

CHAPTER 2

Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue

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In the encounter between members from different religious traditions, the term “dialogue” tends to be used in many ways, ranging from peaceful coexistence and friendly exchanges, to active engagement with the teachings and practices of the other, and from cooperation toward social change to common prayer and participation in the ritual life of the other. Each of these different types of dialogue will naturally involve differing sets of conditions or requirements (for other lists of conditions for dialogue see Dupuis 1997; Panikkar 1999; Swidler et al. 1990; and Timmerman and Segaert 2005). Whereas a peaceful social and political context will play an important role in promoting peaceful coexistence and friendly exchanges, a basic sense of human solidarity and a commitment to the common good may be sufficient to engage in joint social projects. Common worship, on the other hand, requires a particular conception of the nature and the goal of prayer or worship, and some recognition of the authenticity and effectiveness of the ritual practices of the other. This latter understanding of dialogue illustrates that the more dialogue touches upon distinctively religious elements, such as ritual, the more difficult or challenging it becomes.

In this article, I will discuss the conditions for dialogue focused specifically on the teachings and practices of religious traditions. Dialogue, in its ideal form, involves a conversation or exchange in which participants are willing to listen to and learn from one another. It is the possibility of mutual learning which makes dialogue more than a luxury or benevolent pastime for the curious, and renders it a matter of internal religious necessity or opportunity. Dialogue is here thus understood as comparative theology in the broad sense of the term, as a constructive engagement between religious texts, teachings, and practices oriented toward the possibility of change and growth. To be sure, far from every dialogue between religions will actually yield religious fruit. But it is the very possibility that one may learn from the other which moves religious traditions from self-sufficiency to openness to the other.

The possibility of learning from the religious other, however, involves a demanding set of conditions. It first of all requires recognition that there is still room for growth in one's understanding of the truth, and it also presupposes a regard of the other religion as a potential source or occasion for such growth. In the language of virtues, the first may be called epistemological humility and the latter generosity or hospitality toward the truth of the other. In addition to these two fundamental conditions, dialogue between religions also presupposes identification with a particular religion from which one engages in dialogue, trust that the other religion addresses the same ultimate truth or fundamental questions in a mutually relevant way, and belief that one may actually understand the teachings and practices of another religion in a way that might open up one's own religion to new insights and actions. The latter conditions I have designated as commitment, interconnection, and empathy respectively.

If phenomenologically sound, these conditions apply equally to any religious tradition engaged in dialogue, even though their concrete form and expression may vary. In *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, I developed these conditions in greater detail and discussed them in light of the possible resources available within the Christian tradition (Cornille 2008). But it is up to each tradition to discover in their teachings and traditions a religious motivation to engage in dialogue with other religions.

Humility

The first condition for inter-religious dialogue is recognition of the very possibility of change or growth within one's own tradition. This presupposes a humble recognition of the limited or finite way in which the ultimate truth is grasped or expressed within one's religion. Such humility may be applied to doctrines, rituals, and/or ethical systems. It may express itself in terms of the relativity of all historical and cultural expression and/or in terms of a progression toward final clarity and understanding at some future point in time. But the possibility of learning from another religion presupposes at least a recognition that one may still grow in understanding or expressing the fullness of truth.

Such epistemological humility goes against the grain of most religious self-understanding. Religions tend to claim the fullness of truth and the definitive and unquestionable way to the highest goal. Most religions refer to a transcendent source for their fundamental teachings and practices, which forms the basis for religious confidence and certainty. This generates commitment and surrender, which most religions regard as the basis for religious and spiritual growth. For some religions, the locus of absoluteness is situated in particular teachings which must be accepted on faith. For others, it involves particular ritual actions or rules for daily life which must be executed precisely and followed unflinchingly. Most religions exhibit a combination of unquestionable teachings, prescriptions, and rules. To be sure, every religion is subject to historical and cultural changes and developments, and to internal disagreement and schism. But each new interpretation pretends to preserve the original and unchanging truth revealed to its founder. As such, the reality of change and growth tends to be minimized, ignored, or effaced, as every new tradition or school of

interpretation claims to offer a more authentic or faithful interpretation of the original revelation.

