

Elijah Institute, dedicated to creating “understanding and harmony between the world’s religions ... through interfaith dialogue, education, research and dissemination between the world’s diverse faith communities” (*The Elijah Interfaith Institute*). Affiliated scholars represent the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Indian (Sikh/Jain/Hindu) faiths. The Institute sponsors research projects, public conferences and community-based initiatives. Among its publications, many of which have biblical resonances are: *Jewish Theology and World Religions* (2012); *Friendship Across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship* (2015); *The Jewish Encounter with Hinduism* (2016); and *Same God, Other God: Judaism, Hinduism, and the Problem of Idolatry* (2016).

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II. Christianity

1. Meaning and Contemporary Contexts. The term “interreligious dialogue” refers today in common usage to a conversation between individual or

collective representatives of two or more religious traditions. The relationship between different religions provides the reasons and determines the forms and contents of interreligious dialogical exchanges. Its overarching objective is to increase mutual understanding, insofar as this is seen as a decisive element for developing peaceful and just modes of coexistence and cooperation between adherents of different religions. Interreligious dialogues occur in many different contexts, from local conversations of believers to scholarly exchanges in international settings.

Religions are multi-dimensional forms of life, comprising different interrelated dimensions such as belief systems, ethical orientations, structures of worship, ritual practices, types of community organization, forms of aesthetic expression, all including an experiential dimension. Although interreligious dialogues may focus on beliefs, their truth claims and warrants, within a given tradition, they are always embedded in the richly textured life of communities. Furthermore, religions are always embedded in the wider contexts of societies and cultures, subject to political influences and economic as well as ecological factors. Interreligious dialogues constantly run the risk of overlooking either the complex ways in which religious traditions are woven into the textures of cultures or of neglecting the historical depth of their roots in traditions of religious practice. These risks become manageable when both the interrelations of religious communities and social and cultural contexts and the rootedness of religious life in traditions of practice and belief are included in interreligious dialogues.

The modern history of organized interreligious encounters begins with the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago 1893, held in conjunction with the World Columbian Exposition. For the first time representatives of the world religions and a number of new religious movements were presented together to an international audience. The speech by the Hindu monk Vivekananda (1847–1902) is regarded as a milestone in the history of the influence of Eastern religions in the West. The Parliament was revived in 1993 as a platform for fostering cooperation among the religions, based on the program of a “global ethic,” a minimal code of behavior, serving, much like the tradition of natural law, as a common denominator for the ethics of different religions.

The spread of initiatives for interreligious dialogue owes its impetus to the effects of the so-called “quasi religions” (Tillich), the modern ideologies of secularism, scientism, nationalism, communism, and the global expansion of capitalism on the traditional religions. The attempt at safeguarding religious traditions against the perceived relativizing effects of secularism in all spheres of life led, during

the 20th century, to the development of various forms of “fundamentalism,” not only in the monotheistic religions, but also in some Asian religious traditions. In an attempt to secure the fundamentals of religion against the effects of secularist ideologies and life-styles they have developed a literalist attitude to their sacred texts and a radically critical attitude towards other religions, often structurally very similar to non-religious totalitarian ideologies. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 illustrated both the vulnerability of late modern societies to violence motivated by a religious fanaticism, and the need for interreligious understanding and cooperation. The interreligious encounters in a globalizing world have sharpened the interest in the religion of others and led to the attempt of retrieving traditions of interreligious exchange in order to deal constructively with religious diversity.

2. Retrieving Resources for Interreligious Dialogue. The religious pluralist situation in most societies with its perils has been the background not only for developing Christian theologies of interreligious dialogue but also for retrieving the rich literary traditions of interreligious dialogues in history. Beginning with Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* there is an extensive literature of dialogical interaction with Judaism and Hellenistic philosophies, normally written as a decidedly unapologetic apology for Christianity, but nevertheless engaging with the literary partners in dialogue, be they Jewish, or later Muslim thinkers – and evoking a response from those whose beliefs were presented in a theologically stylized form (cf. Setzer). For the current challenges of interreligious dialogue the re-reading of such classics as the *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian* by Peter Abelard (1079–1142), the *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* by Ramon Llull (ca. 1232–ca. 1315) has made the philosophical and theological sophistication of the literary depiction of interreligious exchanges newly accessible. Nicholas of Cusa’s dialogue in the “heaven of reason” in *On the Peace of Faith*, written shortly after the Fall of Constantinople, offers a vision of transcending the variety of rites in the quest for the one true object of worship. Even the Reformers’ largely polemical engagement with other religions nevertheless show a degree of knowledge of traditions outside Christianity and a seriousness of theological reflection largely absent from modern theology. In spite of many deplorable and theologically unjustifiable aspects, especially with regard to Christian-Jewish relations, a closer study of the history of Christian theology since the Middle Ages shows that it cannot be written without doing justice to the interaction between the three monotheistic faiths. Recent research on Thomas Aquinas has suggested that his thought can only be reconstructed as part of a “triangle” of interaction between Ibn Sina, Moses ben Maimon, and scholastic

theology (Burrell). The *Colloquium of the Seven* by Jean Bodin (1530–1596), heavily influenced by his studies of Jewish philosophy, especially Maimonides, represents a late flowering of the genre of interreligious dialogues, accommodating the new confessional differences by casting a natural philosopher, a Calvinist, a Muslim, a Roman Catholic, a Lutheran, a Jew, and a sceptic in the roles of dialogue-partners. The dialogues of Francis Xavier, Matteo Ricci, and other Jesuits with representatives of Eastern religions, especially Buddhism and Confucianism, still provide important insights into the dialectics and rhetoric of dialogical exchanges and illustrate the necessity as well as the difficulties of “translational rationality” (Rubiés). The Enlightenment has had an ambiguous influence on interreligious exchanges. Its emphasis on toleration cannot be easily reconciled with its views of natural religion which relativize the differences between historical religious traditions and the significance of their textual bases.

