



Toward 'Generous Love': Recent Anglican Approaches to World Religions

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ABSTRACT

How should Anglicans regard other religions? The approaches of a number of Anglican writers considered in this article are valuable, both to Anglicans and to others, beginning with F.D. Maurice in the late nineteenth century. Others include Kenneth Cragg, an Arabist and Evangelical; Alan Race, author of the *Exclusivist, Inclusive, and Pluralist* paradigm; Kwok Pui-Lan, a contemporary Asian feminist; Ian S. Markham, who proposes a 'Theology of Engagement'; Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury and an important writer on the theology of Raimon Panikkar; David F. Ford, proponent of the Cambridge Scriptural Reasoning (SR) program that seeks 'better quality disagreement'; and Keith Ward, whose systematic theology develops a concept of 'convergent spirituality'. Moving from the theoretical to the practical, the article discusses the global United Religions Initiative of William E. Swing, former Episcopal Bishop of California. Collectively, these authors provide a range of intersecting Anglican approaches to the evolving question of Anglican relations with other world religions.

KEYWORDS: world religions, inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism, convergent spirituality, scriptural reasoning, *Generous Love*, F.D. Maurice, Keith Ward, Kenneth Cragg, David F. Ford

1. The Revd Dr Frederick Quinn is an Episcopal priest, chaplain at Washington National Cathedral and US diplomat, and author of a number of books including *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

No question is more controversial in the contemporary Anglican Communion than how Anglicans should regard neighbors who are members of other world religions. Are they unenlightened pagans? Or equal in the sight of a loving God? Or stuck in some way station(s) in the middle like hikers on a mountain trail? The Anglican Communion is well positioned to advance dialogue on this topic through the writings of several of its major writers who have served as missionaries abroad, travelled extensively, been active in interfaith communities in their home countries, and written probingly on the subject. Their numbers include Kenneth Cragg, a leading Arabist and evangelical missionary bishop, whose comprehensive writings on Islam also suggest ways Anglicans can approach dialogue with members of other religions; Alan Race, a pioneering British author on interfaith relations; Kwok Pui-Lan, a contemporary Asian feminist, who argues that Asian sacred texts deserve an equal place alongside the Bible; Ian Markham, whose 'Theology of Engagement' offers practical guidelines on how to approach an untidy, incongruous subject; and Rowan Williams, who as theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury, with characteristic lucidity and caution, has framed a possible Anglican response to the world of religious pluralism. Another important Anglican contribution to the wider religious dialogue is David F. Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, and author of the growing 'Scriptural Reasoning' (SR) program that brings Jews, Muslims and Christians together to probe the often heated differences among them and produced what one participant called 'better quality disagreements'.

Finally, and most comprehensive of all, Keith Ward, Regius Professor of Divinity (retired) at Oxford University, elaborates on the concept of 'congruent spirituality' and suggests an approach to other religions that is both accepting of them while holding to a uniquely Christian grounding, a position implicitly drawn from the Anglican *via media*. Across the turbulence of recent decades, these Anglican authors raise most of the questions triggered in debates about religious dialogue and recommend ways of moving ahead peacefully in what is an explosive field.

The article concludes with a survey of the longtime efforts of Episcopal Bishop William E. Swing to make interfaith theory a reality through the concrete global activity of the San Francisco based United Religious Initiative. The Anglican journey thus moves from the theoretical to the practical, from theology to the concrete efforts of specific groups to articulate their witness on interfaith relations. The choices for this article are admittedly selective, and some readers will lament the absence of a favored figure. Also, the subject matter is like painting a moving train, for it is in constant movement.

Notwithstanding, it is possible to separate out a distinctive range of Anglican voices writing about the relationship of Christianity, as they understand it, to other religions.

The figures discussed in this article are not the first Anglicans to discuss world religions. Comments about world religions initially appear incidentally among the reports and letters of clergy and laity who went abroad as part of the expanding British Empire from the late sixteenth century onward.² Chaplains were originally sent out to minister to trading company employees, such as those of the East India Company, and settler colonies. By the nineteenth century, a strong missionary presence had developed with groups like the evangelical Church Missionary Society (CSM) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), and several university missions, but such groups were often more content to highlight their differences with other Christians, while describing other faiths encountered as pagan and heathen without considering their content.

*Generous Love (2008): Report of the Anglican Communion
Network for Interfaith Concerns*

A gradual emergence of official Anglican documents on interfaith issues has also been a feature of recent times, chief of which is *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue*, a report from the Anglican Communion Network for Interfaith Concerns.³ Like any such report, *Generous Love* is cautious and qualified in places, but is all the more impressive for moving beyond the usual wooden language of committee documents. It was also possible because of earlier positive consultations in Bangalore, India, and Oslo, Norway, in 2003, and Kaduna, Nigeria, in 2007. The Anglican position paper contains a strong Trinitarian grounding, and draws on the classical Anglican triad of Scripture, tradition and reason. 'The Anglican approach dismisses nothing as outside God's concern', it states, and describes a 'world in its manifold differences in the expectation that it ultimately coheres'.⁴ Particular historical settings and local or regional

2. The substance of this article is drawn from the author's forthcoming book, *Welcoming the Inter Faith Future: Religious Pluralism and Globalization*.

3. *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue* was published in 2008 by the Anglican Consultative Council, London, and is available from the Anglican Network for Inter Faith Concerns, http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/resources/documents/generous_love.cfm.