Epistemological humility thus requires a shift in most religious self-understanding. Some religions do have ready resources for recognizing the limits of their claims to absolute and final truth. Mahayana Buddhism, for example, is based on the explicit recognition of the fallibility of language in expressing ultimate truth (Garfield 2002), and Christianity's notion of the *eschatological proviso* should, at least theoretically, guard against identifying any historical forms with ultimate reality (*Dei Verbum* 8). But most religions may need to engage in a creative retrieval of resources which would permit some degree of doctrinal humility.

One area which offers a ready basis for epistemological humility in many religions is that of mysticism, in so far as it acknowledges the impossibility of fully expressing the experience of the ultimate reality. Mystical texts and teachings admit the radical transcendence of ultimate reality and the impossibility of fully expressing that reality in finite human terms. This recognition of the distinction between the ultimate reality itself and the finite categories in which it is expressed may come to reinforce epistemological humility and open up space for the possibility of growth. Pluralist thinkers have mined those traditions to argue for the unity of all mystical experiences and/or to call for an abandonment of all religious claims to absolute truth (Hick 1989). They tend to hold fast to the distinction between Eckhart's God and Godhead, or between Nirguna and Saguna Brahman, or between the known and the unknown names of God in Islam as the basis for abandoning all religious claims to absolute and final truth. While one need not go so far as to abandon all religious claims to superiority or exclusivity, this affirmation of the transcendence of ultimate reality may at least serve as the basis for doctrinal humility and openness to the possibility of growth and change in one's understanding of ultimate truth. This is probably one of the reasons why monastics in different religious traditions, whose life is oriented toward the cultivation and reflection of such spiritual or mystical experiences, have been at the forefront of the dialogue between religions.

A second basis for doctrinal humility may be found in the emergence of historical-critical and social-scientific study of religion. While believers often regard their religious teachings and practices as transmitted in pure and unaltered form since the beginning, the subjection of religious traditions to historical approaches tends to reveal human and finite hand in the emergence and development of particular teachings and practices. This awareness of the historical and cultural particularity of certain teachings and practices may come to loosen attachment to particular formula or forms of expression and open the way for accepting the possibility of change and growth. This also accords with the cultural-linguistic understanding of doctrine which, in the words of George Lindbeck, opposes "the boasting and sense of superiority that destroys the possibility of open and mutually enriching dialogue" (Lindbeck 1984: 64).

However, this approach to religious teachings and practices is often regarded as suspect or dangerous by those who seek to safeguard firm adherence to the teachings of a particular tradition. Pressed to their extreme, historical critical methods, like the emphasis on the radical transcendence of ultimate truth, may lead to relativism, and

to the erasure of the cognitive or propositional nature of all religious claims or of faith in the efficacy of all ritual gestures and practices. However, recognition of the finite and relative nature of religious language does not necessarily lead to relativism, or to the reduction of religious truths to their historical and cultural contexts. One may recognize the limitation of religious expressions while still holding on to their truth, and even superiority. As such, religious conviction does not preclude doctrinal humility, nor does doctrinal humility erode religious conviction.

Commitment

The second condition for inter-religious dialogue is commitment to a particular religious tradition. It is such commitment which distinguishes dialogue between religions from a purely personal exploration of the teachings of different religious traditions for spiritual enrichment. Whereas the latter form of engagement is guided purely by personal taste and judgment, the former involves a sense of representing a particular tradition, being accountable to that tradition and submitting one's judgment to that of a larger whole. Speaking from and for a particular religion plays an important role, both for the partner in dialogue and for the religion itself. For the partner, it offers a sense of confidence that one is not only engaging personal opinion, but rather a whole tradition of reflection on important religious questions. And for religious traditions, it offers the opportunity to reap some of the fruits of dialogue. It is true that serious inter-religious dialogue takes place between individuals. But it is only in so far as those individuals are willing to engage their own traditions with the insights and experiences gained through dialogue that traditions are also likely to grow and change.

