka Ravindra Svarupa dasa) at his residence in
Potomac, Md. on March 21st. 13 Finally I close this future-section and the entire analysis-section with the bhakti typology interpretation of Professor Graham Schweig.

Alternately, instead of action-research I could have attempted a neutral research strategy but the risk in that case would have been that my apprehensions about Christian dominance would be an unacknowledged preconception. I could have focused on either the survey or the interviews but an additional reason I chose to pursue both angles was because of the pragmatic consideration that I had capable guidance from my Södertörn University supervisor, Professor Jørgen Straarup, for the survey (“Do what you can”) and access to the theologians, faith-leaders and experienced dialogue participants for interviewing (“Use what you have.”). I chose therefore to do both complimentarily.

Theory

If the typology is based on the assumption, as I understand it is, that religious plurality consists of mutually conflicting faiths, then the definition of the term faith is of major importance to the thesis questions of interfaith dialogue and intra-faith boundaries. In his 1958 Reasons and faiths: an investigation of religious discourse, Christian and non-Christian the British religious studies professor Ninian Smart expounded on “three logical strands in doctrinal schemes” 14 in both Christian and non-Christian religions:

- The numinous strand – worship of a Creator God beyond the world of sense experience
- The mystical strand – a timeless, other-worldly, unspeakable bliss attained after a long course of self-mastery and meditation
- The incarnation strand – recognition of a sinless God-incarnate who has the power to save

Strand’s analysis on a comparative religion basis calls into question the definition of religion as separate monolithic belief systems/traditions such as Christianity and Hinduism/Vaishnavism. The American Vaishnava theologian Dr William Deadwyler develops Smart’s strands in his 1990 “Religion and Religions” chapter in Attitudes of Religions and Ideologies toward the Outsider 15 into a Sanskrit dialectic:

---

13 As general background information, Harvard Divinity School alumna Sara Adams (aka Sraddhadevi dd) shared with me valuable insights from her experience of Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in the US. Dr. Deadwyler related also the pertinent 40 year history of the relations between the Lutheran Theological Seminary and ISKCON Philadelphia.
14 Smart 1958 pg. 108
15 Swidler & Mojzes 1990
• **Karma**-thesis – a this-worldly piety aimed at mixed material and spiritual betterment
• **Jnana**-antithesis – a rejection of the world in favor of liberation from **karma** to a mystical oneness with spirit
• **Bhakti**-synthesis – the sublimation of the world with all its resources devoid of selfish interest entirely in the service of God

Deadwyler contends, “Certainly, the major religious traditions have all these three strands of **karma**, **jnana**, and **bhakti** woven through them.” Deadwyler is corroborated later in Södertörn Religions Studies scholar Dr Willy Pfändtner’s 2005 *Understanding Religious Diversity – A Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue from the standpoint of Existential Philosophy* when Pfändtner finds similarly “three basic human dispositional moods expressing themselves in various ways in religious contexts”:

• The mood of exploitation – utilization of resources for life’s necessities as sanctioned, or even ordered, by God
• The mood of renunciation – asceticism with the view that “we are entangled in the world by our desires, and that this makes us suffer”.
• The mood of dedication – loving service to God and fellow humans

Pfändtner’s argues convincingly with the moods-concept based on the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) that emphasis on the noun “religion” be transferred to the adjective “religious” because he claims the noun religion has led to a “distortion of the phenomena in question (religious diversity) caused by what could be termed Enlightenment thinking”. Pfändtner concludes:

> Awareness of this fact may help us to detect our own moods and see differences and similarities in a new way, where we may agree with adherents of so-called alien traditions but also disagree with adherents of our own tradition.

The chronological research progression strands/dialectic/moods from Smart to Deadwyler to Pfändtner of discerning trans-traditional elements in various religions is a perspective which illuminates the question of the boundaries of dialogue, interfaith and ecumenical, central to this thesis. A more recent definition of faith for dialogue purposes is rendered by Christopher Newport University Professor Graham Schweig in his 2012 “Vaishnava Bhakti Theology and Interfaith Dialogue” wherein faith is equated with the Vaishnava term “sraddha” in a

---

16 Swidler, L. 1990, pg. 156 This quotation (and the entire “Religion and Religions” article) is also available in digital form: [http://content.iskcon.org/icj/1_1/rsd.html](http://content.iskcon.org/icj/1_1/rsd.html) accessed 23/06-’15
17 Pfändtner, W. 2005
18 ibid. pg. 147-148
19 ibid. pg. 151
20 ibid. pg. 151
universalist “inborn and intrinsic to human nature”\textsuperscript{21} definition by which Schweig draws a conclusion similar to Pfändner’s:

Ultimately, no one person’s faith is exactly like another’s, inside a shared traditional vision or outside. Thus dialogue is as important within a tradition as it is between traditions.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus a broader, dispositional understanding of faith is better suited to dialogue, both interfaith and ecumenical, than the typology’s narrower definition of faith as mutually conflicting belief systems/traditions.

The study of Christian-Vaishnava dialogue, or any dialogue for that matter, can arguably be made from the empiric standpoint of religious studies. My bias as an action-research participant-observer is my adherence to Vaishnavism, which may appear to be a luminal position. This may disconcert those who prefer a clinical approach but I argue that my findings have an intrinsic value of their own notwithstanding my personal involvement, which endows me with prior knowledge. The tightrope I attempt to walk here theoretically in approaching my questions and material in this thesis is a balancing act between a normative action-research perspective (aiming at problem-solving and guidelines-production) and a descriptive religious studies perspective of objectively reporting, without undue influence, the factual status quo observed in the field work. As far as I know, I am in this regard leaving the beaten path and exploring independently the boundary between religious studies and theology/philosophy of religions.

My thesis is that Christians in the US are open at present to dialogue beyond the exclusivism of the past and that the exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism typology continues at present to undergo reevaluation. Christian-Vaishnava dialogue has been initiated in the past few decades with the help of the typology and dialogue will continue although the typology will undergo reconstruction if it continues as a theoretical dialogue framework in the future.

In contrast to my interviewees (and many other scholars\textsuperscript{23}) who claim that the tri-polar typology is inadequate, pluralist Professor Kenneth Rose for example argues for the typology’s continued usefulness by a modification to a binary model where exclusivism and

\textsuperscript{21} Rosen, S. 2012, pg. 53

\textsuperscript{22} Rosen, S. 2012, pg. 53

\textsuperscript{23} See Meister, C. 2011, pgs 113-114, Cheetham, D. 2013, pgs 216-217
inclusivism are combined to what Rose calls “particularism”.24 My thesis attends to the scholarly consensus that the typology is inadequate.

My theoretical framework for the tri-polar exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism typology is the definition from the Chapman University Religious Studies professor Joseph Runzo in the “Responses to the Problem of Religious Diversity” section of Runzo’s chapter “Pluralism and Relativism” in The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity25:

- Exclusivism: only my religion is true and offers salvation
- Inclusivism: there may be truth/salvation in more than my religion but my religion is the norm.
- Pluralism: many (or even all) religions are true/offer salvation but no single religion has the complete truth

However, on the basis of the grounded theory methodology26, I consciously held my own theories as far as possible in abeyance during my field study in the US, in favor of openness to my respondents, hoping that the research itself would produce the theory. This is particularly appropriate, I think, in view of the opportunity I had to arrange interviews with well established scholars, and faith leaders. A further theory I work with is James Madison University Professor Sallie B. King’s notions in her “Interreligious Dialogue” chapter in the Oxford Handbook about Christian predominance in developing dialogue and the influence that has internationally, in this case on Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in the US:

Interreligious dialogue represents a major paradigm change in the norms of interreligious behavior. It is a change from the intentionality of wanting to change or control others to an intentionality that accepts others as they are. In the minds of many, it represents the only alternative to a future of interreligious hostility and violence. Yet its implications have scarcely been plumbed. It deeply challenges any religion’s claim to exclusive truth, suggesting that each religion has its own unique value and contribution to make. It proposes that the religions should not see one another as competitors in a zero-sum game but instead should embrace the existence of the other religions as good. It insists that there can be harmony amid diversity.27

25 Meister, C. 2011 pg. 65
26 Denscombe, 1998 pg. 125-129 ”Grounded theory is a procedure which emphasizes the importance of empiric field work...This contrasts with “desk-top theories” or abstract explanations in neatly constructed idea-systems to be tested afterwards in reality.” (my translation)
27 Meister, C. 2011 pg. 113-114
As this quotation clarifies, the study of dialogue is the study of religious change which is not wed to a predetermined conclusion. There is however a certain sense of desperation: dialogue is the only alternative to violence.

**Background**

The US was 70% Christian in the 2014 Pew Forum statistics compared to 78% in 2007. The number of the religiously unaffiliated rose from 16% to 23% during the same period and the number of non-Christians, especially Hindus and Muslims, rose steadily from 4.7% to 5.9%. Despite this recent, relatively slight dwindling, Christians have a natural position as dialogue leaders according to Professor King who writes that “Christians have by far been the world’s leaders in promoting interreligious dialogue” and American Christians particularly are natural dialogue leaders as per Dr. Jon Pahl, The Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia:

First—Christians make up the largest single group of religious believers in the world, so it's not surprising that they would have the most participants (in dialogue). Second, Christians represent the world's most advanced economies (US GDP still twice as large as nearest), so they (we) have the capacity to travel and organize. Third, many Christians (like me) feel a calling to recognize the violence done in the name of faith, and promote reconciliation instead. This is not "the white man's burden," but rather an honest confession of sin and good-will effort to atone. See the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Finally, some of us have recognized how interreligious cooperation works, pragmatically, compared to, say, warfare … and bring a commitment to the effective expression of interreligious activism as part of the evolutionary development of humanity, within the broad history of religions.  

Here let us note that Dr. Pahl is responding to an inquiry I made early on in my preparation for the field study in regard to present Christian dialogue-dominance as a vestige of the colonial heritage. The earnestness of Dr. Pahl’s “confession of sin and good-will effort to atone” convinced me to dismiss once and for all my post-colonial misgivings in pursuing the field study. Instead, I begin with the typology origination in the early ‘80’s, ignoring the Christian missionary who earlier used the typology. This is, I think, a good example of the benefit of both the openness and flexibility of the grounded theory approach and the malleability of the investigator in action-research methodology in limiting the focus of a study within a relevant and manageable timeframe, as a response to a discovery in the field.

---

28 68% of the unaffiliated “believe in God or a Universal Spirit”. http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise-religion/ accessed 15/06-2015
29 http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/ accessed 15/06-2015
30 Meister, C. 2011 pg. 104
31 E mail letter 11/02-2015, used with permission.
With the Christian predominance and the definition of religion questions in mind, let us now turn to the analysis section.

5. Analysis

**PRESENT – Survey – “Start where you are.” Arthur Ashe**

The survey consisted of five Christian dialogue questions with multiple choice answers on a scale of 1-5 with the choices ranging from entirely agree to entirely disagree with dialogue in principle. There were also two “why do you agree/disagree?” questions. (See Appendix 1.)

**What was the general pattern of responses?**

On questions 1-4, the answers’ average ranged from 1.3-1.5, in other words, a general consensus half way between “entirely agree” and “tend to agree”.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree entirely</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to agree</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncertain</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree entirely</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N of respondents</strong></td>
<td><strong>105</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in table 1, the percentage of the respondents who (more or less) agree is not less than 96%.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree entirely</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to agree</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncertain</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree entirely</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N of respondents</strong></td>
<td><strong>105</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in table 2, the percentage of the respondents willing to take part in ecumenical intra-religious dialogue happens again to be 96%.
Table 3  A Christian can have a spiritually rich engagement with members of the Hindu religion, mean 1.49

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree entirely</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to agree</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncertain</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree entirely</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of respondents</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in table 3, the percentage of the respondents who (more or less) agree that a Christian can have a spiritually rich engagement in Hindu dialogue is 86 %.

Table 4  I, as a Christian, am willing to participate in interreligious dialogue with members of the Hindu religion, mean 1.30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree entirely</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to agree</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncertain</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree entirely</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of respondents</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in table 4, the percentage of respondents who (more or less) agree that they, as Christians, are willing to participate in interreligious dialogue with Hindus is not less than 94 %.

Table 5  There is a big difference between Christian-Hindu dialogue and ecumenical (intra-religious dialogue) with members of other Christian denominations, mean 2.83

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree entirely</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to agree</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncertain</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to disagree</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree entirely</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of respondents</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in table 5, the percentage of respondents who are uncertain that there is a big difference between ecumenical and Christian-Hindu dialogue is 37 %, and the percentage who (more or less) agree happens also to be 37 % while the percentage of those who (more or less) disagree is 26 %.
I contend that this question 5 deviation from the general consensus in questions 1-4 prompts two observations. Firstly, that the respondents found 5 to be a difficult question and secondly, judging from the responses to the “why do you agree/disagree?” questions (further down), question 5 was found to be difficult because most respondents did not have sufficient personal experience of dialogue – neither ecumenical nor interfaith – notwithstanding their theoretical agreement with the importance/fruitfulness of dialogue as indicated in questions 1-4.

**How representative are the survey respondents?**

Firstly, let us note that the respondents were, with few exceptions, cooperative and took the matter seriously. I tend to believe my appearance in religious garb induced the respondents to understand that the survey was, for me, a serious attempt at dialogue and that they then reciprocated in kind. This cooperative approachability is in itself indicative that American Christians at large are open to interreligious dialogue. Of the 105 respondents, fifteen were family/friends, seventy were “snowball” contacts, i.e. friends of friends and twenty were strangers I met and surveyed randomly in public. In approaching the majority – acquaintances in the “snowball” group - I did not notice any who declined to participate. While approaching the random group in public, I was turned away only 4 times – two simply refused and two said they were not Christian. This indicates that many Americans identify themselves more or less as Christians and have a high degree of willingness to participate in dialogue with an adherent to an apparently non-Christian religious group. This openness is notwithstanding the fact that when I approached the people on the train we were passing through Georgia and South Carolina, an area of the US which has the reputation for being the “Bible Belt” - a US stronghold for conservative Christian denominations inclined to exclusivity. This cooperativeness indicates a fluid boundary-line between Americans and the Others.

Secondly, let us look how the random “control group” compares to the groups of my (the interviewer’s) family/friend and snowball contacts.

---

32 76 % of the population in the US South identify as Christians compared to 70 % in the overall US. 34 % are evangelical compared to 25 % overall. [http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/region/south/](http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/region/south/) accessed 15/06-2015
Table 6  Averages for three groups of respondents, according to their relation to the interviewer, for each of the five questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Friends/family</th>
<th>Snowball</th>
<th>Random</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average question 1</td>
<td>1.154</td>
<td>1.357</td>
<td>1.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 2</td>
<td>1.077</td>
<td>1.214</td>
<td>1.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 3</td>
<td>1.154</td>
<td>1.443</td>
<td>1.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 4</td>
<td>1.077</td>
<td>1.343</td>
<td>1.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 5</td>
<td>2.462</td>
<td>2.786</td>
<td>3.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of respondents</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 6, it is shown that the three groups of respondents, friends/family, snowball (friends/acquaintances of friends) and random, answer the questions in varying ways proportionately more neutral to the interviewer as the relation becomes more distant from friends/family to snowball to random.

The standard deviation between the 20 random respondents and the other 85 was slight (0.6) on questions 1-4, in that the random group was slightly less in agreement on questions 1-4, but significantly less in agreement on question 5. (Question 5 was difficult, as we have already discussed.) The pattern for all five questions is that my relatives/friends are most in agreement, the “snowball” group of mostly students/congregation members is less in agreement and the random group is least in agreement. If we accept the rationale that those who knew me were naturally inclined to agree, the students and religiously active congregation members were accustomed to the type of questions broached in the survey and thus relatively in agreement whereas the random group was least in agreement, being not as accustomed to the survey type questions, and neutral to the interviewer, then it can be argued that the survey instruments are in working order.

The answers to the “why?” questions for the 20 random respondents were much in accord with the other 85 with the exception that there were a few more (6) “uncertain” answers. All in all, the two groups compare well. The overall consistency of the responses from the random group, taken as a control group, with the body of the 85 other surveys of family/friends plus “snowball” contacts, can be interpreted that the survey data is in general reliable.
What was the age of the respondents? Any standard deviation?

The average was 46 yrs. The breakdown is 41 under 36, 30 between 36-60 and 26 older than 60. (8 are unknown.) The younger group was slightly more inclined to agree.

What was their gender? Any standard deviation?

46 were female and 54 were male. (5 gave no response.) The difference of the responses in regard to gender was negligible. To question 1, for example, the female average was 1.37 and the male was 1.34. The female average age was 1 yr. older than the males’.

How do the denominations compare?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7</th>
<th>Averages for four groups of respondents, according to their denomination, for each of the five questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Nondenominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 1</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 2</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 3</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 4</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average question 5</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of respondents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 presents how the different denominational backgrounds affect the respondents’ answers to questions 1-5.

There is remarkably little difference between the Protestant and Roman Catholic responses. It is interesting to note that the respondents with no denomination were however significantly less certain than the Protestant and Catholic respondents in answering question 3 about the richness of the Christian-Hindu dialogue experience. This is supportive of the theme which emerges further down in interviews: a prerequisite for competence in interfaith dialogue is identity in and adherence to a specific faith community/tradition.

The “why?” questions

In response to the first “why?” question about the efficacy of local (micro) dialogue: of the 105 respondents (two were blank) all but 4 (uncertain, uninterested, no opinion & ambivalent), agreed on dialogue's importance/fruitfulness. (See Appendix 1.) Many strongly expressed their agreement, for example:
I have participated in dialogue and learned much in India at conferences. Dialogue depends on participants. In an open-minded search for the truth, justice & peace, one must lovingly engage in a give-and-take dialogue with all people of good will. Increasingly we live pluralistically even at the local level in neighborhoods.

To the second “why?” question about the efficacy of national/international (macro) dialogue, the responses was more varied: 2 disagreed, 1 was uncertain and 5 stipulated necessary conditions (non-proselytizing, pragmatism, freedom from power/money interests etc). (See Appendix 1.) One theme was approval of the "trickle down" effect from leaders’ example to individual followers, for example:

   It is nice to have leaders show their willingness to engage with their peer leaders. A display of religious cooperation can go a long way in opening the minds of those in the pews.

What does the survey tell us?