4. *Generous Love*, pp. 2-3.

contexts allow Anglicans to find both the possibilities of expressing robustly different convictions while living together in unity. The document portrays a generous Christianity and a specific Anglican charge to maintain its active presence among other faith communities. By 'abiding as signs of the body of Christ in each place' and 'offering embassy and hospitality to our neighbors', it both gives and receives 'the blessing of God our Father'. The document states, 'The convictions of John Wesley that though we cannot think alike yet we must love alike, and that we may be of one heart though we are not of one opinion, are compelling for those of us who work with people of differing beliefs on practical projects'.⁵ A constant tension between theology and experience is acknowledged, as is the reality that 'in interfaith relations we need to live with provisionality, paradox, and disappointment'.⁶ *Generous Love* was four years in the making and clearly represents an advance over most major denominational statements of recent time, and remains in the lineage of the Vatican landmark document, *Nostra Aetate* (1965) that reoriented Western approaches to world religions and softened the edges of interfaith dialogue.

F.D. Maurice and The Religions of the World and their Relations to Christianity

During the height of Victorian imperialism, a different voice on other religions emerged, largely unacknowledged in his time.⁷ Frederick Denison Maurice's (1805–72) writings on world religions, like so many other subjects, defy easy categorization, but represent a launching point for the consideration of modern Anglican views about other religions. Maurice's views were laid out in a set of lectures, *The Religions of the World and their Relations to Christianity*, given in 1846 at King's College, London. Maurice drew on the literature forthcoming from British, French and German colonial figures, explorers, and scholars, and the publications of groups like the Royal Asiatic Society, in which he argued that the universal Christ was present in all ages. Most striking is his open tone and willingness to find value in other religions, without employing the underlying condemnatory note used by many contemporaries. In *The Religions of the World* Maurice vividly portrayed the differences between religious understanding in his and earlier times; in past

5. *Generous Love*, p. 5.

6. *Generous Love*, p. 6.

7. Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Religions of the World and their Relations to Christianity* (London: John W. Parker, 1847).

centuries religion was publicly the province of fear-inducing priests and lawgivers. But despite such efforts at centralized control, an underlying basic faith still endured that Maurice identified as Christian in character. Next he divided the world into two distinct camps – living and dead religions. The living religions were Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism; the dead were the religions of Persia, Egypt, Greece, Rome and 'The Gothic' of northern Europe. For Anglicans discussing world religions today, the writings of Maurice represent an important source, but in his own time he was largely ignored.

Kenneth Cragg on Islamic-Christian and Interfaith Encounters

A major Anglican voice on the Islamic-Christian and wider interfaith encounter in recent times is Kenneth Cragg, for over half a century an Anglican evangelical bishop and Arabist, and author of *The Call of the Minaret* (1956), and *A Certain Sympathy of Scriptures, Biblical and Quranic* (2004).⁸ Cragg is often presented as a traditional Evangelical, but his stated positions about other religions are more complex than is usually assumed. While being solidly biblically grounded, he is also a herald of the 'generous Christianity' centrists emerging today. Cragg first visited the Middle East as a young missionary in 1939. He lived eight years in Beirut, learned Arabic, and spent the next sixty years writing about Islam and Christianity, and interfaith relations – although interfaith relations was always a topic Cragg enfolded in his larger studies of Christian-Muslim relations.

When asked 'Is it possible for Muslims, Christians, and Jews to find a greater religious convergence than they have found to date?' Cragg replied:

What I have always thought is there is a genuine, honest, real overlap between Muslims and Christianity, so that the attitude many people had of 'them and us' alienation is misleading. It is important not to let that sense of otherness dominate; we can fraternize over what is genuinely mutual. The concept of creation, human creaturehood, the divine stake and human response, and the whole concept of prophethood are concepts we share.⁹

8. Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), *A Certain Sympathy of Scriptures, Biblical and Quranic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004) and *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999).

9. Oral interview: Kenneth Cragg with Frederick Quinn, Oxford, UK, 18 February 2003. A longer version of this interview was published in "'Am I Not

Additionally,

Mission is not fixed and static, it is something learned as we go along. The Great Commission, the idea of making disciples out of all peoples, is in the plural. Peoples means cultures, languages, and religions. The object of the Christian religion is to bring the individual into faith, the symbol of that is baptism. I wouldn't for a second suggest that we forsake that, but we must ask 'Is there a discreet and compassionate Christian relationship we can establish with other religions as such, realizing they are going to be part of the scene?' They are not going to disappear. They are going to stay.

Could Christians say Muhammad is God's Prophet and Christ is the Son of God, and leave the question's final disposition to God? Cragg cited linguistic examples in his response. 'A simple grammatical illustration; in Arabic grammar God is subject of all predication, yet different in different predicates, yet all predicates lead to same subject. In English we can say "Manchester is a city in Connecticut or a city in England." The two predicates can be the same, but are different, leading to the same subject, the same word.' In conversation I tried to draw Cragg out into declaring himself a conservative or a liberal, but he deftly avoided the attempt. Using textual, historical and linguistic examples he constantly spoke of an expansive, merciful God beyond the confines of any specific faith tradition.