Though the idea of representing a whole religious tradition in dialogue may seem daunting, it involves various qualifications. First, dialogue occurs between individuals located within particular sub-traditions of religions. As such dialogue takes place not between a Muslim and a Buddhist, but rather between a Shi'ite Muslim and a Tibetan Buddhist, or between a Mennonite Christian and a Conservative Jew. Second, dialogue does not presuppose a comprehensive knowledge of the tradition. While a basic knowledge and understanding of traditional teachings would be expected, dialogue itself can become an occasion to gain a deeper knowledge of one's own tradition as one attempts to answer probing questions raised by the religious other.

The act of representing a particular tradition in dialogue involves attesting not only to the contents, but also to the truth of particular teachings. This touches upon the much disputed question of the relationship between dialogue and mission (see from a Roman Catholic perspective the document "Dialogue and Proclamation" (Vatican Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991)). While dialogue is often regarded as a friendly exchange of information about beliefs and practices, mission or evangelization is seen to involve an attempt to convince the other of the truth of those teachings and practices. As I have argued elsewhere, this tends to create a false dichotomy or a divided consciousness in those engaging religious others and a sense of suspicion in the partner in dialogue (Cornille 2011a). It also tends to deprive dialogue of its energy and zeal. In

so far as its ultimate goal is the advancement of truth, dialogue may be regarded as a form of mutual or reciprocal witnessing.

In its ideal form, dialogue involves a back and forth between engaging in dialogue with the other and with one's own tradition. The latter movement takes place not only through internal confrontation and integration of different teachings in an intra-religious dialogue (Panikkar 1999), but also through second order dialogue with fellow believers, theologians, and representatives of the religious establishment. Traditions play an important role as a place of return for those involved in dialogue. Ideally, they provide a broader basis for discernment of insights gained in dialogue, and they allow for the fruits of the dialogue to be enjoyed by a larger community. However, the return to one's own tradition often forms a challenging moment in the process of dialogue. First, it is not always evident how to communicate the fruits of dialogue to the larger tradition. While some religions have a teaching authority (who may or may not support inter-religious dialogue), others do not have a clear structure of doctrinal oversight or evident channels through which the insights gained through dialogue might be disseminated. Scholars engaged in dialogue may publish their insights, but it often remains a challenge to translate those insights for the benefit of people in the pews.

A second challenge lies in the fact that religious traditions tend to be resistant to change and less than receptive to the new insights and experiences gained through dialogue. The admission of learning from another religion through dialogue may be perceived as an expression of weakness or insufficiency. This often leaves individuals engaged in dialogue in the margins of their respective traditions, either by necessity or choice. Inter-religious dialogue thus requires, on the part of participants, willingness to openly and humbly engage the larger tradition with the fruits of the dialogue, and on the part of official representatives of the traditions encouragement and openness toward the fruits of the dialogue.

Interconnection

In addition to the basic requirements of openness and commitment, inter-religious dialogue also presupposes belief that religions actually do have something to do with one another, that they deal with some of the same fundamental religious and existential questions or that they somehow connect in common concerns or on some higher plane. If the term religion is actually vacuous (as some argue) or if the religions are so different as to be entirely unrelated, then dialogue between religions could be regarded as futile or irrelevant.

Though the term religion has become a contested category, it would be disingenuous to deny that, at least from a historical or phenomenological perspective, the forms of belief and practice that have come to be called religions have nothing in common. While there are indeed many different definitions of religion, they all point to the ways in which humans have given expression (in myth, ritual, ethical systems, and institutional structures) to their relationship with some transcendent reality. Religions provide

varying answers to many of the same fundamental questions and they attend in different ways to some of the same moments of existential crisis. This recognition of the other as engaged with the same or similar religious questions and desires offers a basic foundation as well as a starting point for inter-religious dialogue.