The indication is that there is a general consensus among those I approached that religious dialogue, both ecumenical and interfaith, is the order of the day, and that they feel more confident about the micro, local level, than the macro, institutional level, although many have not had much personal experience as of yet. There is no evidence of favoritism toward ecumenical dialogue but there is indication of Christian openness to interfaith dialogue. The findings of this minor field study are far less conclusive than comprehensive studies. The 2014 PEW Forum study “How Do Americans Feel About Religious Groups” for example polled more than three thousand respondents. Still this study can indicate something about Americans in general: whereas the PEW Forum found Americans neutral to Hindus, this minor field study finds that Americans are favorably inclined to dialogue with Hindus and that can indicate that Americans in general think that dialogue is the order of the day and thus respond favorably when approached by a Hindu for this purpose. With this present dialogue-friendly angle in mind, we turn to the next angle of vision: the theoretical tri-polar typology basis of dialogue.

PAST - Typology Analysis – “Use what you have.” Arthur Ashe

Exclusivism was the traditional Christian response to the religious Other since the time of Constantine when Christianity was favored as the state religion. Other religions were considered false and incapable of leading adherents to salvation. Christians sent missionaries

to convert non-Christians. Enlightenment brought liberalism and the concept of freedom of religion and in beginning the 20th century Protestants moved through the World Council of Churches toward recognition of religious diversity whereas the Catholic Church maintained that salvation was not possible outside the Church. In the early 1960’s however the Catholic Church recognized in Vatican II that truth is found in the major religious traditions and that salvation was possible outside the Church. *Nostra Aetate* opened the door for Catholics to engage in dialogue with members of other religions as equals.  

To deal with this undeniable phenomenon of religious diversity Christian thinkers in the last half of the 20th century developed the three-fold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism as a tool. Now let us turn to the eight interviews in answer to my question, “Does the inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism typology apply equally well to both ecumenical and interfaith dialogue?” Locations of the quotations from the interviews, which are in Appendix 3, are given in parenthesis, with the name and section as per the appendix.

The above mentioned typology development was nicely summarized in Professor Sebastian’s interview mentioning important contributors such as John Hick, Paul Knitter and Gavin D’Costa. (Sabastian 2) Professor Rajashekar also mentioned Alan Race:

> It (the typology) was first delineated in early ‘80s by Alan Race, the British scholar as part of his doctoral dissertation. Since then it has caught on in most of the academic writing.

---

34 “*Nostra Aetate* contains the first formal statement of the Catholic Church on other religions…*Nostra Aetate* relates the world religions in concentric circles of closeness…Closest to the church (sic) is Judaism…Then in the next circle comes Islam…Then come Hinduism and Buddhism, rather thinly characterized but nevertheless very positively, in terms of their meditation techniques, lofty principles and devotional and ascetic elements.” Meister 2011, pg. 148-149

and a lot of Christian scholars used this classification in the early ‘80’s and ‘90’s. (Rajashekar 1)

This summarizes a significant amount of scholarly endeavor.

Professor Rajashekar goes on to give some credit to the typology:

They are good for academic purposes, to evaluate particular positions, theological commitments, categories, you know, to put people in particular brackets. (Rajashekar 1)

Professor Sebastian agrees that the typology fills the function of “covering the imagination of the world” (Sabastian 2) and “helps beginning the conversation”. (Sabastian 2) There are certainly good reasons why the typology attained extensive attention, as Rajashekar described. Rev. J. Redington gives examples, first exclusivism:

…but even within exclusivism you get Christian evangelicalism. But serious and intelligent people like Terry Muck who writes on dialogue out of an exclusivist position admittedly and deliberately… I think he was in dialogue exclusively with Buddhism at the time he wrote what I read, so he is working out of an exclusivist paradigm. (Redington 1)

Here is an example of an exclusivist positioning as a starting point for dialogue, Christian-Buddhist in Muck’s case, although exclusivism leads usually to dialogical passivism.36

Redington then gives examples of inclusivism, in an open and closed format:

But certainly the inclusivist paradigm is already pluralistic in the sense of someone I think it’s Kate McCarthy (or Paul Griffiths) but she makes a good distinction I think between closed inclusivism and open inclusivism. A closed one would be an assumption that all religions are valid up to a point but then when they get to that point they will realize that ours is the most comprehensive, as some advaita vedanta positions would hold.37 Whereas a more open inclusivism position would be that in some sense the religions are valid and they include each

36 “The exclusivism of Plantinga and Alston end up in a passive attitude towards the religious Other, in that they claim the most rational thing to do is to sit tight with their own position, which they master so well, and not be unduly affected by difference.” Pfändtner, W. 2005, pg 69

37 Sankara (788-820 CE) comments on the Vedanta sutra with a two-tiered notion that brahman covered by ignorance becomes isvara (God in various religions). However, uncovered knowledge is oneness (brahman), and is supreme. This higher, non-theistic brahman thus subsumes all religions, according to Sankara. Müller, F. Max, Śaṅkarācārya & Rāmānuja (red.) (1962-). The Vedānta-Sūtras: with the commentary by Śaṅkarācārya [vol. 1, 2], Rāmānuja [vol. 3]. Repr. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass
other in a certain sense but in a fashion that is not totally defined as yet. Gavin D’Costa takes the Holy Spirit idea that Jesus is sending the Holy Spirit and it is his Spirit and so forth but it is through the inspiration of the Spirit that religions other than Christianity do have truth and do have saving value perhaps and it’s up to Christians therefore to try to find the Spirit in other religions. So that is a kind of open Christian inclusivism you could say. (Redington 1)

Inclusivism, as Redington demonstrates here, functions in at least two ways. Professor Jon Pahl mentions assimilationism as another variant of inclusivism (Pahl 1) rendered by Harvard Religious Studies Professor Diana Eck:

The terms exclusion, assimilation and pluralism suggest three different ways in which Americans have approached our ever-broader cultural and religious diversity…For assimilationists, the invitation to new immigrants was to come, but leave your differences behind as quickly as possible. In other words, come and be like us.38

Inclusivism/assimilationism can thus be a demanding basis for dialogue. Pluralism is a more egalitarian alternative. Redington continues with examples of pluralism:

…So, as well as the pluralism model having many different kinds of forms,39 Raimon Pannikar’s⁴⁰ may be one. John Hick’s is perhaps the most famous and also the most frequently attacked, but not without some truth to it and so forth. But at any rate, so Paul Knitter who has been, by too many perhaps, lumped together with John Hick - and certainly he was in his early writings - has written in his introduction to The Theologies of Religions, he has a sort of four part classification, has mutuality in it and then the other three so he makes room for Frank Clooney’s and James Frederick’s comparative theology out of a Christian position or comparative theology out of a Hindu or Muslim position probably as well. (Redington 1)

Here Redington alludes to critique of Hick’s pluralism. One critique is that it does not accommodate particularity well.⁴¹ Paul Knitter’s “Mutuality Model” and comparative theology, which Redington prefers to Hick’s pluralism, is a topic we will return to further down when Harvard professor Francis Clooney’s name again appears.

---

38 Eck, D 2001 pg. 47
39 Dalai Lama’s pluralism, as expressed in his lecture at Södertörn University April, 2011 was analyzed as different from the type of pluralism endorsed by his critic, Gavin D’Costa in Pfändtner, W. “Ar Dalai Lama en pluralist?” in Goldstein-Kyaga (ed.) 2014
40 Raimon Pannikar (1918 – 2010) was a Spanish Roman Catholic priest and a proponent of interreligious dialogue. He had three PhD’s: chemistry, philosophy and theology. Pannikar was the son of a Spanish father & Hindu mother and he considered himself to be a dialogue from birth. As a scholar, he specialized in comparative religion.
41 Pfändtner 2005, pg.61
Having assessed the typology’s origin and function, Rajashekar points out an important fact about the typology originators’ motive:

Most of them (Race, Hick, Knitter, D’Costa et al.) were not really into interreligious dialogue. They were academics, trying to study the phenomenon of religious pluralism and these categories provided an entry point into the discussion. (Rajashekar 1)

Rajashekar notes here the important shift of purpose from dealing with diversity (for which the typology was developed) to entering into dialogue (for which the typology is inadequate). Both Rajashekar and Sabastian then critique the typology for a number of reasons:

- The categories overlap (Rajashekar 2 & Sabastian 1)
- They limit dialogue to preconceived attitudes (Sabastian 1)
- They are overgeneralizations unfit for religious subtleties (Sabastian 4)

Professor Pahl is also critical:

…and like any typology, it is a generalization and it obscures as much as it illuminates… Any of these generalizations, categorizations, typologies tend to obscure the details. (Pahl 1)

Pahl, like Redington above, is here concerned with particularity. Sabastian recommends that the typology should not be the last word in dialogue (Sabastian 1) and Redington agrees:

I would agree with Kiran Sabastian that, or at least even if he didn’t say it quite in this way, I would say that the tri-part classification is still useful for getting started on talking and even middling in one’s talk as it were, but it would be best to treat it as not the categorical best, heuristic model for the theology of dialogue. (Redington 2)

Thus the general consensus is typology critique. There was, however, an exception to the interviewees’ typology critique. Rev. Thomas Mullin accepts the typology to the limited degree that he thinks that Catholics can be classed as exclusivists in regards to tradition but points out that “our lived experience” contradicts exclusivism in today’s world. Professor Sabastian agrees about the “messiness
of everyday life". Mullin finds the US pluralistic which he is critical of, if pluralism leads to an amorphous syncretism wherein recognition of God is publically excluded. Mullin mentions the secularization of schools in this regard. (Mullin 3) The typology has, at best, limited application according to Rev. Mullin.

Rev. Richard Clark considers the typology complicated and “many layered”, inclusive on the micro-level but exclusive at times on the macro-level. (Clark 1) This typology ambivalence is a theme that recurs in the other interviews.

Rev. Narcie Jetter experiences exclusivity in ecumenical dialogue because of her being a female minister (Jeter 1), a point of ecumenical controversy recurring in two other interviews (Mullin 3 & the Roman Catholic sister 1) further down. Jetter’s silence on the typology, except specifically in the matter of ecumenical gender exclusivity, can be understood as an indirect critique of the typology’s current overall relevance. Neither does the Roman Catholic sister’s interview indicate that the typology is very pertinent. It is interesting to note that Professor George Lindbeck’s “interfaith stranger/ecumenical family” dichotomy quoted above is conspicuous in its absence with Mullin as well as the Roman Catholic sister. In fact the categories are reversed in the case of Jetter, who is estranged by ecumenical chauvinism and inclined to interfaith dialogue. (Jetter 1)

In more recent religious diversity publications, the formerly extensive typology discussion has evolved but is far from entirely absent. In *The Oxford Handbook for Religious Diversity* (2011), the focus is on pluralism, but in *Understanding Interreligious Relations* (2013) the first part is entitled “Religion and the Religious Other” i.e. it is an advanced discussion of exclusionism

---

and the second part, entitled “Themes and Issues in Interreligious Relations” includes the chapters “Multiple Religious Belonging”, Interreligious Cooperation” and “Interreligious Dialogue” which, as the names indicate, deal largely with inclusivism. Although specific mention of the typology appears limited in The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue (2013), it would be an interesting further study to discern to what extent the extensive typology discussion of the past decades is present in the discourse still in an implicit form. Consider, for example, a passage from the Companion introduction:

> And since no two religions are ever perfectly compatible, the exchange and discussion of religious views cannot but involve some level of disagreement and some measure of defense of the plausibility of one’s own beliefs and practices…While most religions have come to a basic recognition and acceptance of the reality of religious plurality, degrees of religious tolerance and openness toward the religious other continue to vary, not only between religious traditions but within them.43

It could be argued that the typology is present implicitly in the above quotation in the form of exclusivism (“…disagreement and some measure of defence…”), inclusivism (“…tolerance and openness toward the religious other…”) and pluralism (“…no two religions are ever perfectly compatible…”) although not mentioned explicitly. A thorough examination of this theory of current typology language-sublimation would be an interesting further research topic, but it is not within the scope of the present thesis.

Like Professor Kenneth Rose, mentioned above, however, there are scholars, Perry Schmidt-Leukel to name another, who argue that the typology is defensible still.44 This is contrary to the consensus of the interviewees in this thesis who agree, except possibly one, Rev Mullin, that the typology has filled its function and the dialogical conversation needs not be limited to it.

The conclusion is that, according to our interviewees’ consensus, the typology filled in the past, and perhaps still today fills, an important function as the catalyst to start the process of discussing religious diversity. It requires effort to overcome the inertia to begin any serious project. To make the transition from the age of monologue to the age of dialogue45 is certainly a formidable project and the typology has served, and perhaps still serves, this

---

43 Cornille, C. 2013, Introduction, pg. 2
44 Cheethan, D. 2013 pgs. 139-146 “In contemporary Christianity all three positions – exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism – have strong defenders.” pg. 146
purpose. Since this typology project was primarily a Christian initiative, it indicates that Christians are earnestly utilizing their predominance, as Professor Pahl put it, in response to a calling to recognize the violence done in the name of faith, and promote reconciliation instead. This is not "the white man's burden," but rather an honest confession of sin and goodwill effort to atone.  

Pahl’s intention to exonerate Christianity from the colonial past by dialogue activism finds support both by this study’s survey and interviews. Since, however, the typology is not well suited for interreligious dialogue, it needs to be reinterpreted to be of any further use. Although we have not exhaustively discussed George Lindbeck’s ecumenical favoritism, a preponderance of the interviewees’ evidence indicates that many Christians think there is no essential difference between ecumenical and interfaith dialogue although faith identity is not precluded. Dialogue is the “meeting of commitments”. If this indicates fluidity on the interfaith-ecumenical boundary, that fits well with the trans-traditional effect of the strands/dialectic/moods definition of faith. Now that we have discussed the present survey-angle and the past typology-angle as a theoretical background for dealing with religious diversity, let us now turn to the third angle, the hands-on application of encountering the religious Other: the future of dialogue.

FUTURE - Dialogue Evolution - “Do what you can.” Arthur Ashe

The present dialogue interest is arguably related to the momentous typology discourse in past decades. Since the typology was not originally constructed for dialogue, and is subject to critique, I suggest that an interesting third angle to investigate is the opinion of experienced dialogue participants as to the future direction for dialogue. There are different types of dialogue. Dialogue in everyday life occurs at work, school, athletics, entertainment etc. For political or social activism, faith groups sometimes interact for public welfare. Leaders for religious organizations engage sometimes in parliamentary-style dialogue. People of faith visit others’ worship at times and engage in prayer together. Here in this section, we shall focus on the “prototypical form of dialogue in most people’s minds”\(^{48}\), namely, verbal dialogue to better understand the philosophy, theology and worldview of another religion, in

---

\(^{46}\) An e-mail exchange 11/02-15, used with permission.

\(^{47}\) Cheetham, D. 2013 pg. 201 quotes World Concil of Church’s sub-unit, Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies’ first director Stanley Samartha (1920-2001) :“Faith, according to Samartha, is the ‘driving force to and intensification of dialogue’.”

\(^{48}\) King, S. 2011, "Interreligious Dialogue“ in Meister, C. 2011, pg. 102
this case the meeting of Christians and Vaishnavas. I will first discuss future dialogue themes that the typology interviewees spoke of in response to my question in the previous section. I will then incorporate an interview with Rev. James Redington, S.J. in response to my question about his vision of the future of US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue with an interview of Dr. William Deadwyler (aka Ravindra Svarupa das). Lastly, I will briefly discuss Professor Graham Schweig’s bhakti-oriented exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism typology model.

Several of the interviewees (Clark 1, Jetter 2, Mullin 3, Ravindra 6, Redington 8, Roach 1) opined that having a particular faith identity was a prerequisite for competence as a dialogue partner. Sabastian added the condition that the person of faith does not have a “holier than thou” attitude. (Sabastian 5) Dr. Rajashekar questioned however the nature of claims to authority in the beliefs of people of faith. (Rajashekar 7) In dialogue a person of faith does not “suspend his faith” as Rev. Thomas Roach put it (Roach 1), but rather appreciates what he or she has in common with the religious other. To build relationships was also mentioned as an essential motivation for dialogue by all the interviewees, without exception. (Clark 1, Jetter 2, Mullin 3, Pahl 2, Rajashekar 2, Roach 1, Sabastian 4, the Roman Catholic sister 1, Redington 10 and Ravindra 6) Unity and particularity are paradoxically coexistent factors in dialogue.

Gender was an issue in regard to encountering the religious other. Rev. Mullin pointed out that the Catholic position of male ordination is contentious from the point of view of the adherents of some Protestant denominations (like Rev. Jetter’s, as mentioned above) but Rev. Mullin is positive that dialogue is fruitful nonetheless. (Mullin 3) Although Catholics do not allow priests to marry, ordained Episcopalian married ministers who convert to Roman Catholicism are allowed to be priests together with their wives. Regarding conversion, the

\[^{49}\text{For dialogical purposes, the "reification of 'the religions' into more or less conflicting belief systems with universal pretentions" is counterproductive, according to Pfändtner. He argues that the notion that religions have different distinctive worldviews, i.e. "a homogeneous picture of the world" constitutive of their respective cultures is "a construction according to Enlightenment and Christian presuppositions". Pfändtner suggests what he calls "constructive dialogical pluralism" as a philosophical dialogue tool instead. Pfändtner 2005 pg 98-100}\]

\[^{50}\text{This contrasts with the religious phenomenological tactic of suspension of non-belief (epoché). See Gilhus, Ingvild Sælid & Mikaelsson, Lisbeth (2003). Nya perspektiv på religion. Stockholm: Natur och kultur pg. 77}\]

\[^{51}\text{"The Holy See has specified that this exception (married Episcopalian clergy becoming Catholic priests) to the rule of celibacy is granted in favor of these individual persons, and should not be understood as implying}\]
Roman Catholic sister pointed out that Episcopalian high religious services are very near to the sacramental rituals in the Catholic Church, thus enabling transition. As interesting a topic as it is, conversion as the "Us & Them” reversal does not necessarily address our present question of where Christians draw the line with Vaishnavas. We can therefore leave conversion aside as peripheral to this thesis discussion.

Dr. Rajashekar pointed out the non-translatable nature of religious experience. (Rajashekar 3) This insight prompts the topic of the role of language which at least since the time of Wittgenstein and his language-games theory52 has been extensively discussed. How language accesses transcendence is a related discussion, but neither is this within the scope of this present thesis. Dialogue partners must presume, however, that understanding the “other” is indeed possible.

Rev. Roach posited that belief in God is a unifying factor in meeting the religious other. (Roach 1) How God is understood and defined however is different for people of different faiths as Professor Sabastian pointed out when he includes the religious Other whose otherness Sabastian is earnest to respect even if it questions the boundary between his own definitions of religious and non-religious. (Sabastian 5) The question raised here is what is meant by religion? Religion can refer to practices and symbol systems. Religion can also mean dispositions/attitudes, the means for salvation or it can mean a set of beliefs about what factually exists. A dialogue-friendly definition of religion will be discussed further down in regard to Ninian Smart’s concept of “strands” (Ravindra 5), and also in regard to Professor Schweig’s innovative typology interpretation. This relates to Pfändtner’s constructive dialogical pluralism which emphasizes religious moods, as mentioned above.