Alan Race and the Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism Paradigm

While Cragg emerged as the Anglican Communion's leading scholar on Islam in the mid-twentieth century, the discovery of a typology to analyze the relationship of world religions with Christianity came when the British cleric, Alan Race, introduced the three categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism in his path-breaking book *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (1983).¹⁰ Race was the fortunate graduate student who constructed a totally new concept at an opportune moment; if he were a scientist, he would have been a candidate for a major award for moving the research field ahead. The three categories remain widely used today, especially by Christians, to describe their appraisals of other faiths. Race reflected on the book's origins, 'There was a gap in what was a huge subject area, the

(Footnote continued)

Your Lord?' Kenneth Cragg on Muslim-Christian Dialogue', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 26.1 (April 2006).

10. Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

Christian response to other faiths. I was in Bradford when the first Muslim immigrants were coming to the United Kingdom in great numbers. "How do we interact with them?" "Who are these people?" were questions in the back of my mind. The serious study of other religions was just beginning.¹¹

Race spent over a quarter century in such urban interfaith settings where the question of whether or not the Bible is the sole source of revelation about world religions was raised. 'There was a confusion of responses, but they seemed to fall into three categories, which I incipiently saw as Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist', he recalled. Exclusivism and inclusivism were two sides of the same coin, but pluralism meant crossing the Rubicon where 'You cease to have to defend superiority. You become more aware of the provisional nature of all religions, you become more aware of the mystical tradition, and you become suspect in church circles.'

'I never meant for the categories to be water tight', he reflected several years later. 'Many people today would say they don't fit any of them. Lots of people are caught in a transitional place. People make the mistake of thinking religions are phenomenologically the same thing, which is not the case. But that does not mean they are unconnected at deeper levels.'¹²

Race became editor of *Interreligious Insight: A Journal of Dialogue and Engagement*, and Dean of Postgraduate Studies at St Philip's Centre, Leicester. Recently he was coeditor of two survey volumes, a core text and a reader on *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* where he observed, 'The task of a Christian theology of religions ... is to negotiate the via media between the universalism of religious truth and the particularity of its diverse glimpsing. The religions are neither "all the same" nor are they "all different."¹³

St Philip's Church, Leicester, where Race also serves as vicar, is set in the heart of one of the United Kingdom's most populous multicultural and multifaith settings, a place where religious communities have worked hard to avoid the race riots that plagued other cities, and to promote a

11. Alan Race, oral interview with Frederick Quinn, Leicester, UK, 12 July 2008.

12. Alan Race, oral interview with Frederick Quinn, Leicester, UK, 12 July 2008.

13. Alan Race and Paul Hedges, *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths: SCM Core Text* (London: SCM Press, 2008) and Paul Hedges and Alan Race (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths: An SCM Reader* (London: SCM Press, 2010). The quote is from *Core Text*, p. 13.

climate for cooperation among different ethnic and religious groups. St Philip's was a traditional Anglican parish with a gradually increasing number of African and some Asian members. A large mosque (sometimes called 'St Philip's mosque' by locals) was built across the street in a city that is now more than 50 percent Asian. And within Leicester there are 123 churches, 29 mosques, 22 temples, seven gurdwaras, two synagogues, and a Jain temple. Several languages are spoken in the neighborhood, which witnessed a large influx of immigrants in 1972 when Idi Amin expelled more than 50,000 East Asians from Uganda. Since then, Leicester became a magnet city for other Asian immigrants, as well as Kurds, Turks, Afghans, Iraqis, Poles, Slovakian Roma, Zimbabweans and Nigerians.¹⁴ The interaction of religions was thus not a theoretical subject, but a daily reality. This is important because it suggests that if the focus of interfaith relations is in local settings, the emphasis will change dramatically, from the doctrinal to the practical, and the basic question becomes – how should we respond to our neighbors?

Exclusivism, extra ecclesiam nulla salus

The first of Race's three categories is exclusivism, one that traditionally has been identified with institutional Roman Catholicism, but which a segment of Protestantism endorses as well. Broadly cast, exclusivism makes three claims: that the Christian Bible is the only source of religious revelation, citing texts like Jn 14.6 and Acts 4.2; that Jesus Christ is the sole agent of salvation (with no rivals), and that the church represents the only presence of God's grace and salvation in history. Exclusivist doctrine coalesced in the third century through the figure of Cyprian (200–258), remembered for introducing the landmark concept of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church there is no salvation). Although originally aimed at heretics and schismatics, the doctrine was gradually expanded to include Jews and pagans, and by the time of the Council of Florence in 1442 its broader interdictions were firmly in place. It also attracted a large Protestant following. A version of the exclusivist position was stated by Judson Smith of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1896:

There is no faith which Christianity is not worthy to replace, which it is not destined to replace. It is not to share the world *with* Islam, or *with* Buddhism, or *with* any other religious system. It is the true religion for

14. Trish Roberts-Thomson, Leicester City Council, 'Community Cohesion and Faith in Leicester' (slide presentation), Leicester, UK, 18 March 2009.

man in the Orient and in the Occident, in the first century and in the twentieth century and as long as time shall last.¹⁵

Inclusivism and 'Anonymous Christians'

Inclusivism, Race's second category, both widely accepts elements of truth in other religions and finds they represent less than the salvation offered through Christ. The principal inclusivist voice of modern times was Karl Rahner, who popularized the phrase 'anonymous Christians' in the 1960s.¹⁶ The German Jesuit stated that Christianity understood itself to be an absolute religion but also exists in a historical-social context, where not all people have been exposed to the Gospel. This means that other religions can exist, erroneous and depraved as they might be, and still be recipients of divine grace.¹⁷ Opponents, or those who misunderstand the church, or have not encountered it, may turn out to be 'anonymous Christians', well intended, but waiting for enlightenment only the church can provide. 'Anonymous to whom?' later critics asked. As both the content and values of other religions became increasingly well known, Westerners found them sources of deep riches, and relations among religions became more complex than Rahner imagined in his time.