Participants in dialogue may find their common ground or goal in various places, either inside or outside of the religion proper. Often, religions have come together around common social or political causes: poverty, hunger, homelessness, war, or natural disasters (see this volume Chapter 9 on inter-religious dialogue and social action, and Chapter 10 on inter-faith dialogue and peace building). These common causes not only require a communal response, but they also allow religions to engage one another in practical terms and to connect on a basic human level. Such collaboration may in some cases lead to further dialogue on the reasons for engaging in social action, on the conceptions of the ideal society informing the pursuit of social change, or on any other topic of interest to both parties. Cooperation in common causes tends to establish a level of trust and friendship necessary for further fruitful and constructive exchange. However, the focus on a common cause *outside* of any tradition does not necessarily lead to enduring dialogue focused on the contents of religious faith and practice. First, the level of exchange between members of different religions may never go beyond attending to the practical matters at hand. And second, the actual occurrence of dialogue would remain dependent on the existence of common external challenges or crises.

Sustained dialogue between religions thus requires a sense of interconnection which is *intrinsic* to the religions themselves. Some search for this religious basis for interconnection in an experience or goal common to all religions involved. As such, mystical experiences have often been regarded as a meeting point between religions. Perennialist philosophers such as Aldous Huxley and essentialist scholars of mysticism such as Robert Forman argue that all religious traditions derive from or are oriented toward the same mystical experience (Huxley 1945; Forman 1999). This common experience then provides the reason for engaging in dialogue as well as the goal of dialogue.

Rather than a common mystical experience, pluralist thinkers such as John Hick have postulated the existence of a common ultimate reality as the basis and reason for dialogue between religions. Since all religions are partial expressions of this same ultimate reality (called the Real), dialogue between religions may be regarded as the only way to advance toward this ultimate reality and to approach the truth (Hick 1989).

While these notions of an interconnection between religious traditions in a spiritual experience or transcendent reality *common* to all religions may represent an important impulse and ground for dialogue, they also contain some limitations. First, the very idea that all religions meet in a common experience is difficult, if not impossible, to argue definitively, as is evident in the ongoing debate between essentialists and constructivists in the area of comparative mysticism. While the former assume a unified mystical experience, the latter argue that all mystical experiences are shaped by the categories and practices which lead up to the experience. The idea of a transcendent reality beyond all religious traditions has also been subject to critique in the

area of theology of religion (D'Costa 2000, Heim 1999). Not only do most religions affirm a continuity between their conception of the ultimate reality and that reality itself, but they also tend to affirm the truth of their own claims, even when conflicting with those of others, and take such claims as the ultimate basis for judging the truth of others.

In addition to the question of the plausibility of a common experience and goal, the problem with such a conception of interconnection lies in the fact that it is not conducive to genuine interest in the particulars of other religions (Heim 1999: 28 ff.). If all religious teachings and practices are ultimately regarded as pointing to an experience or goal which is radically beyond any religious conception, then the expressions which make up the particularity and the identity of religious traditions do not matter very much. As such, the idea of a common spiritual ground or goal does not constitute a sufficiently compelling basis for engaging in dialogue about such particularities.

Rather than attempting to establish interconnection in a ground or goal common to religions, I would argue that what is required for dialogue is a sense of interconnection grounded in the concrete beliefs of any particular religion. It is not the belief in a common experience, but the conviction that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature which will form the basis for engaging other religions from a Buddhist perspective, just as Christians will need to believe that the Biblical God is also revealed (in some form or to some degree) in the texts and teachings of other religions. The possibility of constructive inter-religious dialogue thus requires that every religious tradition involved develop a religious self-understanding in which (at least some of) the teachings of other religions are somehow related to or relevant for one's own religious conception of truth. As such, different religions will have different conceptions of how they are connected to other religious traditions. But it is through such various conceptions of interconnection that dialogue takes place.

Empathy

In addition to the more reflexive or self-referential conditions, dialogue between religions also requires the possibility of understanding one another across religious traditions. This epistemological condition for dialogue has been the subject of considerable debate in the study of religion (McCutcheon 1999). The importance of this condition may seem self-evident. If one is locked conceptually and experientially within one's own religion, then dialogue would never be able to yield any new insights or experiences. While constructive dialogue may not require perfect understanding of the religious other, it does presuppose some capacity to stretch one's religious imagination beyond the categories of one's own religion and gain some understanding of, and resonance with, religious teachings and practices other than one's own.