The ethical value of dialogue as an alternative to confrontation and conflict was a theme mentioned by all the interviewees. (Clark 1, Sabastian 5, the Roman Catholic sister 1, for example) From this I draw the conclusion that Christian missionary objectives are being weighed by conscientious consideration of the responsibility that Christian dominance entails for public leadership especially in the area of peace negotiation. Huntington’s clash of

civilizations theory challenges the dialogical project with the (un-)ethical alternative of choosing conflict in meeting the religious Other. To meet the challenge, Christians are expanding the “Us” category.

Rajashekar pointed out that plurality in the sociological sense of diversity has to be recognized as an undeniable fact. That was a major motivation for our including the survey angle. Mullin was apprehensive however of atheistic relativism. (Mullin 3) Rajashekar contributed to the plurality discussion with unity and “different differences” as a necessary “heuristic device” (Rajashekar 5) although there is an element of uncertainty - what I call St. Paul’s faithful agnosticism - as long as “For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face”:

Whether pluralism is an expression of a transcendent reality, I can never be sure of that. OK. In the Hindu philosophical tradition in the Vedas you have references that the ultimate is one and the sages name it differently, Rig Veda. That is a position in itself. Differences are real but there are different differences. Only when one attains the status of being in union with the ultimate can one categorically say, yes there are different expressions of the same reality. As long as you move on the phenomenal level, you are confronted with the differences. You can hypothesize the unity, but there is no certainty. It is just like this parable of the blind men and the elephant. They all have different descriptions of the different parts of the elephant – nobody has a holistic vision. Only the king or somebody who is observing these people describing the different parts of the elephant has the whole vision. The blind men will never get there, are not able to get there at that moment. (Rajashekar 5)

In this quote Rajashekar demonstrates his expertise at comparative theology combining St. Paul’s faithful agnosticism with the well known Rig Veda unity in diversity quote (which we return to later) and the elephant “parable” based on the pre-Christian, Jain doctrine of non-onesidedness.

---

54 “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” 1 Corinthians 13:12 King James Bible 
55 “There is one Reality about which vibrant persons speak in various ways” Rig Veda 1.164.46 translation by Graham Schweig 2012, pg. 54
56 Anekantavada, “non-onesidedness” and adhgajanyayah, “the blind man and the elephant” quoted in Joseph Runzo’s “Pluralism and Relativism” in Meister 2011, pg. 73
These various themes related to dialogue’s future development and interfaith/ecumenical boundaries which emerged of themselves in the typology interviewees’ responses to the typology question indicate the open-endedness of interfaith discourse. “Metaphysics, epistemology and semantics” as Pfändner put it are all components of our questions what the function of the typology is and where Christians draw the Us/Other line. Now we have summarized here the typology interviewees’ various themes which address the question of the future dialogue direction. I will now turn specifically to the question of dialogue’s future by incorporating an interview with Rev. James Redington, S.J. in response to my question about his vision of the future of US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue with an interview of Dr. William Deadwyler (aka Ravindra Svarupa das) about his vision on the same question. For handy reference of the names and terms which appear in these following pages (and interview transcripts in the appendix), I provide a graph of the principle Vaishnava divinities (A), Vaishnava sampadayas (denominations) (B), names of the prehistoric denomination-founders, their medieval founders’ names (C) and doctrines as well as the gurus and scholars who currently interest themselves in these various traditions (D). The 4th and equally important Vaishnava sampadaya, Nimbaraka, is not in this (far from comprehensive) graph only because that denomination does not happen to be mentioned in the interviews in this limited thesis. It may be questioned why I pay attention at all to this seemingly technical, Vaishnava theological information and the answer is simply that the names and terms in the graph appear in the interviews which follow.

---

57 An e-mail exchange 27/12-2014, used with permission. Open-endedness is not limited to interfaith encounter: “The conflict between a personal and a non-personal conception of the Ultimate is not a conflict between traditions but a state of tension within the traditions.” Pfändner 2005 pg. 102 in reference to Keith Ward’s comparative theology doctrine of the “Dual-aspect” within “the great religious traditions...uncomfortably like a contradiction.”
Figure 1.

A. Vaishnava divinities, their realms and modes of worship

B. Vaishnava sampadayas (denominations) and the names of their respective prehistoric founders

C. Sampradayas’ medieval founders’ names and doctrines

D. Gurus and scholars who currently interest themselves in these various traditions

With figure 1 as reference, we turn now to the juxtaposition of my interviews with the two above-mentioned experienced dialogue participants about the future of Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in the US interspersed with my analytical comments. This dialogue-future vision is warranted by and a natural complement to the present dialogue interest indicated in the public survey, the outgrowth of decades of past ideological discussion in the form of the typology.

Ravindra Svarupa dasa’s aim is to shift the dialogue horizons to seeing religion “as an innate, natural, human activity” based on the idea that our eternal identity, dharma, i.e. that we are eternally servants of God, realizable when we remove illusory misidentifications. (Ravindra
2) This corresponds to a topic that Rev. Redington suggests would surface real differences: “the reality, or not, of the world and things in it. And the second statement of that: the value, or not, of action in the world”. (Redington 8) It would require extensive preparation to broach this traditional controversy between Christians and adherents of Indian religions, according to Redington, but could prove very fruitful. The dialogue partners here broach a challenging Christian-Vaishnava doctrinal issue of reality vs. the illusory, confident that with sufficient preparation this dialogue would fructify as increased clarity and mutual enrichment for both partners. As for the preparation, Christians have since decades worked at developing a theology of dialogue but Vaishnavas have work to do in this regard as an emerging minority.58

The result of dialogue is two-fold: one understands one’s own belief better and paradoxically one become therefore more open to one’s dialogue partner’s beliefs. (Redington 9) This paradox is demonstrated in the intra-faith sphere by Ravindra Svarupa’s trans-Vaisnava appreciation as a Chaitanya Vaishnava (figure 1C) for love of God in separation in the Sri Vaishnava tradition (figure 1B) as Harvard scholar Rev F. Clooney’s new book59 describes. (Ravindra 8) This leads Ravindra to a clearer insight about the origin of the mode of conjugal love of God in separation in his own branch of Vaishnavism as well as in both Sri Vaishnavism and the Christian tradition. (Redington 5)

Although it may be done for various purposes such as social or even political betterment, dialogue “is a religious act” and has an intrinsic value in itself wherein the partners “would be involved in each other’s salvation” according to Rev. Redington. (Redington 10) Whenever there is an earnest interest in dialogue, one should respond: “play with those who want to play”. (Redington 11) Jesus taught that one should love his neighbor. When asked by a Jewish lawyer who the neighbor is, Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan. (Redington 6) Rev Redington, in the mood of dedication in Pfändtner’s terms60, regards Vaishnavas as neighbors whose love he cultivates, in pursuance of Jesus’ instruction, by dialogue. With this Christian concept of neighborly love, Redington suggests the dialogue topic of the Vaishnava concept of love of God in Vaikuntha-majesty (figure 1A) and in

59 See pg. 14
Vrindavana-sweetness (figure 1B), which leads to another topic of dialogical interest envisioned by Redington: grace

Redington regards a Vallabha (figure 1C) guru, Shyam Manohar Goswamy, (Redington 4) as his instructor\(^{61}\) in the matter of pusti marga which can be translated as the path of grace.\(^{62}\) This path of grace entails the Vaishnava concept of the hierarchy of intimacy beginning with servitude and progressing through friendship even to a devotee’s inclination of parental emotion toward the Lord, culminating in conjugal attraction. (Redington 5) Ravindra Svarupa points out that “within this one tradition, it allows for a lot of different relationships” (Svarupa 5) which can be summarized in two categories; majestic reverence and intimate sweetness (figure 1A). Passive adoration and servitude, “feeling inferior but wanting to do something” are in the first category (Ravindra 6) whereas the Chaitanya Vaishnava guru, Bhaktivedanta Swami (figure 1D), who is Ravindra Svarupa’s instructor (and initiator), evaluates the second category – intimate sweetness as in friendship, parental emotion and ultimately conjugal attraction – as higher. Ravindra explains:

The example I usually give is this: that if you become a big deal in England and you have got it made, you get knighted by the Queen in a great, formal ceremony and in this way, you meet the Queen. But if you really, really have it made, you get to go in the back door of the palace and sit down with the Queen at the breakfast table while she’s still in her house coat. (laughs) That’s really…, that’s more, you’re higher up, even though it’s missing the ceremonial greatness. That’s the point: You are part of the inner circle. (Ravindra 6)

Here we see an example explaining esoteric Vaishnavism which is readily understood in Christian terms. Ravindra Svarupa finds this relationality (bhakti) in the Christian Trinity. God is a person and there is a dynamic exchange with the Son and Holy Spirit into which people of faith can enter and to which they can contribute.\(^{63}\) (Ravindra 6) The religious variegatedness described here by Ravindra and Redington is likely to be a future direction for dialogue, judging by the concern to define/redefine the term religion expressed by the interviewees. (Sabastion 5, Rajashekar 3, Roach 1)

---

\(^{61}\) Redington accepts this Vaisnava guru for sikshya (instruction), a genuinely Hindu relationship, but Redington remains dependent upon Christ for salvation and does not therefore surrender to a Hindu guru for dikshya (initiation). (Redington 4)

\(^{62}\) Redington bases his translation here on the posanah tad-anugrahah “nourishment of mercy” phrase in the Bhagavata Purana 2.10.4.

\(^{63}\) Gavin D’Costa’s tradition-specific concern for dialogue is based firmly on the trinity-doctrine: “D’Costa concludes that Trinitarian Christianity offers an openness to other religions, which is ‘better’ than any openness he has found elsewhere.” Pfändtner argues with his constructive dialogical pluralism for a non-tradition specific “decisive transformation” which “does not mean that the individuals in any way have to give up their adherence to specific traditions with their various narratives.” Pfändtner 2005 pg. 86-88
The above mentioned hierarchy of intimacy over reverence (Redington 5) does not preclude the non-partiality of pluralism, i.e. not favoring any specific religion, as espoused by Harvard’s Professor Diana Eck. (Ravindra 6) Eck’s pluralism contrasts with the favoritism she critiqued further up in regard to inclusivism/assimilationism. St. Paul’s pneumatikon soma - spiritual body – is appreciated as Vaishnavism, for example. 64 (Ravindra 6) Wherever there is the notion of God as a person in relationality, “that is what it is”, the same religion in principle, either in the Christian or Vaishnava tradition. (Ravindra 6)

Intra-faith dialogue can sometimes be more challenging than interfaith. Rev Redington recalls the history that Pope Paul V in the first decade of the 1600’s mediated a debate between the Dominicans and the Jesuits as to the nature of God’s grace. (Redington 5) In that same era, Chaitanya (1486 – 1534) had an analogous difference with his contemporary tattvavada (figure 1C) Vaishnavas (Ravindra 5) who held that liberation was the fruit of rigid adherence to varnashrama (duties according to one’s psycho-physical nature) whereas Chaitanya argued that the goal of human life was to develop spontaneous love of God, regardless of caste. Rev Redington had a difference of opinion in dialogue with an ISKCON Vaishnava concerning a student of Redington’s who was an apostate from ISKCON, joining another Hindu group. This disagreement was later resolved, at least between Redington and ISKCON, if not with the individual. (Redington 11)

This intra-faith disagreement and interfaith agreement indicates a broader conception of the term “faith” as per the above mentioned Smart/Deadwyler/Pfändtner’s strands/dialectic/moods trans-traditional concept of faith/religion. We come again to the topic further down.

A final Christian-Vaishnava dialogue topic which Rev. Redington foresees dialogue-interest in, is the question of Christianity’s and Vaishnavism’s structure as communal/community or not. Our present age is individualistic 65 but Rev. Redington feels that Christianity is meant to be communal like Judaism and Islam. (Redington 7) Similiarly, Ravindra Svarupa points out

---


65 P. Heelas and L. Woodhead quote the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor’s concept of the “subjective turn” from “life as” a dutiful role-player in traditional society. Heelas, Paul & Woodhead, Linda (2005). The spiritual revolution: why religion is giving way to spirituality. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell. Sweden is rated as extreme in rational/secular, self-expression in the World Values Survey of Ingelhart & Welzel http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp accessed 12/08-2015 but this has recently been examined critically in Södertörn University’s Professor David Thurfell’s Det gudlösa folket 2015 Molin & Sorgenfrei
that Vaishnavas believe that even in higher planets like Satyaloka, Tapaloka and Maharloka (figure 1A) there are groupings of people of faith. (Ravindra 6)

From this passage we can envision that the Us/Them dichotomy we are questioning in this thesis will not disappear in future dialogue and neither will diversity of identification be a hindrance for dialogue, provided that a broader definition of faith facilitates dialogue between faith adherents with different moods both in intra-faith/ecumenical dialogue between adherents of the same sect/tradition as well as in cross-cultural interfaith dialogue. Intra-faith/ecumenical dialogue is in fact a prerequisite for clarity of representation by those who are chosen by a particular faith-group to engage on their behalf in interfaith dialogue, as mentioned in the interview section. (Clark 1, Jetter 2, Mullin 3, Ravindra 6, Redington 8, Roach 1 as well as The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue, see the quote on pg. 28)

Rev. Redington predicted that ISKCON would continue to be a major player in Christian-Vaishnava dialogue as it has in the past two decades. ISKCON organizes annually the main arena for US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in Potomac MD. (Redington 5) Harvard Divinity School Professor and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard, Francis Clooney, S.J. (figure 1D) concurs as he wrote in 2012:

> It is true that I was a member of the first of these dialogues in 1996 and came again for the one in 2010, but while I have had many other occasions to converse with Hindus and work with them in many contexts, I have never engaged in so specific and focused a dialogue as this 15 year long dedicated series.  

Why do American ISKCON converts to Vaishnavism assume the role of spokesperson for ethnic Hinduism/Vaishnavism groups in the US? This representation is due to Hinduism’s general lack of organization and ISKCON’s having a well formulated position paper, endorsed by ISKCON’s Governing Body Commission: *ISKCON and Interfaith: ISKCON in relation to People of God*. Anglican Canon Theologian and Chaplain to the Queen Rev Andrew Wingate comments:

---

66 “…overall there is little Hindu-Christian dialogue” in the US, according to F. Clooney. See Wingate 2014, pg. 138-144
68 “There is no one and agreed founder, no one official scripture recognized as mandatory for the believer. There is no authorized creed, no organization to be compared to the church, no hierarchy that is immediately recognizable.” Wingate 2014 pg.3. See also pg. 102
Significant scholars of other faiths were involved in its production. It is a remarkable booklet, unprecedented in any other faith, except Christianity, and even there it is hard to find something so succinct.  

Attaining this legitimacy was not entirely painless for ISKCON. I asked Rev. Redington, for the sake of perspective, about his initial experience of US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue. He explained that in 1976 when he was a newly appointed professor at Georgetown University with a doctorate in Vaishnavism, ISKCON devotees approached him to request that he write an affidavit in favor of ISKCON which was facing allegations of “undue influence” (read brainwashing) in a New York court case. Father Redington supported ISKCON at that time together with other experts such as Professor Joseph O’Connell. (Redington 10) ISKCON’s early struggle for legitimacy with the help of Christian and non-Christian scholars was a parallel development in the late 70’s and 80’s to the development of the typology discussion described above, both of which contribute to the on-going evolution of Christian-Vaishnava dialogue in the US. I venture that this cross-boundary alliance may well position Christian-Vaishnava dialogue as a joint confrontation to secular and atheistic challenges to the place of religious discourse in the public sphere.  

The Christian-Vaishnava vision discussion by Rev. Redington and Ravindra Svarupa dasa brings to mind one of the models of interreligious understanding in Paul Knitter’s Theologies of Religions called Mutuality Model “when features of another tradition are identified as insightful” because they are found in one’s own tradition. (Redington 1) Knitter’s model provides place for the above mentioned, for example, comparative theology of Francis Clooney, which both Rev Redington and Ravindra Svarupa referred to with appreciation. (Ravindra 8 & Redington 1) I suggest here that mutuality will likely be a variation of pluralism to which the typology will gravitate in the Christian-Vaishnava dialogue evolution in the future.

---

69 Wingate 2014, pg. 35 This booklet is not without its critics. Catholic theologian Gavin D’Costa, for example, challenges what he questions as a tendency to exclusivism (“God-consciousness is the proper prerequisite to ethics and right action”) concealed in the name of ethical inclusivism (“ISKCON values non-theistic communities and organizations advocating humanitarian, ethical and moral standards.”) From the orthodox Jewish perspective, Alan Utterman challenges ISKCON’s missionary strategies as mention in ISKCON’s Seven Purposes in contrast to “a series of statements indicating a negative attitude to missionary activity…the ISKCON document may be regarded as expressing a typically sectarian position.”

http://content.iskcon.org/icj/7_2/index.html accessed 12/08-2015

70 Bromley, David 1989 Krishna Consciousness in the West Bucknell University Press,  
71 Pluralist Kenneth Rose values “…the quest to discover a platform that can serve as a common religious defense against antireligious attempts to negate the intellectual basis for religion in general”. “Religious Pluralism and the Upanishads” Journal of Vaishnava Studies Vol 20 nr 2 Spring 2012, pg. 25
Having discussed Redington’s and Ravindra’s visions as the third angle in my methodological triangle, namely, dialogue’s *future* evolution as a trajectory of our investigation of the *present* dialogue-interest manifested in the survey and the *past* decades of typology discourse, I will now complete my description of the future dialogue vision with a short discussion of an innovative interpretation of the exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism typology offered by Professor Graham Schweig by which I wrap up this analysis section of the thesis. Schweig enhances the typology, like Knitter did with modality, with another pluralism-variation: universalism. This variation is however based on Vaishnava theology. I argue here that the critique by scholars mentioned above of the typology so vigorously developed in the *past* and the *present* dialogue interest found in the survey warrant innovative interpretations such as Schweig’s ontological model, for example, for the *future* evolution of dialogue.