Inclusivists also broadened the interpretation of many traditional biblical passages. The Good Samaritan (Lk. 10.25-37), the faithful Canaanite woman (Mt. 15.28), the Syrian leper (Lk. 4.24-27) and the grateful Roman Centurion (Lk. 7.9) are some figures they point to as representatives of a wider Christian vision. In each example, ethnic, political and religious boundaries were extended beyond their traditional limited confines.

The turning point vaulting inclusivism into prominence came when the Second Vatican Council issued far more gracious comments about other religions than in any previous Vatican documents, including that they 'often reflect a ray of truth' (*Nostra Aetate*). Vatican II stopped short of saying such religions represented ways of salvation, but made clear the Catholic Church 'rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions [and] has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts

15. Quoted in Daniel Strange, 'Exclusivisms: "Indeed their Rock Is Not Like our Rock"', in Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (London: SCM Press, 2008), p. 42.

16. Strange, 'Exclusivisms', pp. 38, 43.

17. Karl Rahner, 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions', in John Hick and Brian Hebblewaite, *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), p. 38.

and doctrines' of such religions. The importance of Vatican II for Protestants and Catholics was real. Basically, it created a newer, more expansive setting for religious dialogue, and while there was some retreating from this position by institutional churches in decades ahead, fundamental new parameters for religious encounters were put in place, especially for the sustained encounter of Western Christians with other religions.

Pluralism, a Process, Not a Doctrine

Pluralism is distinctly different from exclusivism and inclusivism, Race has argued, and pluralism acknowledges the possibility that there may be several valid paths to salvation.¹⁸ While it recognizes the uniqueness of Christianity, pluralism does not elevate the Christian faith to a position of superiority or finality over other faith traditions, nor does it relegate others to lower, lesser places.¹⁹ Also, pluralism requires an active dialogue among participants, not as a debate to be won or lost, but as a truth-seeking encounter that includes clear points of agreement and disagreement. On pluralism, Race wrote, 'There is no reason to doubt the validity of the religious apprehension of other religious traditions and every reason to accept their integrity.... The spiritual fruits of the many faith traditions seem comparable: all have inspired saints and holy figures who have been active on either individual or sociopolitical levels.'²⁰

Additionally, pluralism does not represent a single ideology, but an open process through which participants engage in give-and-take encounters. Pluralism implies an open-ended engagement where participants are not asked to abandon deeply held positions, but to encounter numerous other pilgrims who have made similar journeys.²¹ 'There is no such thing as a generic pluralist', Diana L. Eck, head of the Harvard Pluralism project, has written. 'There are Christian pluralists, Hindu pluralists, and evenly avowedly humanistic pluralists - all daring

18. This article does not survey various interpretations of salvation. Useful authors on this subject include Gavin D'Costa, Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Paul F. Knitter, Peter C. Phan, Gerald O'Collins and Amos Yong.

19. Alan Race, *Interfaith Encounter: The Twin Tracks of Theology and Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p. 33.

20. Race, *Interfaith Encounter*, pp. 31-32.

21. Diana L. Eck, 'A New Religious America: Managing Religious Diversity in A Democracy: Challenges and Prospects for the 21st Century', Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 20-21 August 2002; available at: <http://www.usembassymalaysia.org.my/eck.html>.

to be themselves, not in isolation from but in relation to one another.²² Eck moved further than Race on what constitutes pluralism, and still others would move even further. Gavin D'Costa, a Roman Catholic advisor to the Archbishop of Canterbury, articulated a traditional Catholic position, but one cognizant of the content to other religions. Amos Yong, a leading Pentecostal theologian, interpreted the encounter of world religions in the language of global Pentecostal theology, and S. Mark Heim, a Baptist missionary/ theologian, interpreted the journey of world religions not toward a single mountain, but toward different mountains (to use but one metaphor of the journey or religious quest).²³ The language and perspective of such writers of the 1990s diverged in different directions, but much of it had origins in Race's work of the 1980s.

Kwok Pui-Lan and the Comparability of Eastern and Western Sacred Texts

A distinctive new perspective on interfaith relations was represented by Asian Christian writers of the post-World War II period, such as Kwok Pui-Lan, who teaches at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and who has written extensively of the value of Asian sacred texts, myths and stories.²⁴ This includes comparing the content of the Bible with Asian sources and moving beyond the tradition where, if two texts are compared, the Bible will always be the normative document. Such differences can now 'be used to amplify certain dimensions of the biblical text or bring to the surface divergences in the religious worldviews shaping the texts. The tensions between the two texts call for more in-depth dialogue and reexamination of Christian doctrines'.²⁵ The Anglican feminist theologian's position, widely argued by other Asians, is that the Bible represents one of several scriptural traditions that have deeply nourished Asians and the task of a modern biblical interpreter is not only to discover how to live in a multifaith society, but also how to engage in the scriptural texts of people of

22. Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 195.