In so far as historical data are available, it has become more commonly accepted in the history of religions that an outsider to a particular religion may attain a level of knowledge and understanding of a tradition equal or at times even superior to that of an insider. A good number of classical scholarly studies in the history of religions were

written by individuals who did not belong to the religion involved. Given proper linguistic and historical competency, there is thus no *a priori* reason to doubt the possibility of intellectually understanding the texts, teachings, practices, and philosophical traditions of another tradition. However, constructive dialogue also requires some level of empathic understanding of, or affective resonance with the other. Not only does this yield a deeper understanding of the meaning of particular teachings and practices, but it also provides a measure for what may eventually become the object of constructive dialogue. It is only insofar as one is able to resonate positively with particular beliefs and experiences in another religion that one will be disposed to entertain the possibility of integrating such teachings in one's own religion. Religious teachings or practices which leave one cold, or which elicit a negative response will probably not invoke much creative energy and initiative, save perhaps to demonstrate the superior value and power of one's own teachings. Empathy thus plays an important role in inter-religious dialogue.

The notion of empathy has become all but taboo in the study of religion. It is usually associated with the bygone days of romantic hermeneutics (Dilthey) and of early phenomenology of religion (Van der Leeuw). Empathy is indeed a highly elusive category and skill. However, insofar as it does play an important role in dialogue, one cannot but focus attention on some of its constituent dimensions. The term empathy has been generally understood as transposition into the mental lives of others or as "the experience of foreign consciousness" (Stein 1964: 11). Max Scheler defined empathy in cognitive terms as "all such attitudes as merely contribute to our apprehending, understanding, and in general, reproducing (emotionally) the experiences of others, including their states of feeling" (Scheler 1954: 8). The human capacity for empathy has been variously grounded in universal mental structures (Van der Leeuw 1930: 675), in the fundamental inter-connectedness of self and other (Ricoeur 1992: 372), and more recently in the existence of "mirror neurons" (Stueber 2006). In her work on empathy, Edith Stein refers to one's mental and emotional disposition or "structure" as the basis for empathy, arguing that "all foreign experience permitting itself to be derived from my own structure can be fulfilled, even if this structure has not actually unfolded" (Stein 1964: 104). This may suggest that one's actual religious beliefs and practices also play a role in the process of comprehending the religious life of the other. Most empathy involves some degree of analogical apprehension, or relation of the meaning of a particular teaching or ritual to one's given reservoir of religious experiences. As such, one's religious tradition plays a constitutive role in inter-religious empathy.

However, the possibility of empathic understanding of the other is not necessarily limited to the array of religious experience and insight already given in one's religious tradition and in one's personal experiential repertoire. Referring to the despair of Jesus on Gethsemane, Max Scheler argued that this experience "can be understood and shared regardless of our historical, racial and even human limitations. And for every candid heart which steps itself in that desolation it operates, not as a reminder or revival of personal sufferings, great or small, but as the revelation of a new and greater suffering hitherto undreamed of" (Scheler 1954: 47). The study of and immersion in another tradition at times offers access to experiences and insights hitherto unknown. These may become the occasion for genuine religious learning and for further

consideration of the possibility of engaging such beliefs and practices in a constructive dialogue with one's own tradition.

To be sure, not every religious belief or practice with which one resonates will become food for constructive engagement and dialogue. One may, for example, empathize with religious teachings and practices which offer little new or distinctive content for dialogue, and one may also develop a negative empathic response to certain teachings or practices. Constructive dialogue may also require more than a strictly personal positive resonance. It would probably take a more widespread appeal for a religion to consciously appropriate elements from another religious tradition.

Empathic understanding of another religion may be enhanced through direct participation in the religious life of the other. Ritual participation and direct access to the sources of religious and spiritual authority of a tradition raises one's sense of awareness and undoubtedly adds to one's ability to resonate, either positively or negatively, with the other. But it also points to the limits of full understanding of the other (Cornille 2011b; Moyaert 2013). Not only are there often limits to participation in the ritual life of the other, such participation also draws attention to the importance of actual faith in the process of understanding the other. While I may understand devotion to the Hindu Gods Krishna or Ganesha by way of analogy with my own devotion to Jesus Christ, I will never gain full access to the contents of the other's faith, insofar as it is essentially shaped by the object of faith. However, participation in Hindu devotion may still reveal levels of intensity of love of God and ritual expressions hitherto unknown, and positively inspiring.