**Figure 2**  Four axes of revelation in dialogue

Introducing his innovative typology interpretation including the addition of universalism in
his “Vaisnava Bhakti Theology and Interfaith Dialogue” Graham Schweig equates faith with
the Vaisnava term śraddhā:

In Sanskrit, the word śraddhā is most commonly, and perhaps most appropriately, translated by
the English word “faith,” because in Sanskrit the word etymologically breaks down as meaning
where one places (-dhā) one’s heart (śrad-). 72

Thus faith indicates not only adherence to an exclusive community of a particular religious
tradition which nourishes an intensely personal experience of the divine but “something more
basic and something that every individual possesses…inborn and intrinsic to human nature –
something that proceeds from the deepest regions of the heart”73 for people of faith as well as
“the non-religious humanist or a proclaimed atheist”.74. Thus Schweig presumes that faith

motivates all human living, and it is what constitutes what is most important to humans
everywhere. It is what each of us most ardently desires and loves, what each of us most
passionately believes, and what each of us trusts as a totally embracing vision of reality.75

Faith is thus universal but that does not preclude that faiths - note the plural form - are
personal and unique for each individual. Here we see the definition of religion questioned by
interviewees (Sabastion 5, Rajashekar 3, Roach 1) again undergoing interpretation. It is
important for our thesis question of boundaries to note that the broader definition of faith, as
Schweig presents here in line with Smart, Deadwyler and Pfändner, entails that interfaith
dialogue can be between those with the same strand/dialectic/mood and intra-
faith/ecumenical dialogue can sometimes be between those who have a different such.

Next Schweig relates the word dialogue – literally “through words” - with another Vaisnava
“onto-existential” term bhakti and its etymology:

The verb root bhaj has two first, primary meanings: “to divide” and “to share.” These two
apparently opposing meanings for the same verb is telling in the way they reflect what is at the
heart of bhakti metaphysics, and, in turn, what is at the heart of interfaith dialogue as well. The
two senses of the verb belong together, because that which is divided can be shared, and that
which is shared can be divided. The soul or the bhakta, then, is something divided or
apportioned from the supreme whole, and yet the bhakta also is something shared by the
supreme and something that has participated in the divine as well. The former sense points to
the oneness of the soul with the divine and the latter to its separateness. Existentially and

72 Rosen, S. 2012 pg. 53
73 ibid, pg. 53
74 ibid, pg. 53
75 ibid, pg 53
ontologically speaking, the former signifies the experience of being apart from the divine, and the latter the experience of being a part of the divine, at the same time.\textsuperscript{76}

Here Schweig’s bhakti metaphysics redirects our question of the religious boundary from “Us/Them” to the border between the individual and the divine. Thus from the standpoint of bhakti metaphysics the universal, yet uniquely individual, experience of Reality/the divine is intense, even passionate. This is relevant to our typology discussion because it is a form of exclusivism which lends itself to discussion among those who have experienced it, and thus goes hand in hand with inclusivism. In this connection Schweig cites the well known Hindu adage, which Professor Rajashekar also paraphrased in his interview (Rajashekar 5 & quoted on pg. 33 above), that “there is one Reality about which vibrant persons speak in various ways”.\textsuperscript{77} Delineating this, Schweig introduces his four-part typology interpretation:

1. (There is) “one Reality” - Universalism – an all-embracing Reality from which every individual’s convictions arise.
2. (about which) “vibrant persons” - Exclusivism - an individual’s intensely personal relationship and passionate experience of the absolute truth/Reality in adherence to a particular tradition/ideology makes the individual vibrant.
3. “speak” -Inclusivism – the humble discourse between those “vibrant” with the experience of the absolute either within a particular tradition (intra-faith) or outside (interfaith).
4. “in various ways” – Pluralism – in dialogue the divine/reality is uniquely revealed in a way greater than the sum of the two dialogue partners in themselves.

Let us make this typology interpretation clear in terms of the four axes in Schwieg’s table above. Axis 1 is the ontological universalism of every human being’s faith/conviction within which dialogue is encompassed by the totality of existence which is at the same time paradoxically individual and indivisible. Axis 2 is the particular traditional/ideological exclusivism manifested in the unique dialogue with Reality/the divine within every individual’s heart in an intensely personal mood. Schweig expands the term intra-faith dialogue to encompass this individual, passionate and exclusive experience of Reality/the divine. (axis 2) In this sense, intra-faith dialogue with Reality/the divine is arguably a prerequisite for an individual’s competence as an interfaith dialogue partner, a recurring theme in our interviews above. Axis 3 is then the interpersonal inclusivism whereby...

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, pg 60
\textsuperscript{77} ekāṁ sad vīprā bahudhā vadanti Rig Veda 1.164.46.translation by G. Schweig 2005 pg. 54
individuals humbly share experience of reality/the divine in dialogue with a partner/partners in the mutually respectful space between the dialogue partners’ hearts. Axis 4 is the existential pluralism whereby an unprecedented revelation of Reality/the divine is realized by means of the dialogue dynamic. This new manifestation corresponds to the “surprises” in dialogue so highly valued by Professor Sabastian in his interview quoted above (Sabastian 3) as well as the deeper understanding of one’s own faith in correlation to openness to another’s. (Redington 9) Schweig’s broad definition of faith addresses both our question of boundaries and the function of the typology by dexterously reinterpreting faith in terms of bhakti theology.

I venture here that Schweig’s typology interpretation might be of use to the future evolution of the US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue because Schweig appeals to the lover-beloved relationship to God which both Ravindra and Redington mentioned as central in their future-vision interviews. (Ravindra 8 & Redington 5) Schweig makes this appeal by comparing the unpredictable dynamic of dialogical pluralism, a recurring theme by the interviewees, to the spontaneous interaction of Krishna and the Vraja Gopikas (cowherd damsels of Vraja) in the rasa lila (divine love dance) described in five chapters of the Bhagavata Purana, the Chaitanya Vaishnava theological summum bonum. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe Schweig’s comparison fully but in regard to his comparison, suffice it to remark that Schweig sees in rasa lila the open-ended nature of the dialogue dynamic as a hermeneutic phenomenon:


This discovery-aspect of dialogue fits well with the interviewees understanding. I maintain in conclusion that Schweig’s line of reasoning here is fully in line with the theory of dialogue presented in the Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity:

> The above principles (of dialogue) are largely rooted in the philosophy of hermeneutics (the study of interpretation), especially as formulated by German philosopher Han-George Gadamer (1975). Dialogue and hermeneutics are at the base about a very mysterious thing: the process of coming to understand the other…That is, we can never see from a God’s-eye point of view, we never think from a neutral place or tabula rasa but always from a particular point of view rooted

78 Bhagavata Purana research is currently a project at the Oxford Center for Hindu Studies: http://www.ochs.org.uk/research/bhagavata-purana-research-project
79 Rosen, S. 2012, pg 68
in our culture, our language, our worldview and/or religion, and our own life experiences…We literally cannot conceive what is beyond our horizon…In interreligious dialogue, it is the encounter with the other and the gradual and difficult process of taking in that otherness and making it conceptually one’s own, part of one’s ken, that expands our horizon…That is not to say that one need to agree with or like everything one hears, just that one is now capable of hearing it and accurately understanding it…Gadamer’s principles, moreover, make it clear why interreligious dialogue is not an effort to forge a single, syncretized world religion. At every step of dialogue, one retains the particularity of one’s perspective; even when one’s horizon has expanded such that one now comprehends another religion more deeply, one still remains rooted in a particular conceptual/linguistic/cultural/experiential place.  

This discussion of Gadamer’s hermeneutical principles summarizes many of the essential points derived from the three angles of analysis we have undertaken.

- Surprises in the dialogical encounter
- Particularity amongst dialogue partners
- Openness to the “otherness” of one’s dialogue partner
- The arising of understanding through dialogue
- The preservation of identity throughout the dialogical process
- Transformation (even “conversion/convincement” as Pannikar put it) after dialogue

With Schweig’s typology interpretation from the standpoint of the bhakti theology of the Caitanya Vaisnava school, I conclude this analysis section in which we discussed some possibilities for the future evolution of the Christian/Vaisnava dialogue in the US.

This dialogue future prospects angle described here is the counter-balance of the perspective of the decades of past typology speculation by scholars described above and both these perspectives are necessitated and given significance by the present public interest in dialogue, demonstrated by the survey. The overall analysis concludes here with this triangle-perspective which has the undeniable fact of religious diversity as its common denominator and dialogue as diversity’s inevitable corollary.

---

80 Meister, C. 2011, pg 107-108
6. Conclusion

In summary, I made a triangular action-research minor field study of Vaishnava-Christian dialogue by making a survey of the attitudes of Christians in the US to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue with Hindus and found that both Catholics and Protestants were largely in favor of the idea of both interfaith and ecumenical dialogue when approached by a person in Vaishnava garb in the public sphere. There was no indication in the survey that ecumenical dialogue was given major priority over interfaith dialogue. There was however an indication that dialogue on the micro level was thought to be more pragmatic and fruitful than dialogue on the macro institutional level.

The theoretical basis for this present dialogue interest is explained in the second angle which was that I made eight interviews with Christian leaders about the well known typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. The general consensus was that the typology has filled an important function in formulating strategies for dealing with the ever increasing religious plurality which has greatly changed the religious landscape in the US in the latter half of the 20th century from Christian missionary and conversion ambitions to Christian leadership in the project of recognition and acceptance of the otherness of varieties of people of faith through dialogue. The typology in other words, although not expressly developed for dialogue per se, has provided a starting point for entering into interfaith conversation, the ethical alternative to dealing with religious diversity through confrontation and violence. The typology is thought by the interviewees to be an inadequate framework however to fully develop interfaith discourse since the categories are overgeneralizations which limit dialogue partners to stereotypes, overlapping one another in the unpredictable directions which the dynamics of dialogue (should, they think) lead participants. The dialogue process can, for example, change the participants’ adherence from exclusivism to inclusivism or pluralism. The typology is undergoing revision with variations such as mutuality, universalism and other innovative forms of pluralism and Christian interviewees think this evolution will continue as the dialogue conversation develops.

This current dialogue interest based on the largely obsolete typology theoretical framework necessitated the third angle: the prospects for the on-going development of US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue. I interviewed two dialogue participants experienced in the twenty years of annual Christian-Vaishnava dialogue arranged by ISKCON, who although deeply
identified with their respective Christian and Vaishnava traditions, could relate and mutually participate in clarifying essential elements of their respective faiths and simultaneously admit disagreement with others within their own respective faith groups. This practically demonstrated my theory that faith is not primarily defined by a set of traditional doctrines within mutually contradictory Christian and Vaishnava religions but rather that dialogue occurs amongst partners with different strands/moods of religiosity both within and between Christians and Vaishnavas. Dialogue, at least as envisioned by my interviewees, requires an innovative typology interpretation based on a broader definition of faith, albeit a definition that does not preclude tradition-specific identification. One such broad, but also particular faith definition based on Vaishnava ontology was suggested in the final section about future dialogue visions.

These three angles complemented one another in that they each provided a perspective on religious diversity which at present has brought about public interest in dialogue with the typology framework as background. These factors in turn prompted prospects of innovative dialogue development based on several scholars’ parallel intellectual development of a reevaluation of the term faith in regard to individual modes of religiosity. Intra-faith/ecumenical dialogue was hereby necessitated in that Christian ecumenical and Vaishnava intra-faith dialogue can at times be more challenging than interfaith dialogue due perhaps to presumptions of shared beliefs which in fact are manifested within the faith tradition family in multifarious modes and temperaments. This broader understanding of the term faith was grounded in the work of Ninian Smart in the mid 1900’s and has been developed ever since by the Western religious studies scholars discussed above.

The field study indicates that Christians in the US think that dialogue is a necessary alternative to religious hostility and violence and that US Christians feel a calling to shoulder the responsibility of leadership in dialogue, a predominance which is natural due to Christianity being the world’s largest faith community coupled in the US with economic hegemony. A theme which emerged in the interviews was that openness to others enhances one’s own understanding and appreciation of his or her faith as Christian. Unity and particularity are paradoxically coexistent factors in dialogue. As mentioned by several interviewees, dialogue leads spontaneously to surprises resulting at best in fluid divisions between “Them” and “Us” without compromising identity in the particularity of the specific Christian faith community adherence. Adherence to, engagement in, knowledge of and
competence to eloquently represent one’s own faith were defined in fact as prerequisites for entering into dialogue with the partner representing the others.

The over-arching, multifaceted picture that I aimed at by the three triangle perspectives is summed up: US Christian-Vaishnava dialogue is presently important, has a solid theoretical foundation from past decades and has promising prospects but also serious challenges for the future dialogue encounters, which are certain to develop.

As an investigator in action-research, I was invariably involved in and affected by the research process, hopefully without interfering with the project’s reliability as an objective religious studies undertaking. The problem my action-research addressed was Christian predominance and ISKCON’s struggle for legitimacy. Belonging to the US generation who came to maturity when Christianity’s long-standing exclusivism gave way to the implementation of Vatican II principles, the guidelines I earnestly suggest are Christian openness to Vaishnava dialogue and determination to rectify Christian predominance-misuse in the colonial past. Having also witnessed ISKCON’s struggle for legitimacy since the 1960’s from within, I suggest that ISKCON, previously marginalized as a cult-Subaltern, accept responsibility to voice a much-needed Hindu/Vaishnava representation, a function that requires maturity on the part of ISKCON to develop. Finally, it is auspicious if Christians and Vaishnavas share their most esoteric theological doctrines and recognize themselves in their dialogical partners.

If the extensive typology discourse among US Christian intellectuals in recent decades has been of influence in the development of the American public’s interest in dialogue at present, as this minor field-study study indicates, although the typology was not originally meant for dialogue, then we can conclude that the reality of religious diversity manifested an enormous intellectual challenge of global proportions which necessitated religious dialogue. Judging from the care and attention given to the future vision of Christian Vaisnava dialogue by the learned representatives studied here, dialogue will play an essential role globally in the future of religious diversity when US leaders of two of the world’s largest faith groups sit at the round table speaking with one another about what is, to them, the most essential and see eye to eye.
7. References


Bromley, David 1989 Krishna Consciousness in the West Bucknell University Press,


Denscombe, Martyn (2010). Good research guide: for small-scale social research projects. 4. ed. Maidenhead: Open Univ. Press


Eck, Diana L. (2001). A new religious America: how a "Christian country" has now become the world's most religiously diverse nation. San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco


Otto, Rudolf (1930) *India’s Religions of Grace and Christianity* MacMillan


8. Appendices

1. Questionnaire

Christian/ Hindu dialogue survey

Your age: _____

Your gender:  O  Male

O  Female

A member of (your Christian denomination, such as Catholic, Lutheran etc.) can have a spiritually rich engagement in ecumenical (intrareligious) dialogue with members of other Christian denominations.

O  1. I agree entirely
O  2. I tend to agree
O  3. I am uncertain
O  4. I tend to disagree
O  5. I disagree entirely

I, as a Christian, am willing to participate in ecumenical (intrareligious) dialogue with members of other Christian denominations.

O  1. I agree entirely
O  2. I tend to agree
O  3. I am uncertain
O  4. I tend to disagree
O  5. I disagree entirely

A Christian can have a spiritually rich engagement in dialogue with members of the Hindu religion.

O  1. I agree entirely
O  2. I tend to agree
O  3. I am uncertain
O  4. I tend to disagree
O  5. I disagree entirely
I, as a Christian, am willing to participate in interreligious dialogue with members of the Hindu religion.

O 1. I agree entirely
O 2. I tend to agree
O 3. I am uncertain
O 4. I tend to disagree
O 5. I disagree entirely

There is a big difference between Christian/Hindu dialogue and ecumenical (intrareligious) dialogue with members of other Christian denominations.

O 1. I agree entirely
O 2. I tend to agree
O 3. I am uncertain
O 4. I tend to disagree
O 5. I disagree entirely

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is important/fruitful on the level of local congregations/denominations. Why do you agree/disagree?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is important/fruitful on the level of national/international religious institutions. Why do you agree/disagree?

Thanks for your participation!

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is important/fruitful on the level of local congregations/denominations. Why do you agree/disagree?

The sharing of information helps to dispel ignorance and uncertainties and to break down prejudices. -respect for beliefs of others, 'knowledge of others beliefs. I agree but we should recognize that the high level of Catholic illiteracy makes dialogue difficult. Hard to have dialogue when one's tradition is in disarray. Agree, Exposure to and knowledge gained from interreligious dialogue can be a wonderful tool for enriching one's own faith and spirituality.
Part of the problem with dialogue is that although we can understand ourselves better from dialogue, many Christians are unable to talk intelligently at all about their faith. There is such strong history of misconception and violence due to different understandings of faith. By learning about the "Other", we can learn to live together peacefully. On a completely different note, by learning about other faiths, I am able to gather tools to enable me to be self-critical in my faith. I agree we are all a part of a community of faith. How we express that faith is what determines whether we work together or apart.

I agree because while we do not believe the same understanding of each other takes away the fear that brought by bad understanding. We are more open to having communion with what we are not afraid of. Local understanding cannot but help lead to better understanding at the global level. Because of jobs (employment), housing.

I agree it’s important on the local level because that's where development of an understanding of one another begins. More discussion & understanding will make the world a better place. Dialogue is at the heart of human nature, therefore dialogue on all levels is needed for mutual development. I would agree with the above statement.

I agree because it opens the door for us to be better neighbors to other Christians as well as the community at large.

I agree due to a need for understanding of diverse beliefs. There is also a need for inclusion.

I agree interreligious dialogue is important because all religions have something that other religions can learn from. As a Christian I have learned from Buddhism.

It is important in that all dialogue serves our communities. When congregations of any faith work together they can do great things in the community.

Yes because it will create some form of ecumenical and spirituality. It expands our understanding of other faiths and helps understand our community. The only way that problems will be solved is through thoughtful, respectful communication with each other. We fear and hate what we do not understand. Dialogue is important to help us understand one another to lessen the fear and hate in the world.

It is important to understand our neighbors, their values and world views. It opens us to better understand our own values and world views.

I agree because I feel it is impactful for each party in shaping their personal faith and relationship with each other as they emerge to understand the world around them.

I agree because a way to promote love and acceptance is through education and understanding which can be gained through dialogue.

It can keep local congregations alive. If there is no tolerance then no one wants to get involved.

I agree because the only way we can better our community and locality is if we all work together and have joint ministries.

Yes because that is the only way we will work to solve some of the social justice issues in our world - by bonding together.

I agree promotes religious tolerance acceptance and understanding. Fosters love, relationship and discovery of commonalities, and the dispelling of misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the "Other". I wish. Many assemblies struggle to exist.

reducing prejudices, gaining better understanding of one's neighbors faith, discovering commonalities

I agree Learning and sharing various methods of worship is important in strengthening belief in God.

We learn from one another. Each faith tradition has a unique understanding and is important in the engagement of religious understanding.

We live in a society where religious pluralism is becoming more prevalent. In order to live with others in harmony and community we must understand one another and that comes through dialogue.

Today IS violence. Religion gets a bad name.

I agree. Dialogue is essential to living as neighbors as is space of authentic worship.