23. S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001) and *Salvations, Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

24. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), p. 64.

25. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 62–63.

different faiths. This does not amount to either rejection of past traditions, nor uncritical acceptance of them, but an appreciation of ancient religious heritages and the texts that have deeply influenced Asians but are little known in the West.²⁶ She wrote:

Asian Christians must debunk western claims that the Bible is the sole revelation of God because such claims reinforce the ethnocentrism and cultural hegemony of the West. They contribute as well to the perception among Asians that the Bible is the book of foreign aggressors. Instead of fencing ourselves in with a closed and rigid understanding of Christian identity, Asian Christians should learn from the wisdom garnered by our ancestors through the millennia that truth is available in many diverse forms and teachings.²⁷

In short, Asian sacred books should be allowed to speak on their own terms and Western Christians should not claim the superiority of their own story over other sacred narratives. Pui-Lan's writings take a traditional Anglican perspective, then expand it beyond its traditional colonial confines, asking fundamental questions about religious truth and its cultural packaging, a question contemporary Anglican writers are only beginning to explore.

Ian S. Markham: Dialogue as a 'Theology of Engagement'

Somewhat different from other approaches to the question of how to enter into dialogue with other religions is Ian S. Markham's carefully construed concept of 'Engagement' in his book, *A Theology of Engagement*.²⁸

Markham, Dean and President of Virginia Theological Seminary, was a former dean of the Hartford Theological Seminary, long a center for the study of world religions. He also studied and lectured in India, and made a conscious effort to fully include evangelical and conservative Christians in the interfaith encounter, one that he suggested has been often shaped by the viewpoints of liberal, middle-class Westerners. He recognized the urgency of expanding the range of participants when he wrote, 'anyone who is interested in or participates in interfaith dialogue

26. An introduction to Western-Asian comparative Christian thought is contained in three books by Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), and *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

27. Pui-Lan, *Discovering the Bible*, p. 30.

28. Ian S. Markham, *A Theology of Engagement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

does not need interfaith dialogue ... anyone who is opposed adamantly to interfaith dialogue desperately needs interfaith dialogue'.²⁹

Such encounters should be more than verbal exchanges, inviting listening, dialogue, shared prayer, and action that subsequently affect the religious beliefs of all participants. Markham's model was further refined to include the additional elements of assimilation, resistance and overhearing. Christian religious assimilation drew from various sources, including non-Christian ones. Resistance was the opposite, rejecting some sources as being incompatible with Christian revelation. This twin process of absorption and rejection was part of the continuing encounter of religions.

But then Markham added an intriguing third category, 'overhearing', in which participants find illumination from both formal, programmed encounters with representatives of other religious traditions and from the surprises such encounters generate.³⁰ An example might be the discovery of deep insights gained from a Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu text. 'Overhearing' such sources does not connect all the dots but adds a newly opened door for future explorations. If parts of the interreligious debate do not tie up neatly, it is because the discussion is in its preliminary, not its closing aspects, and because 'good engaged theology needs to be messy'.³¹

Markham framed his broader invitation:

A constructive, engaged theology grounded in our core convictions disclosed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus should be the Christian attitude to other faith traditions. The act of dialogue where you learn of God those truths that are not contained in our tradition, but are nevertheless compatible with the core convictions, is an act of Christian faithfulness. Countless Christians have discovered this truth. Pioneers who lived this spirit settled in India, learned from Sufis, and have been shaped by rabbis. Such pioneers are models we should seek to emulate.³²

To more ably participate in interfaith conversations, Markham encouraged participants to be firmly grounded and articulate in their own tradition and to frankly raise difficult questions about the beliefs of other traditions. And quite the opposite from Pope Benedict XVI, he urged participants to pray together before discussing whether

29. Ian S. Markham, *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Model of Interfaith Dialogue* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), p. 145.

30. Markham, *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, p. 49.

31. Markham, *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, p. 168.

32. Markham, *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, p. 169.

shared prayer is possible, realizing that even within Christian positions there are a wide range of prayer forms, vocabularies and gestures. 'Conversations about whether we should pray together are not the place to start. Enjoying a focused silence together is a much better starting point. Let God do some of the work. Words can come later.'³³

What emerges from the statements of contemporary Asian Christians and authors like Markham is a much broader concept of dialogue than previously employed, offering thoughtful interpretations that affect every aspect of modern religious encounters. Amos Yong, a contemporary Pentecostal theologian, wrote of the transformative quality of such sustained dialogue that 'is not an accidental luxury ... but an essential practice that we must cultivate in order to live in truth and to grow in truth. Fidelity to the Son of God who went into a far country for the sake of the world requires that we also take the journey into the far country of the lives of those in other faiths for the sake of our world, which includes us and them together. The result cannot but be mutually transformative.'³⁴

Rowan Williams on the Plurality of Faiths

Religious pluralism, carefully construed, is an integral aspect of Christianity, Rowan Williams wrote in response to one of Raimon Panikkar's books. Panikkar (1918–2010) was a Roman Catholic priest who was born of a Spanish Catholic mother and Indian Hindu father. He authored over thirty books and taught at both Harvard University and the University of California at Santa Barbara and famously described his personal journey as one where he 'left' as a Christian, 'found' himself as a Hindu, and 'returned' as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian.³⁵ 'There is no perspective outside plurality, but no legitimacy either in *stopping* with unorganized plurality', Williams wrote in reviewing Panikkar's *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*.³⁶ 'Panikkar's pluralism is not limitless. (Is there any pluralism that is?)' Williams asked. 'We do not, as Christians,

33. Markham, *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, p. 133.

34. Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other, Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), pp. 158–59.

35. Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandic Experience* (ed. and intro. by Scott Eastham; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998), p. v.

36. Rowan Williams, 'Trinity and Plurality', in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 5.

set the goal of including the entire human race in a single religious institution, nor do we claim that we possess all authentic religious insight.' And the goal of interfaith encounters is to find ways of cooperation among religions 'which does not involve the triumph of one theory or one institution or one culture'. What emerges is 'a hopeful and creative pluralism, its affirmation of the irreducible importance of history, or human difference and human converse'.³⁷

Many years later Williams returned to pluralist questions in a lecture, 'The finality of Christ in a pluralist world', in which he urged the sort of religious dialogue that would allow participants to 'see what the other person's face looks like when it is turned to God'. At several points Williams reinforced the idea, 'I'm very content to let God be the judge of how anyone outside the visible family of faith is related to Jesus or is turned towards the Father, including Muslims and agnostics whose lives project a Christ-like aura.'³⁸ Williams's thoughts about other religions, like his writings on sexual issues, are intriguing yet unfinished. The theologian's study and the Archbishop's Palace are two different venues, eliciting two different responses – one expansive, one cautious. Still, Williams has actively pursued a broad interreligious dialogue, especially with Jewish and Muslim counterparts, resulting in several key interfaith documents. In his introduction to *Generous Love* he wrote:

The intellectual ferment of a couple of decades ago, when scholars began to reflect on rival claims to truth or finality of the various faiths, has been brought home to everyone as our societies become more diverse – and sadly, as conflicts on the global scene become more bitter. Many Christians are torn between wanting to affirm the importance of dialogue and not wanting to compromise their allegiance to the one Lord and Saviour whom they proclaim as the desire of the nations.³⁹

*David F. Ford and the Cambridge Scriptural Reasoning (SR) Program:
Producing 'Better Quality Disagreement'*

Many Christians will be drawn to the work of David F. Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, that focuses on deep textual analysis, while avoiding the political and historical arenas entered into by others, like Pui-Lan. Ford is the author of several major

37. Williams, 'Trinity and Plurality', pp. 7–11.

38. Rowan Williams, 'The Finality of Christ in a Pluralist World', a lecture given by Archbishop Rowan Williams, during a visit to the Diocese of Guilford, 2 March 2010; available at: www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2789, p. 6.

39. *Generous Love*, p. 1.

works, like *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, edited with Rachel Muers of the University of Exeter, and *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, in a popular Oxford University Press series. The Northern Ireland-born academic is equally conversant with both classical theology and poetical literature, doing much to call a wider public's attention to the works of the contemporary Irish poet, Michael O'Saidhail. In recent years he has been writing increasingly about Wisdom literature and the importance of cries:

The centrality of cries was massively reinforced by the book of Job, which fascinated me more and more, and by noticing how the Bible is pervaded by cries, with the Psalms being almost pure cry.... Above all, there are the cries of love: God's love for us and all creation: our love for God, each other, and creation; and the anguished cries of those longing for love. This suggests the last word about wisdom: that it is the wisdom of love.⁴⁰

Ford's theological acumen has been drawn on by several Archbishops of Canterbury. *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life*, was George Carey's Lenten book in 1977. Ford also, at Rowan Williams's request, prepared the Bible study themes for the 2008 Lambeth Conference. He was also a key participant in ongoing Muslim-Christian engagements, and in 2009 lectured at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat. It is through the Cambridge Scriptural Reasoning (SR) Program that Ford is most widely known to wider audiences. The initiative brings together representatives of the Abrahamic faiths to study sacred texts from each tradition and 'to produce better quality disagreement', based on patient listening, building trust, reflecting on the readings, and doing so in a setting of joy and praise. Ford's wider approach to the Bible is to treat it as sacred drama. A search for the face of Jesus surfaces at points in his writings, so does compassion for the disabled, and a plea for teachers to be thoughtful mentors to new generations of students, many of whom are on an undefined spiritual quest of their own.

Followers of the program will ask if it is not now time to use its considerable expertise to expand beyond the Abrahamic faiths and outside a university setting. Its methodology could be profitably adapted for the growing numbers of interfaith encounters in mosques, synagogues, and churches and community settings in Nigeria and

40. David F. Ford, 'New Life for Old Words', *In Character: A Journal of Everyday Virtues by the John Templeton Foundation*, 1 September 2009; available at: <http://incharacter.org/features/new-life-for-old-words/>.

Indonesia, for example, where religious leaders hope to move beyond present tensions to more positive expressions of interfaith cooperation. Additionally, the perspective of the Scriptural Reasoning program could expand beyond its largely Eurocentric base and incorporate the interfaith issues articulated by Asians, Africans and religious voices in Latin America. This could enhance the major attractions of the program, something that successfully bridges interdisciplinary frontiers, representing reasoned and compassionate discourse in the volatile minefield of contemporary encounters among world religions.