Though empathy may not provide full access to the experience of an insider, it does allow for an expansion of one's religious imagination and experience. Whether or not the insights and experiences gained through the understanding of another tradition actually lead to constructive dialogue will depend on their compatibility with one's given religious framework, and a broader religious resonance.

Hospitality

The final, and sole sufficient condition for dialogue involves recognition of actual truth in another religion and hospitality toward integrating that truth in one's own tradition. This condition may be seen to include or presuppose most of the other conditions for dialogue: the recognition of truth in another religion presupposes some humility about the truth of one's tradition, commitment to a tradition which exercises hospitality, a general sense of the interconnectedness between religions, and genuine understanding of the other. The very discovery of truth in another religion may in and of itself be seen as a sufficient reason to engage that religion in a constructive dialogue.

Generosity or hospitality toward recognizing and integrating truth found in another religion does not necessarily require recognition of truth in all religions, or in every dimension of a particular religion. This would hardly be possible insofar as religions often espouse mutually exclusive or conflicting teachings. However, the discovery of any single inspiring thought or practice may or should lead to a constructive engagement.

In the process of discerning truth in other religions, it is evident that one's own religious tradition will serve as a starting point or basic norm. Teachings or practices which are in direct contradiction with one's own will unlikely be regarded as true. In functioning as criteria of truth, one's basic teachings may operate as minimal or maximal norms, or as negative or positive norms (Haight 1999: 409). This will determine the degree and the kind of truth present in other religions.

When the teachings of one's tradition operate as maximal or positive norm, only those teachings or practices in the other tradition which are identical to one's own will be regarded as valid or true. This approach to the question of alien truth is fairly common in religious traditions. It is unthreatening in so far as the presence of elements of truth in the other tradition does not challenge or call into question one's claim to possessing the fullness of truth. It also avoids the problem of logical incoherence in that it does not deny the truth of alien teachings which are identical to one's own. The recognition of truth in teachings which are no different than those already proclaimed in one's own tradition, however, leaves little room for constructive dialogue. It merely confirms or reinforces what one already knows, allowing for little or no possibility for change and growth. To be sure, teachings which seem similar are never identical insofar as they are embedded in different religious contexts and larger interpretative frameworks. As such, selflessness, though an ideal in many religious traditions, may have very different connotations, depending on particular anthropological presuppositions. Attention to the reality of differences-in-similarity may thus still allow for the possibility of learning from the other tradition, provided those differences in context and interpretation are not *a priori* rejected.

In functioning as a minimal or negative norm, one's tradition serves as a basis to exclude only those teachings and practices which are irreconcilable with one's own, or – stated positively – to affirm teachings and practices which are compatible with one's own. This leaves considerable room for recognizing truth in teachings which are different from those already present in one's tradition, and for genuine growth through learning from the other. Of course, not every teaching or practice which is in principle reconcilable with one's tradition will necessarily become the object of constructive reflection. Some differences between religions are more interesting or meaningful than others. Whereas dietary restrictions in one tradition may not contradict another, neither are they likely to be engaged in a constructive manner. Constructive engagement will thus depend on whether certain teachings or practices are seen to respond to certain practical or theoretical questions or needs, or whether they provide access to genuine religious knowledge or experience.

Some pluralist thinkers involved in the dialogue between religions reject altogether the use of religion-specific norms in the process of dialogue as patronizing (Hick 1981: 463). Instead, they attempt to propose generic or neutral norms agreed upon by all participants in dialogue. While this may work for a dialogue in which all participants agree upon certain criteria (such as the degree to which religions promote gender equality), religious traditions are unlikely to substitute their own revealed criteria for those attained by human reason and agreement.