3. Reasons and Textual Testimonies. In all interreligious dialogues there is a productive tension between rational arguments and references to sacred texts. The most radical example of a critique of the universal claims of discursive reason by the testimonies of revelation, communicated in forms of text-bound interpretive rationality, is provided by the dialogue *The Kuzari* of the Sephardic Jewish poet and philosopher Yehuda ha-Levi. In Christian theories and practices of interreligious dialogue, reference to the Bible can be employed for pointing to paradigmatic examples of dialogical exchanges (e.g., John 4: 1–26 or Acts 17: 16–32), and for securing the authenticity of the contents of dialogue with regard to crucial issues (e.g., the identity and nature of God, etc.).

A more radical Christian approach would take as its framework the fact that the biblical notion of rationality is one of communicative rather than reflective or contemplative rationality. This communicative paradigm is evident wherever the Bible is used as scripture in the practice of worship. Creation is seen as a communicative act of God where everything is called into being and invested with meaning by God’s word and where God’s human creatures are made responsible to God in judgment and grace. Humans are estranged from God by following other voices than that of the creator, and they are brought back into communion with God by God’s word becoming incarnate in a human person and in human acts of communication. Through acts of verbal and sacramental communication, witnessing to God’s grace and truth, they are led on the way to the perfected communion of God with God’s reconciled creation.

This understanding of rationality as communicative and dialogical rationality, exercised in address and response i.e., in conversation, is one that,

with different emphases, is shared by all three Abrahamic religions. Interreligious dialogue is placed within the framework of God's dialogical interaction with God's human creatures. The virtues of dialogue (Cornille 2008) should be understood as having their primary setting in the relationship between God and humanity. In this way the relationship to believers in other religions is shaped by the relationship of Christian believers to God. *Trust* in God and God's promises, rather than suspicion of others, their beliefs and practices, structures the relationship to others who are believed to be also addressed by God and so have a place in God's providence. *Penitence* takes the place of the idolatrous view of one's own religion as absolute, thereby denying God as the only true absolute. Divisiveness can be healed by the awareness of the *interconnectedness* of all God's creatures. Patterns of *mutuality* and *empathetic exchange* are strengthened in the conviction that God in Christ takes the place of sinners to restore them to their place in the communion with God. *Respect for particularity* is grounded in the recognition that God achieves God's universal purpose by working through the particularities of history in electing a particular people, achieving reconciliation for all in the particular life and death of a particular person. *Hospitality* in the sense of being hospitable to others and of accepting the hospitality of others becomes an anticipation of God's eschatological hospitality to the whole creation.

Practices of interreligious dialogue which are shaped by the practices and beliefs of one's own relationship to God, based on the biblical patterns of exercising this relationship, cannot assume the universality of one's own beliefs but must be committed to strategies of analogical extension and dialogical translation. Such a practice of interreligious dialogue is spreading in the movement of "scriptural reasoning" (Ford/Pecknold) where dialogical exchange is based on the exploration and interpretation of the sacred texts of religious traditions in the presence of, with and for the others. Having started as a practice of "textual reasoning" among Jewish scholars it has developed to the practice of "scriptural reasoning" among the Abrahamic faiths. In conversation with religious traditions, mainly in the East, where experience is placed before the authority of texts, it has to be tested whether the strong experiential thrust of interreligious scriptural reasoning permits its transformation into "experiential reasoning."

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III. Islam

The Qur'an shows clearly that Muḥammad's message in 7th-century Arabia emerged into a context where other religious communities were already well-established, most important among them being Judaism, Christianity, a form of monotheism related to the faith of Abraham known as Ḥanīfiyya, and Arabian polytheism. The Qur'an frequently refers to relations between the Muslim community and followers of these other faiths, and its often highly specific comments, which refer to particular incidents and contexts, can together seem ambiguous unless they are approached in the proper manner (Duderija). Aspects of continuity and commonality with other faiths, especially Judaism and Christianity, whose adherents are called *Ahl al-kitāb* (People of Scripture), are intertwined in the Qur'an with aspects of the emergence of Islam and emphasis on the originality and distinctiveness of Muslim identity. Thus, there are verses which place some of the *Ahl al-kitāb* in a favorable light (e.g., S 22: 17; 5: 69; 2: 62), while in other verses they are strongly criticized for some of their beliefs and practices. Among these are the belief in the divinity of Jesus, which is portrayed as a form of polytheism (*shirk*), the distortion of earlier revelations (*tahrīf*), and the killing of prophets sent to them. This highly contextual and apparently ambivalent approach is reflected in the reports about Muḥammad's attitude towards the religious other, as these are contained in the Ḥadīth.

The Muslim doctrine that revelation has ended with the Qur'an, and the belief that Islam has superseded earlier religions as formulated by classical Muslim scholarship, has been a strong factor in shaping Muslim responses to interreligious dialogue. At times, it resulted in highly aggressive views towards other faiths, e.g., Ibn Ḥazm (d.1054), al-Qarāfī (d.1285), and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who viewed Christianity as a form of unbelief and poly-