Keith Ward at the Crossroads and the Convergence of World Faiths

The British theologian Keith Ward has identified two approaches to the study of world religions representing 'open theology' and 'closed theology'. The former (which he clearly favors) encourages members of different religions to both probe the depths of their own faith traditions and recalibrate beliefs in the light of new knowledge gained from encounters with other religions. 'Closed theology' is just that, insisting on the unqualified paramountcy of a single tradition and yielding no ground to the possibility that other traditions have any legitimacy of their own as agents of salvation. His systematic theology contains sections on Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and the Vedic religions of India, and among major contemporary theologians he is one of the most comprehensive Anglican writers to advance the possibilities of a Comparative Theology.⁴¹

Ward fits easily into no conventional box. The retired Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, he has held academic positions in several English and overseas universities. Among his more than twenty books are four volumes of systematic theology, *Religion and Revelation* (1994), *Religion and Creation* (1996), *Religion and Human Nature* (1998), and *Religion and Community* (2000). He grew up in the north of England and was encouraged by several Methodist pastors to expand his religious curiosity and intellectual horizons. As a student at Oxford, like many of his generation, he was influenced by Ian Ramsey, professor of philosophy and later Bishop of Durham. Then, with the Royal Air Force in the Persian Gulf, he underwent a conversion experience, and has maintained friendships with several colleagues of more fundamentalist persuasion. 'I experienced the living Christ as a personal presence', he recalled. Also, in his early thirties he visited India, where he became immersed in the

41. Frederick Quinn, 'Divine Revelation', *The Witness* (Internet version), 7 April 2005.

Vedas (sacred knowledge) of the Hindu tradition. 'I read about Indian philosophy before I read about Christian philosophy,' he remarked.

Convergent Spirituality

Ward believes 'it does make sense to speak of a common structure of faith at the heart of many religious traditions'. He compares religions to a tree with various faith traditions having common roots but different branches. This leads to a 'convergent spirituality' where members 'learn from complementary beliefs in other traditions, expecting that there are forms of revelation one's own tradition does not express.... It will encourage a dialogue with conflicting and dissenting views, being prepared to confront its own tradition with critical questions' arising from differing historical settings. But convergence does not mean the movement of all traditions to a single place. 'It is a recognition that many cultures and traditions are engaged in a common quest for unity' and 'hope that they may seek and achieve a convergence in common core beliefs, as complementary images come to be more widely recognized'.⁴²

This will not lead to a single global religion, but to a realignment of known religious boundaries, and open new possibilities for cooperation until now considered impossible. In such a world, Christianity will be part of a global web of faiths, while older ecumenical movements become obsolete,

engulfed by wider global movements that seek fluid and changing alliances between many diverse traditions. A continual proliferation of interpretive schools may occur, as the old imperial attempts to enforce authority from one central point fade into irrelevance, and locally led groups explore, with more local commitment but more global awareness, new ways of living out the vision of God which the church has discerned in Jesus.⁴³

Religious traditions cannot live in pretended isolation in a world where virtually every major city contains the worship sites of several major world religions. Christian religious commentators have long borrowed from other traditions and Ward goes further, arguing that people cannot understand Christian revelation without setting it within the context of wider human religious activity. Comparative theology, in short, draws on various traditions and in modern times

42. Keith Ward, *Religion and Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 337–40.

43. Ward, *Religion and Community*, p. 314.

has become increasingly cognizant of the contributions of various world religions. Differing world religious beliefs are examined; opposition and consensus are voiced in discussions, and from such encounters different religious groups hopefully may see themselves in a new light relative to other world religions.

What happens at the great crossroads, where the major religions meet? How can the contemporary believer deal with competing claims of various religions to be exclusive guardians of truth? For Ward, 'There is little reason to think that different traditions and beliefs must be equally valid or true.'⁴⁴ Stated differently, go deeply into one tradition and you can simultaneously appreciate the value of others. The process of deciding among the truth claims of world religions is not one of detached neutrality, like judging a musical competition or sporting event. A person may accept a particular tradition of revelation, but such commitment should also realize that 'the Supreme Reality has not been silent in other religions of the world'.⁴⁵

What will the church be like in coming times?

'Its teaching authority will be more that of advice and guidance in sound scholarship, than a defensive reassertion of ancient dogmatic formulae. Its sacramental life will be more the offer of the unconditional and personal love of God to encourage human flourishing in an equitable and just world, than a hierarchical control of the exclusive means to eternal life. And its institutional form will be more one of humble service to the community than of patriarchal dignity and control.'⁴⁶

The immediate years ahead will be an important time for setting the parameters of such convergent spirituality. Scholarship on the interaction of world religions is becoming more extensive, interfaith contacts more frequent, air travel more usual, and religious conflict increasingly as a dimension of international political life. The global Anglican Communion is well positioned to contribute to such deliberations – it has long been a global presence, with a growing awareness of the content of other faiths, an accommodating via media, and both theologians and on the ground practitioners of successful interfaith cooperation. One of the most successful examples of local cooperation in a global context is the United Religious Initiative, launched in 2000 by a leading bishop of the Episcopal Church.