It is clear that every religion judges others on the basis of their own particular criteria or norms. It is in this process of mutual judgment that a certain equality between

religions is established. Though the implicit or explicit use of religion-specific criteria is thus natural and omnipresent, it is not always clear which set of criteria represent the essence of a particular religious tradition, and which are to be called upon to assess particular religious teachings and practices. Most often, the criteria operative are discovered in the process of dialogue, in negative reactions to or in the appeal of certain teachings and practices. Religions often tend to focus on ethical consequences as the measure of the truth of certain teachings (Cornille 2009). But many different teachings may have the same ethical results, and constructive dialogue requires a somewhat more explicit set of norms according to which one may productively engage the teachings and practices of another tradition.

The existence of such norms does not necessarily imply a static and defined understanding of religious identity and criteria. Criteria may themselves change or evolve in the process of dialogue, as one may come to a deeper understanding of one's very norm or norms in the process of dialogue.

Conclusion

Though framed in terms of personal virtues, the conditions for dialogue discussed above represent epistemological requirements which are to be applied to religious traditions, as much as to individuals involved in the dialogue. The conditions of humility, interconnection, and hospitality in particular involve attitudes toward the religious other which must be generated from within a particular religious self-understanding. It is only insofar as religions find within themselves the resources for dialogue that constructive engagement with religious others will bear fruit in those traditions.

It is clear that most religions are not by nature disposed to constructive dialogue with other religious traditions. The conditions discussed above represent varying challenges for religious traditions. While doctrinal humility may form a difficult challenge for religions based on strong propositional claims to truth or on firmly defined religious practice, doctrinal hospitality may represent a particular problem for religions which attach less importance to doctrinal development and ritual precision. Hence, the possibility of inter-religious dialogue always involves some degree of hermeneutical effort and a commitment to mining the resources of one's own tradition in order to open the tradition up for constructive engagement with others.

Rather than a set of requirements which must be perfectly achieved in order for dialogue to be possible, these conditions for dialogue represent a heuristic device which may help to understand the limits and the possibility of interreligious dialogue. They may offer a basis for understanding why certain dialogues fail, and for recovering the religious resources necessary for constructive dialogue. Moreover, it is often only in the process of engaging other religions that the conditions for dialogue come to be cultivated. The dialogue with Buddhism, for example, has inspired some Christian theologians to a deeper understanding of doctrinal humility, just as the Christian notion of interconnection in the Trinity has inspired some Buddhists to develop their own alternative conceptions of the interconnection between religions.

The focus on mutual learning as the goal of inter-religious dialogue still raises the question as to the kind of learning taking place through dialogue. In general, learning may take the form of remembering or of appropriating. One of the most common and innocuous fruits of dialogue is that of remembering or rediscovering neglected or forgotten dimensions of one's own tradition. The other religion then serves as a catalyst to remind one of certain analogous beliefs, teachings, or practices in one's own tradition. An immediate fruit of the Christian dialogue with Asian religious traditions has been the recovery of contemplative Christian traditions and practices. While such renewed attention to particular aspects of the tradition may be regarded as a simple recovery, it may also at times include some degree of innovation, or reinterpretation of the tradition in light of the other. This type of mutual learning may also take the form of renewed commitment to particular teachings and practices. This may arise from an experience of contrast or from inspiration in which engagement with another religion serves to reinforce particular religious beliefs and practices. Here, the other thus serves as a mirror offering a new lens through which to understand one's own religion.

Mutual learning may also involve the appropriation of new teachings and practices. This may take various forms, from integrating new practices to adopting a new worldview or philosophical framework, and from adding new meanings to traditional symbols or teachings to appropriating new symbols and religious models. There is no *a priori* limit to the possibility of new learning from other religions, except that imposed by the need for coherence and continuity with the established tradition. This type of religious borrowing is not new: throughout history, religions have appropriated elements from one another, often without acknowledging their source. Inter-religious dialogue, however, offers the opportunity to consciously learn from other religions and to recognize the origin of such learning. To be sure, this process of learning from other religions does not necessarily imply wholesale appropriation of the original meaning of a particular teaching or practice. All borrowing involves a certain semantic shift in which the meaning of particular teachings or practices is adapted to the new context. However, this may still lead to genuinely new insight and to real religious development and growth.

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