I agree because we are not islands, isolated one from one another. We need to rediscover our common humanity and inter-connectedness, even as we pursue our several pathways.

I agree.

Dialogue leads to understanding in most cases. An understanding of other religions and beliefs should encourage and reinforce (in some cases) tolerance.

Dialogue among other faiths can hone one' own belief and give reason/clarity to why we worship or believe the way we do.

In order to ever find peace in the world I believe that relationships and dialogue are very important on all levels so I agree

Yes, I do agree. We are all people and we must understand that God made us all. Acceptance of one another regardless of religious denomination is critical to society & the human race.
Because it helps us better understand each other.
I believe everyone should have an open mind. You can learn from all dialogue.
Understanding all religions, whether you agree or disagree, would allow for better understanding and knowledge of their beliefs.
It’s important because it helps us learn about others and how they live their lives. Even if we don't exactly agree, we can become more aware and tolerant.
I have participated in dialogue and learned much in India at conferences. Dialogue depends on participants. In an open-minded search for the truth, justice & peace, one must lovingly engage in a give-and-take dialogue with all people of good will. Increasingly we live pluralistically even at the local level in neighborhoods.
Unless people talk to one another about similar and different beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices will continue.
Agree accepting others culture and beliefs.
Understanding of others begins on the base level of communication, where people are at that time of engagement. And normally that happens close to home.
Helping to understand other faiths, which leads to less misunderstanding and conflict.
Dialogue is unimportant because of society’s secular development.
It clarifies difference.
Respect others tolerating their various ways.
It is important because it helps fraternity/sorority. It helps us understand ourselves better.
Understanding creates community.
Everything meaningful happens on the grassroots, everyday life.
Don't care, willing to accept, but no afterlife.
Cultural differences require communication to overcome bias and to achieve understanding.
God wants us to love one another and find concordance where it is lacking.
Dialogue, listening, exchange, expressing is always good.
Interaction in a pluralistic society enriches respect.
Dialogue opens for learning, experiential engagement, interpersonal engagement, diversity, personal relations.
Hearing the other's perspective creates understanding. It may be challenging but it is important.
Dialogue can be fruitful, but for me its not frequent. It is not essential, but can be helpful.
Dialogue perpetuates cultural competence for understanding the religious other.
Definitely important. Understanding others' religions is beneficial.
It would be nice to discuss with neighboring Jews. Time limits however the priority.
Better bring differences to the light,
My father was Episcopalian and mother was RC. Important to work things out, but is it possible?
Dialogue solves differences.
Dialogue makes for understanding.
Human expression means progress
Dialogue is most important. Sharing. Different beliefs need questioning. It is enriching.
Yes, but it depends. Talk rather than fight. Dialogue can lead to either but hopefully peace.
Dialogue is for understanding not evangelizing.
No opinion
Uncertain
Discuss & learn
Understanding
Key
I come from an interfaith Muslim/Christian family.
Dialogue manifests love, understanding & truth.
leads to knowledge, respect
Dialogue does not interest me.
Dialogue leads to growth if done unobtrusively.
Understanding the Other enhances social cohesion.
Exchange
Agree, Get learned
I agree because it is important to know the faith and spirituality of our neighbors.
Stop hate
I agree because it allows us to grow as a (unclear) community
Agree. It shows unity as a spiritual body and gives us common ground to identify our core values as Christians - defining what it means to be Christian. We can also discuss differences and how important they are in defining ourselves as Christians.
The same basic principles of the trinity so we all could make a bigger difference and impact together
Yes, it connects people. It shows that we all aren’t that different at all.
I agree we all ultimately believe in this idea of a higher power and are called to discuss it and the way it affects our attitudes and actions.
I agree because moving forward we need to be seen as a united front as faith stewards of our community. Cooperation & understanding is essential for a local community.
I am not religious so religious dialogue is not important to me. I serve on a faith-based board and know many religious people who live their faith but I also know and read about many religious people who see their faith as a wall, separating them from those outside the faith. Religion is too often used as a weapon.
Dialogue with Indian Hindus is different (from ecumenical dialogue), though each time in a different way; with American Christians and Jews who have become Hindus, it is less different, though still very good. Dialogue on the local level is important/fruitful because dialogue with local people can lead to deep friendships, even to be intimately involved in each other’s salvation/love of God/liberation.
The sharing of information helps to dispel ignorance and uncertainties and to break down prejudices.
- respect for beliefs of others, - knowledge of others beliefs.
Many people like me grew up with no experience of “other” religious institutions and belief communities.

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is important/fruitful on the level of national/international religious institutions. Why do you agree/disagree?

It’s important but often times it seems disconnected from the denominational level.
Same, especially with peace and understanding.
Same as above, however maximizes the benefits/challenges on a global scale.
Same as above the more we understand who and what each believe the less distrust, suspicion and contention would exist. Maybe we can put ourselves to the side and work together for the care of others that need.
Given all the unrest in the world - although full of politic undertones - misunderstanding of religion seems to be fueling hate between people.
Because of the variety of leaders in the world
It is even more important on this level to help end some of the interreligious strife that is causing so much blood-shed the world
I agree that it is very important for the practice of dialogue to happen at the micro and Macro level, otherwise it would be difficult to cultivate lasting, meaningful & sustainable mutuality.
I agree I believe that ecumenical and interreligious dialogue can have a positive impact on international relations.
To be the peace that is brought to the un-peaceful situation.
I agree, religious institutions from around the world can offer many helpful practices and beliefs that can help others across religious backgrounds.
Oh goodness we could write books on why this is so important - briefly I suppose that dialogue tolerance & education especially talking to each other helps learn about each other.
I agree for the fact that it will create deep Christian understanding.
It gives us ways in which we can best serve and work in other communities that are different than our own.
See above answer.
Same answer. We need to understand each other as individuals and as national/international institutions.
Yes but I also want to see something constructive and positive come out of the dialogue.
Because it helps us to be better neighbors and understand each others’ difference.
I agree because it is a way to create understanding and communication.
It is how nations can keep peace. Interreligious conflict can tear nations apart
I agree for the reason above we can only do so much on our own but together we could move mountains.
Yes, That is the only way to bring about change.
Agree, same, discourages hate & violence,
Yes, but difficult.
Due to globalization the world is becoming a village more and more. That's why this question can be answered just like the first one above.
Yes, the world-wide understanding of worship is helpful to create peaceful world so (unclear) misunderstanding
of others don't cause conflict!
We learn what motivates neighbors which helps in comprehension and collegiality.
Strong, many places for truth - We can help one another.
I am not sure I think so and I am certain that it has been fruitful on many occasions but I feel like I just get "sound bytes".
Again, in this institution and others where I have served this is an indispensable part of what shapes our religiosity and as members of the human family.
I agree. I do not know very much about the Hindu religion and am all in favor of learning more and having an open relationship/dialogue with other religions.
The thoughts expressed above are transferable to the national/international arena. In addition dialogue at this level may help to control the acts of violence and abuse of personal freedoms prevalent in many places more so than found in our local community or country.
Understanding and tolerance is critical in today's world. Ecumenical/interreligious dialogue can be helpful in achieving that.
Nationally and locally dialogue can build trust, respect and acceptability of others religions and cultures.
Without the understanding of all beliefs the world will always remain unsettled.
Same as above and within religious institutions we have a responsibility to share and be merciful teachers and communicators with the community.
Absolutely!! If we don't know Muslims we might think they were all ISIS members.
Same as above.
These talks allow for better understanding between people and other religions. They allow us to live together better.
This dialogue has been conducted in over 50 yrs by religious leaders and scholars and even officially endorsed at the highest level. Huge improvements in mutual understanding have already been accomplished. But there are further challenges that need to be addressed.
Unresolved differences & fears about another nation’s belief system can, has and continues to lead to war and senseless loss of life.
Agree, accepting of others creates peace in the world.
It is nice to have leaders show their willingness to engage with their peer leaders. A display of religious cooperation can go a long way in opening the minds of those in the pews.
These national organizations can be an inspiration to others, and serve as sign posts for future dialogue among smaller groups and individuals.
Dialogue is potentially fruitful organizationally
 Faith is shared. Let the other know they are respected.
 It is a model for people in general, sending a message.
 Extremely important. Political decisions are affected by religious misunderstanding
 Prevent war. Builds tolerance despite differences.
 Lost faith in leaders, Women marginalized.
 Institutional leadership can pave the way for mutual understanding on a more global scale.
 same, but ineffective when there are dogmatic differences.
 Important but productive? Polemic representation restricts dialogue. Book of discipline restricts bishops.
 Has to be a demonstration of humanity for political peace over boundaries. Non polemic leadership for future generations.
 Sets a model and has trickledown effect.
 The Vatican sets example in dialogue.
 Educational, promoting diversity.
 If it is dialogue, it is helpful for conflict resolution.
 Real important nowadays for communication. Has political implications.
Major differences become clarified and codified.
Yes, Pope John Paul tried but met resistance. In community you find the good.
Power & money hinders the macro dialogue.
Leadership always has agendas. Dialogue leads to progress.
Macro dialogue is important but its fruitfulness depends on openness.
Sharing but not evangelism.
Important to straighten out difference. Isolation can lead to conflict
Necessary for knowledge how to appreciate the other.
Important. Pope Francis does good.
Uncertain
Gain knowledge.
Peaceful, respect differences.
uncertain
We have more in common. Human beings discriminate. The golden role, God's work is essential.
Leadership sets the pace & example for the general populace.
Agree - peaceful coexistence.
Same.
Uncertain.
Educational, social respect.
Important, deep.
Agreed. Get learned.
I agree, see above.
same as above
I agree because it (unclear) everyone to grow closer and accepting other faiths.
Agree, because we all believe in similar core spiritual ideals, we can identify ways to understand each other on a human level rather than black-boxing an external group as "other".
It is because they could all make together a big project to better the world and better understand each other.
Yes because religious institutions have to work together - so they have to understand each other.
Same
Cooperation and understanding is necessary to prevent conflict and promote well-being.
I do think people of different faiths, cultures and races need to connect more. We need to see what we have in common, which is more important than the differences.
International/institutional dialogue is different from the experience just above. It's important, but not as fruitful in a spiritual and emotional way.
Same.
-mutual respect is strengthened -sensitivity toward others is enhanced -false images of a religion is removed
I agree. I do not know very much about the Hindu religion and am all in favor of learning more and having an open relationship/dialogue with other religions.
Not sure what this looks like, but will agree
### 2

**Overview over survey results**

Table 1: Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count of Respondents (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>Q5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>76 (72%)</td>
<td>84 (80%)</td>
<td>71 (68%)</td>
<td>81 (77%)</td>
<td>11 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25 (24%)</td>
<td>17 (16%)</td>
<td>19 (18%)</td>
<td>18 (17%)</td>
<td>28 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>10 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (4%)</td>
<td>39 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
<td>4 (4%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>22 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105 (100%)</td>
<td>105 (100%)</td>
<td>105 (100%)</td>
<td>105 (100%)</td>
<td>105 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Respondents’ relation to the interviewer – “# Res” stands for “number of respondents” and “Ave” stands for average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation</th>
<th># Res</th>
<th>Ave</th>
<th># Res</th>
<th>Ave</th>
<th># Res</th>
<th>Ave</th>
<th># Res</th>
<th>Ave</th>
<th># Res</th>
<th>Ave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snowball</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.357</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.214</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.443</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.343</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.154</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.077</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.154</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.077</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.400</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.600</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.947</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.350</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1.333</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1.267</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1.490</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1.305</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>2.829</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Denomination sub-groups – number & averages of responses - questions 1-5 “# Res” stands for “number of respondents” and “Ave” stands for average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th># Res</th>
<th>Ave Q1</th>
<th>Ave Q2</th>
<th>Ave Q3</th>
<th>Ave Q4</th>
<th>Ave Q5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nondenominational</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Interviews

Eight interviewees in alphabetical order, their résumés and their responses to “Does the exclusivism, inclusivism, exclusivism typology apply equally well to ecumenical dialogue as interfaith dialogue?

**Rev. Richard Clark**

http://ufchapelhouse.com/Home.aspx

1. I understand the inclusivity of people coming and sharing space and time and meals or religious celebration worship to get together in life as a whole together. I also understand where there are times, be it a high holy religious time or a time of the day. For example in Judaism, Sabbath time on Friday excludes. What a Christian would do on Sunday, it is an excluded time from others. Patterns have developed and though the doors would be open, the patterns of life can seem to exclude. That’s a very complicated question, isn’t it? And how does help with dialogue? For me, in the way I was brought up, the inclusivity was always the broader umbrella and under that umbrella is where we live, move and have our being and where we reflect love back to the world and where we invite the love from others into our life. No matter where they are or who they’ve been, what they’ve done - I am not here to judge but to reflect this love. So that is the biggest umbrella I know and that is where I keep my life and my day. But it seems the exclusivity comes when I get called to something specific, be it a ceremony or a convention. Everybody in there is the same, and we are all talking about the same thing, we are all operating under the same canons and laws and we are all planning for the next year, for example, and nobody else in there in a gathering of, say a thousand people, nobody else in there is other than what we espouse. Which is the Episcopal Church in the diocese of Florida. So I get those times that are specific but from what I know and what I live and what I pray, the inclusivity is much more the rest of the time of my life. Now institutionally when you look at the Anglican community globally I think that might spread out to the macro sense as well. Bishops meet together in England every 10 years and that is an exclusive event. Yet prayer and, oh my gosh, stacks of articles and books will be written about the inclusivity of being with people in the world, be it the plight of the poor or war time or just folks who are going with their life and living and dying. So that is a very layered and difficult question, one which you will probably have a lot of fun writing.

**Rev. Narcie Jetter**

Rev. Narcie Jetter, pastor, Executive Director of the Gator Wesley Foundation, ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church’s South Carolina Conference. Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology at Emory University
1. I would put my priority on interfaith dialogue rather than ecumenical in some ways because my ordination is not recognized in some denominations such as Southern Baptist, Presbyterian Church of America and so my voice, to me, carries more weight in interfaith dialogue than ecumenical dialogue. They actually treat me as if I have no voice, but I know I have a voice and no one can take that from me. In interfaith dialogue I have as much voice as anyone else. I have a voice but some Christian denominations look down on me because I am a woman. Some of the more conservative denominations take St. Paul’s “women should bide their tongue in the congregation” as an imperative and so I am much more comfortable in interfaith dialogue because we are on a level playing field where we are coming at this from our own perspectives to learn more. And so I bring my experience and my denomination’s experience and my experience of the denomination’s experience and they each bring their own and their faith’s experience and so we are able to share together rightly or wrongly, upwards or downwards, that we are all on the equal playing field. Gender exclusivity in ecumenical dialogue is my personal experience but I would warn and wager that other female pastors would feel that way too. In my opinion, more women are open to interfaith dialogue for this reason. I don’t know why that is. As a white male, you are seen as a person of authority but I am seen as not. So that gives me ways to intersect my life and not be the authority, spokesperson.

2. So I am thoroughly Methodist. My dad was a Methodist pastor and my brother is also a United Methodist pastor so I am thoroughly United Methodist and think in all ways Wesley. I am grounded in the Christian faith and I personally believe that I am saved and I preach all the time that nothing can separate you from the love of God and so I bring that with me to interfaith dialogue because I am particular in my faith and I am grounded in my tradition and that allows me to interact with other faith traditions. That helps me to interact because I am grounded in my faith and am not insecure about it at all. So for example 10-11 yrs ago when I did this interfaith ministry we had a dining room table in an apartment - a ministry of hospitality, presence and meaningful conversation - so around the table everything was up for grabs. So I entered into a conversation about forgiveness with one other Christian but Muslim people, Hindu people, and Jewish were around. It’s a question that has very different answers when you are speaking to a non-Christian audience. We can have that conversation legitimately when there is trust, relationships and when there is respect. So that opened my eyes to the importance of interfaith dialogue.

Rev. Thomas Mullin

Rev. Thomas Mullin, Roman Catholic pastor, BA, MA in Philosophy, Master of Divinity in Theology, License in Sacred Scripture (SSL) from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. Father Mullin was appointed the founding pastor of the newly-established Saint Elizabeth Parish in Chester County, PA in 2000. In the intervening fifteen years he has guided the growth and development from the ground up of a full set of parish facilities (church building,
education center/parish school, gymnasium and parish ministry center) at a total cost of $23.5 million. [http://stelizabethparish.org/](http://stelizabethparish.org/)

1. That’s a model I can work with. OK. I think there is a tendency in most religious traditions to claim that we have the only truth – exclusivism - but I think our lived experience, particularly in the US at this time, is much more pluralistic. I would say that the Catholic, Baptist and Evangelical Churches would be less disposed to the inclusivism and some of the other main-line churches are more open to the inclusivity – they put a higher value in inclusivity so I guess to some extent we are more traditionalist as a body of believers in the Catholic community. So there would be a higher percentage of people in the Catholic community, in my experience, who would tend to think “I’ve got the whole truth” – exclusiveness - but I think people’s life experience, like most of our kids go to college where they will meet people of all different faiths. So they live in a pluralistic world and if they are not maturely and properly developed in their own faith tradition, there are a lot of religious equivalencies, indifference – “it doesn’t really matter, everybody’s been to (unclear)”.  

2. So I think there are more dominant cultural movements that affect the religious interactions than just within the religion traditions themselves. So most of our young people have friends from no religion or different religions which… We grew up in Upper Darby, I knew there were Jewish people but that was about it. Christian & Jew were about the only things we ran into. So their exposure in the local community and certainly when they go away to school is much more diversified which would prepare them for some sense of pluralism like, “I can respect your faith point of view, it’s different from my own”. I think that insecurity breeds the exclusivity, but I am not willing to say “everything is equal, do whatever you want” which would be the ultimate of the inclusivity. Mutual respect acknowledges both the differences and the commonalities and I think that is a hard balance to strike. But that is one the goals…  

3. If the participants in the dialogue are themselves well informed and comfortable in who they are, then I think the exchange can be more honest without all the baggage “I need to convince you about my point of view or make you like me for it to be valid”. So the proselytization and the “I need to convert you to my kind of truth for me to believe it” – the less informed and less secure the participants in dialogue are about their own faith tradition, you’re coming out a “I need to convince you so that I feel I am justified”. There is no place for that. So if the dialogue can create that there is a sense that there is truth in this other person’s experience religiously, that can either parallel mine or enrich mine even though it is articulated in a different way, I think that is constructive and fruitful. I think that it is hard to move from the surface level experience “How do you pray? How do I pray?”. They are very different and get people to go back and say that at a more fundamental level, each of us is encountering the Other… so it’s really inviting people – people have to be much more deeply engaged and rooted in their own religious tradition to participate and contribute fruitfully to a dialogue with other religions. And I guess the danger is that if the political correctness of an absolute inclusivity, “no matter what you believe, you’re on the same page” OK, overly influences the sense of pluralism then you get what I call the least common denominator which is nothing. A graphic example of that, I think, in the American cultural experience is out of a claim to be pluralistic and open to everyone, we don’t mention God in school at all. No, see, there ought to be some affirmation for religiosity and an acknowledgment that we express it in different ways. But we have just taken it out of the picture altogether with that “oh my God, I can’t get you upset”. To me there is an exaggerated anxiety about being different, having a different point of view, because we are not comfortable with that. I think we need to be comfortable with that. I sit at the table with the other ministers and there are things with which we completely disagree with one another on, for example female ordination, one of the push-button issues, but we can respect that there is more than one way of understanding something.  