44. Ward, *Religion and Community*, p. 310.

45. Ward, *Religion and Community*, p. 324.

46. Ward, *Religion and Community*, pp. 314–15.

The United Religions Initiative and William E. Swing

The landscape of William E. Swing's early horizons was Appalachia and the wider world existed only on schoolroom maps. After growing up in West Virginia in the 1940s, attending Kenyon College and Virginia Theological Seminary, and long experience in parish ministry, Swing spent 27 years (1979–2006) in San Francisco as Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California, a multiracial diocese with strong international ties. Swing was in his office near Grace Cathedral when a call came from the United Nations in New York in 1993. Would he organize an interfaith service at Grace Cathedral to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco? The actual 1945 event had been held at the nearby Fairmont Hotel. He thought: if there was an international body already in place to address political and military disputes, was there any comparable religious institution working to advance global good? No such organization existed, so Swing, who had rarely travelled abroad, set out with his wife, Mary, to meet with world religious leaders. Mother Teresa, the Dali Lama, Hindu shankaracharyas, Muslim mullahs, Jewish chief rabbis, and Orthodox patriarchs, the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch. These leaders heard him out. Most were cautious in their replies. 'If this is of God, no one can stop it', a high Vatican official commented, 'But if it is of man, it will fail.' In 2000, United Religions Initiative (URI) was solidly launched, with thousands of global participants. Its goals were distilled in a single sentence: 'The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.'⁴⁷

From its inception, URI was careful not to represent itself as another religion, religious hierarchy, or as a competing interfaith organization. As its founder studied existing interfaith groups, one striking observation was that many rarely cooperated with other interfaith groups. Such groups represented 'a big business model that says you've got to corner your market', in this case the interfaith market, and the bishop was anxious not to launch another competing group.⁴⁸

At the heart of URI's work are over 500 Cooperation Circles spread across 77 different countries. Each should have at least seven members

47. 'The United Religions Charter', United Religions Initiative, PO Box 29242, San Francisco, CA 94242.

48. Chuck Salter, 'We're Trying to Change World History', *Fast Company*, November 2000, p. 1.

and represent at least three religious traditions, and each circle is free to organize in any manner and around any particular issue or activity that fit with URI's overall purpose. The Council's 'spirit is not one of control, but rather one of service informed by deep listening to the hopes and aspirations of the whole URI community'. Its actions should reflect 'tenderness for one another and for the Earth community'.

The Fuse Box Model of Religious Cooperation

Swing had been warned by a theologian friend that 'when theologians get into the interfaith encounter things will not be tidy'. After reviewing the state of religious pluralism debates, the bishop carefully formulated his personal conclusion:

Whatever approaches the sacred of any faith tradition runs the risk of inflaming hostilities. The time comes, though, when common language and a common purpose for all religions and spiritual movements must be discerned and agreed upon. Merely respecting and understanding other religions is not enough. Dialogues raise questions about ultimate belief. As religions converge upon each other in battlefields and grocery stores, classrooms and marriages, some common sacred sense must be discovered if we can ever hope for a modicum of peace. Kenneth Cragg said, 'What has authority for some of the human race must have relevance for all.' If the hot wires of all the religions are becoming progressively intertwined and volatile, is it possible to create a fuse box? A United Religions would be like a fuse box.⁴⁹

Conclusion: 'The Lamps Are Different but the Light Is the Same'

Anglican perspectives on world religions present a wide range of carefully shaped possibilities for parishes and church leaders to consider in their own interfaith encounters. From F.D. Maurice in the mid-nineteenth century through David F. Ford and Keith Ward today, Anglicans are offered several intersecting ways of looking at other religions comprehensively and acknowledging their worth in a welcoming manner. 'Generous Love', it was called in a 2008 Anglican Communion document. Specialists like Kenneth Cragg on Islam and Kwok Pui-Lan on the historic religions of Asia offer detailed analyses of the relationship of other faiths with Christianity and represent specific ways of deeper engagement among believers of various religions. Alan Race has laid out a discernible range of possible responses in his

49. William E. Swing, *The Coming United Religions* (San Francisco: United Religions Initiative; Grand Rapids, MI: CoNexus Press, 1998), pp. 63–64.

much-employed exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist paradigm. Ian Markham, writing several years after *Race*, has shown how in a really deep dialogue with members of another religion a person's own faith position is reaffirmed, something Christians can distinctively proclaim while engaging in dialogue and service with others. Rowan Williams has reflected about leaving the final placement of world religions in relation to one another to God, while actively engaging Jews and Muslims in candid, wide-ranging interfaith encounters. Invariably, I am asked for my own views on the place of other religions in relation to Christianity, to which I make two observations: first, at heart the interaction of world religions is one of local encounters that are either welcoming or rejecting in specific settings. It is fruitless to compare tightly written academic theological texts with the locally originated faith statements of participants in an urban, multifaith neighborhood whose religious members are trying to obtain health benefits for recently arrived immigrants and related life in this world with their deeply felt faith journeys as well. Second, such encounters are largely experiential, not doctrinal. Here I am grateful to former Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold for sharing with the wider church two quotations from the Persian mystic-jurist, Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–73), 'The lamps are different but the Light is the same' and 'Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing there is a field. I'll meet you there.' Additionally, interfaith contact makes my own Christian journey clearer. I pray as a Christian, shaped in a particular tradition, and encourage others to pray in the language they know best, representing obviously different histories and heritages. Such differences pose not a threat but an opportunity to face the future.

Seen across the span of the last century and a half, Anglican voices have articulated an impressive range of thoughtful options to consider in weighing the church's interfaith future. Today's church is in the early stages, not the ending of such a journey, and can profit from a range of thoughtful Anglican voices, several of which are considered above, which can serve as beacons on such a journey. Grounded in Scripture, they carefully draw on tradition, and use the power of reason to shape what is a critical field of inquiry for the contemporary interfaith journey.