4. I had an interesting experience with the rabbi across the street that might be part of your thing. We had about 50 people from the church congregation and the synagogue for a little dialogue and the structure was that the rabbi would give a 10-15 minute, just a general introduction to Judaism and I give a 10-15 minute, general introduction to Catholicism and then we had questions and the table to talk. So in the course of the 15 minutes the rabbi, who I respect is a very fine gentleman and we used their facilities for five years when we had none, started by saying that you don’t have to believe in God to be Jewish. You follow a Mosaic pattern of life, a kind
of a covenant of law, so it’s a kind of ethnic identity and then a commitment to a certain lifestyle. So I got up
and said with all due respects to the rabbi Charany (?), you do have to believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God
to be a Catholic Christian. That is just part of the package here, a faith component that is fixed. Now I don’t
have to look down on, or belittle people who don’t share that faith but I can’t pretend that is not an integral part
of my identity and faith. I think that if I am afraid to stand for what I believe out of some political correctness
view of you being offended, I don’t think that that is genuine dialogue. I think genuine dialogue is that “hey,
each of has a different experience of the other and we express it in different cultural and traditional matters”. I
stand for it. And that is hard sometimes in the American culture right now. Even the kids in school, it is amazing
to watch it. The thought that you will get someone upset because they think different from you, is a real
sensitive issue and I don’t think it is constructive to healthy dialogue. My faith experience is a pretty important
part of my personal identity.

1. I do think it has application and like any typology, it is a generalization and it obscures as much as it
illuminates. But I definitely think that if you take Diana Eck’s definition of exclusivism, inclusivism and I think
she also calls it assimilationism - there are a couple of ways she describes that middle category if we imagine
them on a continuum- and pluralism they can certainly be applied in ways that people can understand the
dialogue within Christians in ecumenical circles. It could work equally well but I’ve never done it and in some
ways the category/typology is akin to the language of conservative/liberal that often gets tossed around and does
a lot of damage in describing individuals as liberal and fundamentalist. Any of these generalizations,
categorizations, typologies tend to obscure the details. One of my favorite paleontologists is a guy by the name
of Steven J Gould who wrote a book called Wonderful Life. It’s about the Burgess Shale which is a fossil record
of decimation in which all of these creatures are wiped out with the exception of one and that one creature is
called pecaya grecala (?) and this creature happens to be the first coronate, i.e. the first creature with a spinal
column. Gould says, replay the tape with a narrative of the film of life, what are the chances that this one
creature would survive the decimation? The chances are not good – it is an amazing contingency, a detail. And
he says that God dwells among the details and I am inclined to believe that that is right. So when we use the
typology of inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism when describing a person in a tradition that claims the same
name that we do or someone who claims a tradition that is very far, we have to use the typology with a great
deal of care…

2. I think that the many manifests itself in relationships and we discover our differences in relationships and I
appreciate what Rabbi Jonathon Sachs has to say about the Dignity of Difference in which he argues against any
dualism basically. Any attempt to create identities based around you or us tend to deface the Other or miss the inherent dignity of the difference of the other. And I think there is wisdom while also striving toward that understanding of a shared horizon of that peace that is a great gift to us when we recognize what the other is to us.

Rev. Dr. J. Paul Rajashekar
Rev. Dr. J. Paul Rajashekar – Lutheran Theological Seminary Luther D. Reed Professor, Systematic Theology
http://ltsp.edu/PaulRajashekar#sthash.SCb3bGco.dpuf

1. I for one have become disillusioned with this taxonomy. OK. They are good for academic purposes, to evaluate particular positions, theological commitments, categories, you know, to put people in particular brackets. It was first delineated in early ‘80s by Alan Race, the British scholar as part of his doctoral dissertation, since then it has caught on in most of the academic writing and a lot of Christian scholars used this classification in the early ‘80’s and ‘90’s. Most of them were not really into interreligious dialogue. They were academics, trying to study the phenomenon of religious pluralism and these categories provided an entry point into the discussion.

2. And I have used it too in my own reflections but I have increasingly abandoned such classification simply because I have come to realize that in some issues I am an exclusivist, in some issues I am a pluralist and in some issues I am an inclusivist because depending on the context and whom I am talking with and what issues I am dealing with and what level I am dealing with, OK, I change my positions. I think that every religious community is not necessarily exclusive but particular. They have their own distinctive identity, frame of reference, philosophical, epistemological assumptions and therefore they are particular. You cannot simply translate it to any other beliefs, superimpose it on other beliefs. Every religious community is particular, in that sense, they are exclusive. In one sense they are also unique. All right. They are also inclusive in the sense that depending on whom they are relating to, relating with, at what level, nobody works as an island unto themselves, they always have external relations. Individual identity is always a relational identity. And therefore there are moments when they embrace the other, they accept the other, honor the other, tolerate the other – inclusivists, but then from the sociological standpoint we are all pluralists, there are different particularities so that is a fact and nobody can deny it and therefore they are all pluralists, even those exclusivists have to acknowledge pluralism so I don’t use those categories anymore in my discussions, and I don’t refer to them - I may use the categories but I don’t put too much weight on them.

3. Religious experiences are encountered in some form of a primordial experience; primal experiences, personal experiences, some form of encounter with the transcendent being, reality, whatever you want to name it and experiences are not easily translatable. Experiences are unique because it is like having your own headache. Everybody has headaches. I can understand your headache but to the extent that I understand your headache it
becomes my headache. Every headache is unique but there are shared resemblances, affinities, Migraines, for example, a lot of people have migraine headaches but shared characteristics, doctors can identify, but ultimately every headache is one’s own. If I can experience your headache in an authentic sense, I have crossed over.

4. Inclusivism in that sense can mean familiar resonances. The particular religious experience may not be identical but you see resonances that in the other takes you back to your own. There is some sort of a non-verbal commitment, a shared commitment develops, some can articulate it well and sometimes it is incoherent defies categorization, conceptualization. It is somewhat similar to aha moment and there is an understanding happens. Understanding means you stand under the experiences of the other. OK. You are led into the deeper caverns of your heart and mind and soul. Some people express it in mystical terms of communion, bond that develops and the distinction between the subject and the object becomes minimum. Visibly, subject/object distinction still remains - phenomenological level – but internally there is a deeper connection that evolves. How does one articulate that? It become a challenge for every religious faith in interreligious encounter inter-Christian or extra-Christian, interreligious, extra-religious…

5. I distinguish pluralism as a reality, visible, sociological, phenomenological reality. People are different; objects are different at least on the basis of sight. Whether pluralism is an expression of a transcendent reality, I can never be sure of that. OK. In the Hindu philosophical tradition in the Vedas you have references that the ultimate is one and the sages name it differently, Rig Veda. That is a position in itself. Differences are real but there are different differences. Only when one attains the status of being in union with the ultimate can one categorically say, yes there are different expressions of the same reality. As long as you move on the phenomenal level, you are confronted with the differences. You can hypothesize the unity, but there is no certainty. It is just like this parable of the blind men and the elephant. They all have different descriptions of the different parts of the elephant – nobody has a holistic vision. Only the king or somebody who is observing these people describing the different parts of the elephant has the whole vision. The blind men will never get there, are not able to get there at that moment. So therefore I can only posit the possibility, but can never be absolutely certain of it. I am willing to posit it OK as a heuristic device, as a way of responding to pluralism, as a way of using pluralism for constructive purposes, for purposes of religious coexistence, for shared concerns of justice and as a hypothesis allows for a recognition of mutual relatedness but I can never in fact be certain that that in fact is true as long as I live in the phenomenal world I can only see things dimly and darkly but not with absolute clarity…

6. In that sense I am far more a Gandhian in the sense that one passes the unity of reality in terms of satya (truth). One can only realize the truth as it confronts you in the present you grab what is. You seize it. Absolute unity of reality is a necessary theoretical assumption that allows the possibility for realizing truth here & now. Whether the unity is fully realized in the absolute truth you will know only when you get there. So for my intransigent Christian terms people talk about their salvation and so forth, they have experiences of salvation momentarily in their physical body in relationship with people but the fullness of salvation is realized only at the end. You are in the process of realizing it towards that end but to in fact get there that becomes an eschatological reality - illusive to grasp it as long as you are in the mortal frame…

7. Dialogue for a particular objective. The necessity for dialogue is motivated not simply because I am interested in you because you are there but your presence raises questions for me. By what authority do you make such a claim? By what authority do you make such claims about my beliefs and doctrines? That question of authority of individual claims haunts me. What are the grounds for making such a claim prompts me to engage in dialogue so there is an intellectual curiosity, an intellectual challenge that forces me to engage in dialogue OK the presence of the other forces me to engage in dialogue The differences that exist between us forces me to engage in dialogue so I don’t simply engage for the sake of dialogue but I have a quest for understanding that forces me to engage in dialogue
Rev. Thomas Roach S.J.

Rev. Thomas Roach S.J., MA in Theology, MA in German. Presently serving as Rector of the Jesuit Community at the University of Scranton. From 2001 - 2009, Father Roach served as Secretary of Education assisting the Father General of the Society of Jesus in Rome in his responsibility of providing direction and leadership for almost 4000 educational institutions and 3 million students worldwide.

www.scranton.edu/board/bios/roach-thomas.shtml

Yes, I think this typology does (apply to both dialogues). The question is to adhere to your own belief, and to believe solidly in your own religion but at the same time to accept, to be open to the truth that is in other Christian denominations, if you will, and other religions. And I am getting that straight from Second Vatican Council. The because the Second Vatican Council said we must be, we are Catholics, there are certain things we believe in, but we have to be open to the fact that there is truth in all other religions, thinking of native American religions with their respect for nature or you think of what truth there is in Lutheranism or in Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism. Yes so you are open to the truth there, there is Pluralism, that there are all these different people - you search for the truth that’s there but you still try to see what we have in common but you are still going to have your own belief. You are not going to give up your own belief. Dialogue does not mean that you are just going to suspend belief - that I am going to suspend my own religion for a while. No, you enter into dialogue from where you are but you are open to the truth of what other people have to offer. For example you and I can sit down together and pray together - that’s the big thing. But it presupposes that you both believe in God, doesn’t it? Secondly it presupposes that human beings can dialogue with God, believe in prayer, so we do that. It is something we have in common, a mutual respect because this is something we have in common.
1. That is an excellent question because what happens is that typologies take on a life of their own and then they tend to live in different ways and determine attitudes toward not only intra-religious but interreligious conversations. For instance if you characterize a Christian group as being exclusivist using this typology, then there is very little chance of further dialogue because you have already put them in a box. So all typologies have limitations. Of course it is helpful in the broad sense but what we ultimately need is the unpacking of typology. The boxes are too big to accommodate the subtleties that lie under, within, and through attitudes to one another.

2. So certainly to cover the imagination of the world, when these typologies stand to the work of people like Hick and then Knitter, and then Knitter tries to refine the the whole kind of typology (John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions (Orbis, 1987) and then from within the Christian circles Gavin D'Costa books like the Myth of Uniqueness edited by Hick & Knitter (Gavin D'Costa, ed., Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions (Orbis, 1990) and Gavin D’Costa edited the book Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. So yes on one hand typologies help beginning the conversation but they should not end the conversation. So that would be my answer to your question.

3. Typologies should be invitations to start a conversation but they should not determine the way in which the conversation flows because the interreligious and intra-religious encounter is filled with surprises and typologies tend to limit surprises because people want things cut, clear and dry and this is hardly the case when it comes to so profound responses as when it comes to responses to religious realities…

4. Even if religion is a very personal matter it cannot be lived out as a pure individual, because we are all individuals in community. So while there may be an element of distinctiveness and one may even go to the limit of claiming an exclusive status to the distinctive nature of one’s relationship to the Divine, that relationship has to be lived out in community. Even though I don’t like spatial metaphors the so-called vertical relationship gains authenticity in a horizontal life in community. So rather than talking about dialogue in community, I tend to talk about a community in dialogue. And not always in a positive sense. Dialogue has a possibility of reconciliation, understanding, mutual compatibility but dialogue also has the potential to spark an explosion and all this happens within communitarian living and the challenges of the messiness of everyday life and the struggles for scarce resources.

5. And so if a relationship which seems to be exclusive, and in one sense vertical, individualistic, leads to a sense of superiority and “holier than thou” then it is hardly something which is commendable. A deeper relationship with the divine should lead to a deeper relationship with one’s fellow creatures and the wider creation. So I have been strongly influenced by the work of the World Council of Churches in fostering dialogue.
with people of living faith and ideologies. For me personally I have been influenced by the work of Stanlet J Samartha as very helpful and very influential including his book, *One Christ, Many Religions* (One Christ, Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology Orbis, 1991) toward a revised Christology where he talks about the reality that for us there is one and no other, but that does not mean for others, there is also, there are also other ways of reaching the divine. And ultimately it is not me and mine but we in our common quest to understand our future. To understand that our future has to be an interreligious future. We are on a journey together. Maybe on different paths but we can hold hands and not use our hands as fists on this journey. Any type of relationship we have, should make us sensitive and open to those from other backgrounds, religious or non-religious, to recognize that we are human beings caught up in a quest to the heart of the mystery of God.

**A Roman Catholic sister (name withheld)**

A Roman Catholic sister who has served her religious community more than fifty years as a teacher, a school administrator, a legislative assistant on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C., as well as a member of her community’s national and international (Rome) leadership team.

1. Yes, I think it is important to have ecumenical dialogue or even interreligious dialogue, but I probably won’t seek it out. But I think it is enriching. I know so little about Hinduism, They teach Vaishnavism here (an almost 100 yr. old, originally women’s college, co-ed in recent years) and the teacher invited me to attend but, although I would have loved to go, I had a funeral to attend. India is so many people. I don’t know if there is a difference between intra-Christian dialogue & interfaith dialogue. Especially today with ISIS killing people left and right, dialogue is important. The Muslims are killing one another off in grand style. Of course we Christians did so too Thirty Years war and Hundred Years War. So it is giving religion a very bad name. I think the truth is in many different places and we need to talk to one another. We can help each other because different people are led to God - or whatever one calls God in different religions - in various ways. There is not just one way. I don’t deal with a lot of people – I deal with alums (graduates) who are older and most of them are Catholic. Our students are not all Catholic. First of all, they don’t have to tell what their religion is, but I rarely - I am on the third floor here so they don’t even know I exist - but I know some of them and I go to the ecumenical Thanksgiving prayer service we have and God only knows what their religion is. But probably Christian, although we had a wonderful open house in the chapel and one of the classes did research on the windows – we are one of the few places that have all women in our windows – the only men are Jesus, Joseph & St. Augustine and they are not great, big pictures. They are from 1941, when the chapel was built. But there was a young woman with a head scarf on and I went over to her and I said, “How did you like this assignment?” and she said “Well, I don’t know much about the Catholic saints but I’ve learned all about these three.” (laughs) She is very sweet and I thought this is interesting. We have some Muslims, but see, I can’t tell the boys, but the women will often wear a head scarf and it is interesting that they would come to a Catholic college. We are a Catholic college but open to other faith traditions. And I think they all have to take some religion course and I think it is enriching for the students if they are asking questions. In fact we have a new religion teacher this year, she is coming from Regis in Toronto, I think. She has taught before but not a lot and we have the mass of the Holy Spirit, not well attended at the beginning of the year, they don’t have to go and many of them don’t but some do and she ran out of the chapel after that and she said “I love the students here, they ask questions and participate.” I thought, great!

And in fact the other night we had a panel of alums about what life has been like for them and they were all women and I saw a young man there and I said “did your teacher tell you that you had to come to this?” and he said “yes we are supposed to be here” What class? And he told me and I asked “Is that (name withheld)?” and he said “Oh I like her so much.” She is the one who said she likes the students here; she is a very good teacher. I suspect it is a worthwhile class. They don’t memorize anymore.

2. I think we grew up, at least I did, with exclusivity as far as religious practices are concerned. Certainly for Catholicism and all the religions seemed to be that way – we all had our little boxes. I remember my parents
liked this Jewish group – they owned a clothing store. It is interesting. My parents would talk with them while I was looking at clothes but I don’t remember many Jewish people coming to our house but they liked them for some reason. My father really was an agnostic and I knew he didn’t go to church and as a child you think “Oh, he doesn’t go to church!” but you know I will always be grateful to him because on the Sunday when the parents were supposed to go, Family Sunday, he got dressed up and he and my mother would come with me to church. He didn’t go to communion but he was so kind to do that. He said to me one time that “I had a course at Penn in comparative religions and it made me think maybe there is a god and maybe there isn’t.”

_He was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania?_

Yes and he went to Penn law school. I have no idea how he got to Penn from a little town upstate I never asked him and he never told me.

_He was not atheistic?_

No, he didn’t know and he said I don’t want to talk to you about it because it might weaken your faith. I thought, “Isn’t that nice!” and when I said I wanted to enter the convent he said, “Well I think we brought you up in the right way and you are old enough to make your decisions”. My mother wasn’t quite as happy. She wanted grandchildren. I didn’t grow up in an intensely Catholic family but what saved my mother – she should have been out working part-time – because I think she was bored being a housewife but she cooked and did everything a housewife did. But when she joined the Sodality – that gave her a whole group of women to relate to. The Sodality of Our Lady. The men had the Holy Name Society and the women had the Sodality and they had mass at 8 o’clock on the first Sunday of every month and met for meetings. And in fact I have a hilarious letter I wrote to a high school friend and I have in it: “we got our mother elected as an officer in the Sodality and now I’ve had to go to the 8 o’clock mass the first Sunday of every month”. So I said “we are going back this year to get her out of there – we are going to vote her down” (laughs) I don’t think we did that though. And then she was part of the Catholic daughters – I think they have dissolved at this point – it was like the Masons, they had a certain handshake, wore an outfit and had passwords. My father thought it was hilarious – he did make fun of it a little and so did I – but those two organizations really did bring her back to life. She had something to do outside the home and she had many good friends.

_Non-Catholics were Included?_

I am sure they were all Catholics, no Jewish or Protestant, because that is the way life was. But as I said they did have some friends who were not all Catholic. My cousin Bob failed religion one year in high school – he went to West Catholic (High School)– and we were told to never tell his mother, Aunt Marie, that he failed religion. He was going to summer school for math because I think she would have had a heart attack if she knew he failed religion. She would have had his head! So we were mum, which is hilarious.

_Times have changed?_

3. I think it is a 180 degree turn. So many alums, not everybody, say that “my grandchildren are married and they haven’t had the children baptized” and I say don’t worry about them it is a good family. Something will happen.

_Exclusivity can be an individual’s personal relationship with God?_

I think I get the question. In religious life, and I think other people do this too, we pray together and faith sharing, take a scriptural passage and say what it means to us. So we do share some of our relationship with God. I think it strengthens us really – Do we have to do that? No, we don’t but generally we do. And I feel at home doing it. I feel at home with people of other religions but have just not had the occasion. But I usually make an annual retreat and gone many places, one of them is Wernersville, the Jesuit retreat…
I’ve been there.

Oh I’ll bet and they have people from different religions, sure, now it is usually a silent retreat but occasionally during one of those they will say if anyone wants to get together to pray together - some people chose to and some not, there is freedom

There is religious dialogue within your community?

4. Yes, that’s an important part of my life. When we first began it was after Vatican II and the superior – we were still in our habit – and she said we are going to have faith sharing, so I will say something and when you feel inclined you can say something. So there were four of us and we sat around the desk and she said something but none of us said anything. It was so different, we weren’t used to it. But we had some hilarious times too when the community divided into groups and on Sunday morning at 8 o’clock we would have faith sharing and I would say something about that “I pray that some of the children I am teaching would do better as they seem to be struggling” and one of the nuns would say “may (name withheld) get a better result with the students” and I would think “I don’t need her to tell me what to do!” (laughs) Of course I would not say that. We went through times when we tried to learn how to share. See, we had vocal prayer but not totally, we had a lot of silent prayer but to share at that level, we hadn’t done that much where it wasn’t scripted. But now I think people feel at home doing it. And it’s a help to them, to all of us.

We have spoken about inclusivity & exclusivity, but what about pluralism?

5. But again when talking to (a Religious Studies professor at her college, name withheld), the teacher here, he said to me you know the Church is moving right in there to be more accepting. I mean no one who is a good theologian would say the Catholic Church, as it used to be in the 50’s that the only way to salvation was through the Catholic Church. That was always a heresy really but it was out there.

Wasn’t that an official doctrine? But you mean it was heresy?

Well, I always thought it was because in high school they said “no, it was heretical, other religions have some of the truth too”. We all have some of the truth, which was my understanding. But I’d see there was a priest, I forget his name now, in Boston who did pound away that there is only salvation in the Church and he was excommunicated. Maybe when I was in grade school, maybe you are too young to remember that. This is even before Vatican II. In fact I grew up that the Church is the one true way and other people have just not seen the light but it was there also that they will be saved because they haven’t been given the special grace, the gift of faith. Now I think it’s more that everyone does have, God speaks in different ways to different people and I think the Church is much more pluralistic than it was and that is Vatican II
Father James Redington, S.J.
Ph.D. in Hinduism (with a minor in Buddhism) from the University of Wisconsin – Madison in 1976 and has taught related courses for many years at Georgetown University, Arrupe College in Zimbabwe, the Jesuit School of Theology and St. Joseph’s University. An expert in interreligious dialogue.


The framework of my question that I am going to ask you about your vision of the future of US Christian/Vaishnava dialogue is part of a triangular study where the past has been examined by asking various theologians when I was in the US recently about the well known typology of exclusivism, inclusivism pluralism and for example the Dean of Studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia...

1. Oh, I know them, which Dean of Studies, was it Rajashekar?

No, it was his colleague, Kiran Sabastian.

Oh, yes, I know him also and I find him very good, yes what did he say?

His answer was very valuable and the essence I am quoting "So yes on one hand typologies help beginning the conversation but they should not end the conversation."

Good.

So that would be a summary of the answers I got. The typology has filled its function, they think and it’s time to move on to a new paradigm how to base the dialogue.

If someone, or two or three, can think of a set of categories that, if you will, almost covers the situation. That in itself is tough. Is there any set of categories that covers the whole situation when dialogue is by its nature open-ended? And I think there will be different modalities, different modes, of it being invented as people get into dialogue more and more. And they already exist probably but certainly among the three, exclusivism, inclusivism and parallelism or that’s what Raimon Pannikar calls pluralism although it may not be identical, but pluralism means there are going to be many models within it, the very name means there are many models, if you will, but even within exclusivism you get Christian evangelicalism. But a serious and intelligent person like Terry Muck who writes on dialogue out of an exclusivist position admittedly and deliberately whereas those who invented the paradigm assumed that almost nobody would want to be found dead being called an exclusivist. (laughs) And yet there are hundreds of millions of exclusivists if you count up the exclusivist religions’ types of exclusivism, there are hundreds of millions of them worldwide including people who are seriously into dialogue like Terry Muck. I think he was in dialogue exclusively with Buddhism at the time he wrote what I read, so he is working out of an exclusivist paradigm. But certainly the inclusivist paradigm is already pluralistic in the sense of someone I think it’s Kate McCarthy (or Paul Griffiths) but she make a good distinction I think between closed inclusivism and open inclusivism. A closed one would be an assumption that
all religions are valid up to a point but then when they get to that point they will realize that our is the most comprehensive, as some advaita vedanta positions would hold. Whereas a more open inclusivism position would be that in some sense the religions are valid and they include each other in a certain sense but in a fashion that is not totally defined as yet. Gavin D’Costa takes the Holy Spirit idea that Jesus is sending the Holy Spirit and it is his Spirit and so forth but it is through the inspiration of the Spirit that religions other than Christianity do have truth and do have saving value perhaps and it’s up to Christians therefore to try to find the Spirit in other religions. So that is a kind of open Christian inclusivism you could say. So, as well as the pluralism model having many different kinds of forms. Pannikar’s may be one. John Hick’s is perhaps the most famous and also the most frequently attacked, but not without some truth to it and so forth. But at any rate, so Paul Knitter who has been, by too many perhaps, lumped together with John Hick - and certainly he was in his early writings - has written in his introduction to The Theologies of Religions. he has a sort of four part classification, has mutuality in it and then the other three so he makes room for Frank Clooney and James Fredericks comparative theology out of a Christian position or comparative theology out of a Hindu or Muslim position probably as well.

2. I would agree with Kiran Sebastian that, or at least even if he didn’t say it quite in this way, I would say that the tri-part classification is still useful for getting started on talking and even middling in one’s talk as it were, but it would be best to treat it as not the categorical best, heuristic model for the theology of dialogue.

One idea which I have read a little about by an author named Keith Ward...

Yes, I have heard of him but I have not read him as much as I should. He is an Oxford don, no?

Yes, sir, he writes about henofideism which entails the idea that there are various faithful positions and one adheres to that faithful position one has, but at the same time one understands that God is not silent in other traditions but that God appears there in various traditions.

Yes, I think the Vatican document, Nostra Aetate, is fairly close to that. And again Raimon Pannikar who I do depend on quite a bit, but not entirely, for the theology of dialogue, has a notion fairly well developed in some of his writings on the distinction between faith and beliefs, is very fruitful in that respect that he defines faith more broadly than usual as an anthropological dimension, in other words of every person’s relation with ones destiny and within that faith which does need to be expressed in beliefs, but which is not identical with one’s beliefs because on the transcendent reaching end of one’s faith, it is inexpressible in beliefs. In my article published in the Catholic Theological Studies quarterly December, 1983 issue 4 “Interreligious Dialogue and the Interior Dialogue”, I do have a section on Pannikar’s teaching on faith and beliefs from his book Intra-Religious Dialogue chapter 3, “Faith and Beliefs”. But nonetheless faith has to have beliefs just as language has to have words but the two are not identical. So that leads him much along the line perhaps of what Ward means by understanding and Pannikar uses that term too and uses even the word conversion to the beliefs of the other but he sort of leveled off at, before his death, on the word convincement of some beliefs of dialogue partners of other faiths but as becoming part of one’s own faith. So I don’t know if it goes farther than Keith Ward’s expression of it but certainly Pannikar is very rich on that topic.

Interesting. By the way you also used the word guru in your published interview by Father Connor and that you felt comfortable calling a Vallabha spiritual master as your guru.

4. Yes, I just happened to be speaking on that a week ago Saturday in a presentation I gave here at the University of Scranton on Nostra Aetate, the dialogue document of Vatican II, but most of the speech I spent on narrating my relationship with this Hindu guru Shri Shyam Manohar Goswamy of Mumbai and the distinction that I made there, because it was mostly a Catholic audience, maybe not exclusively but mostly Catholic and in any case I could make it with Christians or non-Christians, I would say let me explain the way I use the term

81 That Hick’s abstract Christology is far from the understanding of Jesus by a vast majority of Christians, is one attack by Hick’s critics.

82 Francis Clooney’s latest book compares the theme of love of God in separation found in the Sri sampradaya of Vaishnavism with medieval Christian writers: Clooney, Francis X (2013). His hiding place is darkness : a Hindu-Catholic theopoetics of divine absence [Elektronisk resurs].
guru with respect to Shyam Manohar Goswamy and myself. The clearest Hindu distinction, and I think it helps to accurately distinguish, is that he is not my diksha guru, that is my initiatory guru in other words I am not a Hindu who has gone for refuge in him and basically taken him as the one who would, more than anyone else, save me or bring me to moksha or better yet prema bhakti and so forth. So in that sense I am not technically a Hindu and in that sense he is a guru, to some extent, in quotation marks. However, there is a very real Hindu sense he is my guru and in another sense he is my shiksha guru, teaching and learning guru. There is no doubt about that in respect to especially the teachings of Vallabha in the pusthi marga and Vaishnavism of that suddha advaita, philosophically speaking, system.

Thank you for that clarification. What about the future of dialogue? Where do you think it can go? Where do you think it should go in the US specifically between Christians and Vaishnavas?

5. I wrote down a couple of thoughts of topics and kinds of topics I would like to see in our Vaishnava/Christian dialogue where we meet in the Washington D.C. area, but we come from all over the place over the past seventeen years. Now I guess it is it will be eighteen years next time. And in some of these topics, we may have covered parts of it before but the time might be ripe to bring it around again. But anyway let me just give a couple of those. For instance, on grace, on God’s grace - what notions there would be in Christianity and what notions there would be in Vaishnava/Hinduism and say a dialogue with my guru, Shyam Manohar Goswamy, in fact we have dialogued quite a bit and I have sent him material about disputes about grace within the Christian tradition. The Dominicans and Jesuits had a huge kerfuffle. The Pope finally wisely said why don’t you two guys both shut up about it (laughs) for a while because this difference you have is kind of insolvable. So we did fortunately the Jesuits and Dominicans listened to him on that but in the meanwhile there had been some worthwhile things said. But I’d be applying it of course to grace as in Gaudiya Vaishnavism especially and in Christian churches and theologies and so on.

6. But even more so, kinds of love and just as sort of models to speak on, such as love in union and love in separation. Also say the four kinds of love according to Vaishnavism: servant relation to God, friendship relation to God, parent relation to God and lover/beloved relation to God. And in Christian terms say love of God and love of neighbor and “who is my neighbor?” as the Jewish lawyer asked Jesus, “who is my neighbor?”, and Jesus answered with the Good Samaritan parable, of course. So those would be the kind of things that I would suggest, because every year at the end of our Hindu/Christian dialogue- and it goes for a good 2 hours or so- is what should we do and what topics should we do next year.

7. Another one that occurred to me, and I don’t know if it has been suggested, and I don’t recall it being suggested in the 12 or 13 years at least I have been able to go to these meetings, and that is the communal or

---

83 For an explanation of these central Hindu/Vaishnava terms in regard to interreligious dialogue, see the karma, jnana, bhakti dialectic theory: http://content.iskcon.org/icj/1_1/rsd.html
84 There are four traditional schools (sampradayas) within Vaishnavism. Vallabha’s pusthi marga is connected with the Rudra sampradaya.
85 A little history - Anuttama dasa: “Thus, the first Vaishnava-Christian Dialogue in North America was held in East Freeport, Massachusetts outside of Boston, in September 1996. In attendance were such notables as Francis X. Clooney, Larry Shinn, Gordon Melton, Leonard Swidler, and Kenneth Cracknell, Klaus K. Klostermaier and, from the Vaishnava side, Tamal Krishna Goswami, Ravindra Svarupa das (Dr. William Deadwyler), Shaunaka Rishi, and others...Thus, the first Vaishnava-Christian Dialogue in Washington, D.C. (held in nearby Potomac, Maryland) took place in April of 1998. Under the advice of Reverend Kenneth Cracknell, I contacted Dr. John Borrelli, of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for his help and guidance. Together we strategized topics and participants.” The Harvard professor, F. Clooney: “It is true that I was a member of the first of these dialogues in 1996 and came again for the one in 2010, but while I have had many other occasions to converse with Hindus and work with them in many contexts, I have never engaged in so specific and focused a dialogue as this 15 year long dedicated series.”
86 Pope Paul V in the first decade of the 1600’s
87 Gaudiya Vaishnavism belongs to the Brahma sampradaya.
community nature of our religions. In other words, are they communal, are they community in nature? And if so, how so? And so on. Like on the Hindu side possibly *satsang* would come into that. *Satsang* - the assembly of the good or the association of the good. But also how ISKCON people are taught to and are exemplified with texts to relate with each other and depend on each other and so forth⁸⁸. And how Christians do so and so forth.

8. And the last thing I thought of is - and I've thought of this for some years now and mentioned it once in this session of two hours and Ravi Gupta, a very intelligent and wonderful ISKCON member thought it would be very good but would require a lot of preparatory conversation to see how this would go- but anyway you can see how you react to it, in other words I think there is a real difference between ISKCON Vaishnavism and Catholicism or other types of Christianity. It’s a real difference and I think real differences would remain after the dialogue but possibly quite fruitful. And in making that statement about this particular topic I sort of expose a principle I got form another Catholic, a pioneer of dialogue in Madras, Father Ignatius Hirudayam⁹⁰, an Indian Jesuit there in Madras but he was saying often enough that the most fruitful dialogues are about differences not similarities, about differences between religions, are the most fruitful of all topics. Now I don’t know if I would post that as my key thesis or something but in any case I do think it is a true thesis. Anyway the example which I think is a real difference that I think would be fruitful to explore is this - a dialogue between ISKCON Vaishnavas and Christians in that USA dialogue - the reality, or not, of the world and things in it. And the second statement of that: the value, or not, of action in the world.

*This would be a fruitful direction for dialogue, you think?*

Yes, I think so. With probable real differences but likely very fruitful outcomes as well.

*That reminds me of your statement ‘...studying another religion is one of the best ways to clarify one’s own religion, as well as to learn about others.’*

9. Yes, and in my interreligious dialogue course in its different forms, I try to teach that - in fact Wednesday will be my last class this semester⁹⁰ I hope to be teaching my students - as one of the two-fold fruits of dialogue. The first of which is being confirmed in my own faith, but paradoxically thereby becoming more open to other faiths, not less open.

*The two are not contradictory?*

No, they are not contradictory, they both happen. People in dialogue find out almost universally, as far as I can tell, that both of those happen even though they appear to be paradoxical. Or that they might at first glance appear to contradict one another. No, they are both true.

*Who are the major players now and who do you envision will be the important voices in future Christian/Vaishnava dialogue?*

---

⁸⁸ The founder of ISKCON, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, taught the Gaudiya Vaishnava conclusion that Krishna is the Supreme Person. Person means social and the ultimate purpose of human life is to enter into the association of Krishna’s pure devotees. ISKCON was established to facilitate this society. See: http://www.founderacharya.com/


⁹⁰ The course is called Comparative Religions of the World from an interreligious dialogue methodology.
Well, let’s see, in a way it’s dangerous in the sense whom I might forget or exclude whom I would really mean to include, but given that caveat, I would say certainly, and not necessarily in order of importance, from the Vaishnava side: Anuttama, Ravindra Svarupa dasa, an excellent theologian and wonderful person, Graham Schweig, Ravi Gupta, Rukmini and as I say there are surely others I am forgetting.

In your published interview I read you say “in a certain stubbornness” that “interreligious dialogue is a way of meeting God and one’s neighbor in the depths of faith, it is an end in itself. As Thanksgiving’s joy—and I mean both the holiday and the Eucharist—as Thanksgiving’s joy is an end or goal in itself. As great art is; as friendship is—like love and God’s sudden grace, dialogue needs no further goal”.

10. Yes, dialogue has a value in itself, and a richness in itself, as friendship has. And I am not saying it is the only end in itself. One good conceptualization or statement of it that just crossed my mind, again from Pannikar, is that he says that dialogue is a religious act. The way I put it sometimes in my own teaching and in the Theological Studies article I published in 1983 and in last week’s talk about Nostra Aetate, is that in the deepest forms of dialogue, partners say two partners especially, but it could be more, would be involved in each other’s salvation. That is a mixture in a way I would say in which dialogue is an end in itself and that salvation is the end as Christians state it. Other religions use other words with legitimate differences. But at any rate I would say that dialogue has its own nature and is worthwhile in itself. It does not need to be pursued for another reason. It can also be pursued for improvement of the social order. Or political order even but I would say emphatically that not all dialogue has to sub-serve a purpose outside itself. It is worthwhile in itself and by itself.

When did you first come into the field of Christian/Vaishnava dialogue?

11. Yes, I gave that some thought when you asked about it. And why not consider it starting with my relationship with ISKCON? In one way or another, the first meaningful relationship aside from seeing some Hare Krishnas - as you know you were all on the street and at airports and stuff - was when I was in Boston in 1976 – 1977, during that school year, it was probably 1976, a kind of an important thinker in ISKCON at that time, since left and I am not sure where he is now, but he was called Subhananda das, Steven Gelberg, maybe?

Yes, I know who you are referring to.

Now he and I talked at the Paulist Center in Boston91 where I was doing what we called field education in my theology period. And when he found out, as it were, that I had a freshly minted PhD in Vaishnavism, although not in the Gaudiya type but a very similar type, Vallabhacarya, he asked me to write - now I am not sure I have the exact legal term for what I wrote - an affidavit or some other legal term

Amicus curiae?

It wasn’t an amicus curiae brief either, some term like that and indeed it was in favor of ISKCON on the issues that I felt I could give some opinion, an affidavit for a court case, I think in New York

Kreshower/Shapiro?

Probably. What was the first name?

Kreshower.

91 “Today the Paulists are committed to evangelization of the unchurched, reconciliation of alienated Catholics, and ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.” Accessed 17/05-2015 from: https://paulist.org/history/paulist-history
OK, so my affidavit which I know was published by ISKCON in an anthology of quotes and statements about ISKCON that may have been published by ISKCON in the early 80’s or late 70’s, I am not sure, but I wrote in favor of the validity of ISKCON and its not-brainwashing nature, as far as I knew. So that started off a good relationship. Now later Subhananda and I differed a bit, in a broad sense dialogue fashion, when I had a student where I was teaching who was in ISKCON but left ISKCON and as far as I know is a member of another Hindu group. And Subhananda wanted to know the student’s objections and ultimately the student’s name and so forth and I refused to give the student’s name and so forth. But at any rate that’s one relation in which there was some difference. Now after then, my Theological Studies article, some person from ISKCON, I don’t remember who, wrote and asked for dialogue re the nature of sannyas which I said something about in that article in Theological Studies but I didn’t respond. And I still was in my youth you could say with respect to dialogue and with respect to a lot of things but as the years went on, I later found out or concluded that you have to play with those who want to play. So I regretted not responding to that request for dialogue about sannyas and to some other such invitations, as I thought as a young professor I thought I was going to get hundreds, of these or at least tens, of these invitations to dialogue but I found out that in fact they were rather few and far between. And I would say that this is one lesson I learned: that you play with those who want to play. And you don’t try to force those who… actually there was one question and answer session at the World Parliament of Religions in Barcelona in 2004 where Raimon Pannikar, who was actually from the area of Barcelona, was in a panel and he was asked by a certain person in the audience, who asked something like, “there is this priest I know, Father Pannikar, who really needs to be in dialogue and would be terrific in dialogue but just refuses to respond to my invitations to be in dialogue” and so on and so on and she said, “what should I do” and Pannikar said “Wait!” Play with those who want to play.

*Play with those who want to, are ready to play...*

12. But there is no guarantee that anybody is ever ready to play! (laughs) But if they want to play, just like my guru assumes, in the case of his religion, that if someone asks about going into his religion more deeply, he assumes they have grace from Krishna in the form of a ruci. That is Sanskrit ruci, which means inclination. In other words, the inclination to go deeper into it is itself a sign of Krishna’s grace. So in a way the inclination to want to play, the desire to play, figuratively in dialogue, should be responded to.

**Ravindra Svarupa dasa**

An interview of Ravindra Svarupa dasa by Yogindra dasa (aka John Doherty) on March 21, 2015 in Ravindra Svarupa dasa’s study in Potomac MD.

(Yd): As you know, I am writing my undergraduate thesis on Christian/Vaisnava dialogue in the US. What is your vision for the future of Christian-Vaisnava dialogue in the US?

1. (RSd): Here are some books on Christian/Vaishnava dialogue: Hindu Christian Dialogue Encounters and Perspectives, Rudolf Otto’s India’s Religion of Grace and Christianity, Krishna Consciousness in the West. This has my “Patterns in ISKCON’s Historical Self-Perception”.

That’s a different article than your “Modern Historical Consciousness”?

Yes, that is a different article. Here is another article I wrote. It’s in Attitudes of Religions and Ideologies toward the Outsider, the Other Swidler & Mojas (ed.) Edward Mellan Press 1990

Oh, yea, your article “Religion and Religions”. I just read that. Your conclusion was that different religions, not hostile to a personal conception of God, are in the same family.

In the same family?

That’s one of your conclusions, at least.

I have to read it again; I don’t remember what I wrote. (laughs) It’s a question what you mean by family. The first meaning of ecumenical was the Western Catholic Church talking to the Eastern Catholic Church. That’s what ecumenical dialogue first meant. It meant within the Church. The idea of talking even to people outside the Church, outside the Christian confessions, you know, that’s how it first came about, the ecumenical movement. And then it began to be broadened.

2. My idea of doing dialogue is to try to create a perception, well it’s based on what Prabhupada said, what’s the meaning of dharma. To get people to think of religion as dharma. Religion as the idea that I am the servant of God. To see religion as an innate, natural, human activity. When it says it’s your svarup, (eternal identity):

Jivera svarup hay nityera krishna das

That’s your eternal identity, your “constitutional position.” It’s just what Prabhupada taught. You may not even know the name Krishna. There is an idea of God, and I’m the servant of God. So if you want to say that’s what we all are, devotees of God, then there is one religion. And when you get rid of the upadhis (material designations) that’s what is there. So I’d like people to come to see that.

3. Of course what will be is that you can get along better with Christians than rtviks. (laughs) That’s harder.

Yes, that’s the real challenge because it’s in-house.

The in-house things are harder to get along with. Two branches of the Franciscans fight with each other, or whatever. I don’t know if that ever happened two branches of the Franciscans. Well the Franciscans and the

---

92 Howard Coward (ed.) Motilal Banardass 1993

93 Rudolf Otto MacMillan 1930

94 Shinn & Bromley (ed.) Louisburg PA Bucknell University 1989


96 This splinter group holds that ISKCON’s founder, Prabhupada, is the only guru for his followers. Any spiritual guide in ISKCON after Prabhupada, is merely then an officiate (rtvik), not an actual guru in the traditional sense.
Jesuits, then, the grey friars and the black friars. Whatever I did in dialogue was to promote that kind of shifting of the horizons.

_A redefinition of what faith means in interfaith? Instead of it being your faith belonging to a community in a certain tradition with a different claim on truth, you were talking about different moods. There is the karma mood (this-worldly elevation), the jnana mood (pursuit of liberation)?_

I used this word “strand” from Ninian Smart, in every religion there is a _jnana_ strand…

_That’s in your article “Religion and Religions”. Where did you get that?_

Ninian Smart uses it in a slightly different way when he talks about the mystical strand, I got his book, right here, _Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy_ Ninian Smart, George Allen & Unwin, London 1964. This is in the series called the Muirhead Library of Philosophy. This is very good. He is smart. He even mentions Chaitanya that early on.

_If we stick to these mutually contradictory traditions with irrational claims on the truth like Hindu, Christian then dialogue becomes very difficult. But if we understand strands, or as you say, then dialogue… it will not only enable dialogue between different religious traditions but it would also allow for dialogue within Vaishnavism?_

He has categories, right: anti-polytheistic theism – Judaism, Christianity, Islam transpolytheistic theism – Madhva, Ramanuja, Saiva siddhanta, Chaitanya.

_So he has categorizations of different branches of Vaishnavism. So there could be dialogue within Vaishnavism?_

4. Sure, of course. Like among us, we Gaudiya Vaishnavas are closer to the Ramanuja in philosophy, and the Madhvaites we argue with more.

_We have difference with Madhavites although they are close to us in terms of our disciplic succession?_

I had a little argument once, I published a Back To Godhead article, and this Madhvaite wrote to me criticizing the article.

_Why?_

Well, I made some claims about Lord Chaitanya giving people access to divinity and one of the things I remember most clearly that he took exception to… well what he said was that in ISKCON, if you are not born an Indian, you can’t go back to Godhead in this life. But if you’re successful, in your next birth you will take birth in a brahmana/Vaisnava family in India and then you’ll be able to go back to Godhead. That’s one of the things he took exception to. There are other things too.

_Sarva dharma parityaja mam ekam saranam vraja_ 98

That some _dharmas_ become obsolete. He really didn’t like that idea – that any _dharmas_ become obsolete.

_I don’t follow. He took exception that some dharmas become obsolete?_

Yes, I thought that is what the Bhagavad Gita was saying because you can’t do them anymore. You can’t do strict, elaborate ritual worship, you can’t do fire sacrifices and… but by Lord Chaitanya especially the sankirtana yajna makes. The Bhagavatam says sankirtana is the yuga-dharma, the “dispensation” to borrow a Christian term, for this most degraded age.

_It’s do-able?_

---

97 page 215 in the notes
98 “Give up all other _dharmas_ and surrender unto Me” says Krishna in Bhagavad Gita 18.66
Yes, I may have used a word like that.

But he argued that the other dharmas, aside from sankirtana, are not obsolete?

Yes, or just stated they weren’t because dharma is eternal and I can understand technically, yes, but they are not applicable.

So that is an example of dialogue of difference with the same branch of Vaisnavism and, as you mentioned we are closer actually with the Sri Vaisnavas, which is a different sampradaya?

5. Yes, and Prabhupada liked to read Ramanuja’s *Vedartha Sangraha* and things like that. The Madhvaaites on the other hand are almost like Calvinists. They really have got this very rigid idea about… and I don’t know how much it really follows from [Madhva] Madhvacarya’s actual teachings, I haven’t studied it, but in Caitanya-caritamrita Lord Chaitanya had an argument with the *tattvavadis*. He said, “your religion is covered by *karma* and *jnana* in response to the *tattvavadis* claiming that the means of salvation is correctly following all the precepts of *varnasrama* and that the goal is liberation, Vaishnava liberation, but there is some tinge of *karma* and *jnana*.

But despite that difference, Lord Chaitanya appreciated that at least the *tattvavadis* worshiped the Supreme Personality of Godhead. So that is an example of dialogue with the religious Other within Vaishnavism.

In our tradition we’re taught that the Vedas can be divided into three divisions, three “strands” to use Smart’s term. The *karma* strand of pious works, the *jnana* strand of liberation into impersonal Brahman taught in Advaita Vedanta, and the bhakti or devotional strand, expressed, for example in Ramanuja’s *visistadvaita* or “Qualified non-dualism.” Thinking of these three traditions as “strands” in Smart’s sense of the term I could understand the statement

*nana-sastra- vicarinaika-nipunau* describing what the six Goswamis did: they carefully went through the Vedic literature and applying what they learned from Lord Chaitanya, they dissected out pure devotion from everything else, and so the *karma* strand and the *jnana* strand were isolated and in this way bhakti or devotion got even more distinct, fine-tuned, refined to get to pure devotion.

That was a unique contribution?

I think that is what Lord Chaitanya did actually. It’s interesting that he didn’t write anything, we have only the eight the *siksastaka* verses, but when he got Rupa and Sanatana and Jiva, all highly educated scholars, he got them to do this work of taking what he had taught them and then going through the scriptures and using that as the focus of their intelligence, their guidance, to now sort through what is there. The *sastras* have all different things. Everything is there. The Veda has got, whatever you want practically is in there. And it recognizes a great deal of diversity. So how do you put that all together and accept it all as true and yet come out with a

---

99 Prof. M. Hiriyanna describes it (*Vedartha Sangraha*) as ‘an independent treatise explaining in a masterly way his (Ramanuja’s) philosophical position, and pointing out the basis for it in the Upanisads’.
accessed 20/05 - 2015

100 The system of 4 social and 4 spiritual orders.


102 The founder of *Gaudiya Vaishnavism*, Chaitanya (1486-1534), wrote only eight verses
single ultimate *siddhanta* (philosophical conclusion)? There is one *siddhanta*, everyone agrees, yes, there is a *siddhanta*, there is an ultimate conclusion. But here are all these different ways, so how do you deal with it?

**Would a pluralist agree that there is a siddhanta?**

6. No. I think strict pluralism would deny that. One time I had a discussion on this topic with Diana Eck, and she was quite emphatic: You cannot privilege one over the other. That’s pluralism. And there is no need to make them coherent. Or lead to a single… there is no *siddhanta*. This sort of pluralism is not a philosophy, it’s just sort of an approach, I think, to dealing with religions. And you don’t privilege yours or anybody else’s over any others. But we *do* privilege something — we privilege *bhakti* but with *bhakti*, as far as I’m concerned, that *bhakti* strand can be reigonized in many historical religious traditions. Prabhupada’s teaching was, wherever you find *bhakti*, in whatever tradition, that’s what it is. You acknowledge it. If you see *bhakti*… I remember this one place in the Vedabase\(^{103}\), Alan Ginsberg and some disciples were talking to Prabhupada about some poems by William Blake and one of them quoted the line “It is Raised a Spiritual Body”. And Prabhupada remarked “He believed in spiritual body. That is nice. That is Krishna Consciousness…” Well, the idea of spiritual body, that is from St. Paul: *pneumatikon soma*. Of course, Christians think of the spiritual body as the resurrected material body but there is the idea of the spiritual body, in other words, at least God is a person. Once you have Trinity, you have spiritual persons in relationships, transcendental relativity. The Father, there are three persons, they are related to each other, that’s Vaishnava. When there is some kind of inner dynamic of spiritual persons in divinity.

**OK, that’s an essential element of Vaishnavism.**

Yes. For us, we pick out Radha and Krishna, That’s a dynamic by which that dynamic beauty and bliss is ever increasing and into which others can join. You can participate in this. When somebody’s spiritual aspiration is to become a *manjari*, a maid-servant of a *sakhi*, who is a servant of Radharani, you know there you’re getting into the, you have a role to play in this thing, which…that’s because it’s in *Chaitanya Caritamrita*\(^{104}\) that Radha and Krishna are together and Radha sees how beautiful Krishna is, she becomes more joyful, her beauty increases because, of course, it’s a spiritual body whatever you’re feeling, your joy increases, her beauty increases, she gets more beautiful, Krishna sees that and his joy increases, his beauty increases, she sees that, and so it goes…no end. So this relationship between them as an assistant of Radharani or whatever, you have something to add. You have some part in it. And we believe in the spiritual world, that there is a place for people. You look at the *Brhad Bhagavatamrita* even on Satyaloka, Tapaloka, Maharloka there are different communities worshiping different aspects of God. And we rank them what’s highest and not highest. We do because we have a set of values: spontaneous devotional service is higher than ritualistic worship. So we have from Chaitanya, we have the idea of what is the supreme. Or look at it this way, even the *rasas*\(^{105}\) are ranked because of increasing intimacy. On the other hand, if your *rasa* with Krishna - technically *rasa* is wrong it is your *rati* - if your *rati* with Krishna is that of servitude or friendship, that is your *rati*, that’s perfect.

**But servitude, isn’t that excluded from Goloka?**

No, I don’t know if it’s excluded…

Isn’t that Vaikuntha?

Generally, yes, that comes to the fore, but you know, we talk about these different realms but, let’s say, when Krishna’s in *Goloka*, are there pollens of dust on his feet? Are they persons? Are they alive? What’s their relationship? It might be even *santa rasa*\(^{106}\). I am not clear about that but I think that if all those relationships are there in *Goloka*, but it’s just the other ones that are privileged, most conducive. They are the more intimate, interactive rasas where awe and reverence is diminished.

---

\(^{103}\) The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust database.

\(^{104}\) A late medieval Bengali classic on Sri Chaitanya’s life and teachings.

\(^{105}\) *Rasi* and *rati* refer to an individual devotee’s preferred mood in approaching the Divine.

\(^{106}\) The devotional mood of passive adoration.
But to go on this theme of exclusivism, outside Vrindavan there is Srivan where Laxmi is performing austerities to cross over the Yamuna to enter Vrindavan...

Those are described in different areas, you know, she wants to get into Vrindavan because it’s just the conception. The example I usually get that, you know, if you become a big deal in England and you got it made, you get knighted by the Queen in a big ceremony and you meet the Queen. But if you really have it made, you get to go in the back door of the palace and sit down with her at the breakfast table with her while she’s in her house coat. (laughs)

That’s really included!

That’s really…, that’s more, you’re higher up, even though it’s missing the ceremonial greatness. You are the inner circle.

Do you think I can write about this concept of inclusivity/exclusivity in terms of rasa academically?

Well, the idea here within this one tradition, it allows for a lot of different relationships. And relationships in which majesty, you know, you have these two – majesty and sweetness which predominate. You know, you can appreciate, at least from my point of view, you can appreciate majesty. We had darshan of Venkateshvara and, you know, the Lord in his majesty is also very attractive. There is no doubt about it. You can appreciate it. But maybe what’s for you is even better, but it’s not that you denigrate the others. Now I don’t know if the people, like if you have santa rasa, a passive adoration, how you would see the more intimate rasas? Because in santa rasa there is an attraction but there is no impetus for servitorship. Then there is servitorship, a sense of being an inferior but you want to do something. And there is a list and to each one there is added something to it so there is a kind of hierarchy that way.

Is that hierarchy with additional qualities at each step, is that from the viewpoint of madhurya rasa?

7. I think it is because it’s written by Rupa Goswami. (laughs) I don’t know what viewpoint somebody who is from a Madhva tradition has on it, but this intimacy, this love in separation, is there in the Sri Vaishnavas.

It is?

Oh, yes.

I thought Madhavendra puri introduced it?

Madhavendra puri introduced conjugal love in the Madhva line. He was the first. But there are poems, Frank Clooney has done an analysis of these, a study of these (Sri Vaishnava poems). It is a beautiful new book he has about it. 109

Is that his book on comparative theology?

No, no, it’s a more recent book on love in separation. These Sri Vaishnava poems by Satakopan.

8. Here is John Carmen The Theology of Ramanuja Here is another book of his. This is interesting: Majesty and meekness: a comparative study of contrast and harmony in the concept of God Carman, John B. (1994)... Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Do you know John B. Carmen?

---

107 Vrindavan is Krishna’s childhood home. Srivan is a forest and Yamuna is a river in Vrindavan.
109 Clooney, Francis X (2013). His hiding place is darkness: a Hindu-Catholic theopoetics of divine absence [Elektronisk resurs].
No, I am not familiar.

I have three things of his. He was a Christian. Here is Tiruvaymoli. Frank Clooney studied these.

And he found love in separation?

Yes, it is definitely there, you read it, it’s there.

Cantwell Smith?

Sure. That book The Meaning and End of Religion really had a big impact on me when I first read that. Before I was a devotee, I think. Get Frank Clooney’s new book. With Clooney, it is clear that he can really appreciate longing for Krishna on a deep emotional and spiritual level. And I think in Clooney’s new book, it’s between Laxmi and Narayana that this takes place, it’s not the idea of Vrndavana.

There is separation also there in Vaikuntha?

It’s definitely love in separation That’s going on there.

That Father Clooney, a Jesuit at Harvard, would discover this confidential rasa! Love in separation in the Sri Vaisnava line and would be able to really deeply appreciate emotionally, spiritually...

Well, he did.

---

Dr Graham Schweig, professor of philosophy and religious studies at Christopher Newport University. Doctorate in Comparative Religion from Harvard and previously Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Virginia. Princeton University Press published (2005) his Dance of divine love: the rāsa līlā of Krishna from the Bhāgavatapurāṇa., India’s classic sacred love story.

---

110 The Tiruvaymoli ("words of the sacred mouth") is one of the Divya Prabandham, an important liturgical compilation of the (5-10th century CE) Tamil Alvar Bhaktas. The author self-identifies as a lovelorn Gopi pining for Krishna.