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by

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Towards Respectful Relations between Christians and Muslims: An Interfaith Dialogical Approach.

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Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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Abstract:

As the subtitle of this thesis indicates, the emphasis is on an "interfaith dialogical approach" towards Christian-Muslim relations. As a prelude, Chapter 1 "sets the scene" by giving some selected background material. Its function is to lead the reader into the later, more substantive chapters. The chapter begins by précising Race's typologies of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism to examine the interfaith perceptions that Christianity and Islam have about each other; but as the chapter demonstrates, this approach is, by and large, ineffective in promoting mutually respectful relations. For reasons of practicality, Judaism is omitted from the discussion; nevertheless the question of supersessionism is germane to the thesis and thus is discussed in this frame of reference. Supersessionism, in this context, revolves around the double question, does Christianity supersede Judaism; and/or does Islam supersede Christianity? This chapter affirms that no religion is superseded by another. Much of the bias perceived by some against dialogue is the result of history and therefore, Chapter 1 concludes with a brief outline of some pertinent reasons for such opposition.

Chapter 2 forms the heart of the thesis. It begins by discussing what constitutes dialogue and how it may be conducted; it also indicates what is *not* dialogue. Section (b) concentrates on the problems specifically encountered in Christian-Muslim dialogical exchange. Section (c) is pivotal, introducing and examining the Muslim overture, *A Common Word*, where Muslim scholars and clerics reach out to their Christian counterparts. *A Common Word* represents a seminal breakthrough in Muslim-Christian relations. This leads on to the Christian response (the "Yale Response") where Christian scholars reply to the Muslim overture. The next section (e) examines the Muslim reply to the "Yale Response." To give balance to the overall positivity of this chapter, section

(f) analyses the opinions of those, both Christian and Muslim, who oppose any attempt at dialogue.

Chapter 3 is, in effect, an extension of the previous chapter, serving as the thesis' major example of a specific way of addressing Christian-Muslim dialogue. Both conventional Christianity and Islam may be regarded as following rational bases of faith, and up to this point, the thesis has been constructed using these same rationalities. Chapter 3 however presents constructional difficulties, in that mystical concepts, by their very nature, are non-rational; a thesis, by definition, must be rational. As this chapter explains, mystics resort to lyrical and poetic analogies to explain the non-rational in rational terms. At various times I resort to the same techniques. This is the reason why, in the later sections of this chapter, scientific analogies are drawn. Even in a subject as empirical as physics, scientists are at times forced to resort to seemingly non-rational explanations.

On the surface, mysticism would appear to have no place in interfaith dialogue. This chapter, especially in section (g), strongly argues to the contrary, and suggests that such an approach could have practical benefits. As the chapter asserts, this approach is a pathway whereby a number of both Christians and Muslims are able to bond in "mystical friendship" without having to contend with the impossibility of coming to terms with conflicting theologies. Mystical concepts are thus considered beneficial in the sociological concept of humanity living together in peace.

Rationale and Methodology:

As the primary title of this thesis indicates, its aim is towards improving Christian-Muslim relationships; its major objective is stated in the secondary title, namely to use interfaith dialogue as an agency to achieve this improvement. The methodology is by an examination of the literature as listed in the Bibliography. The hermeneutics of suspicion notwithstanding, in writing this thesis I have attempted to be as objectively neutral as humanly possible. I am of a Christian persuasion and therefore, of necessity, cannot completely divorce myself from my Christian background, beliefs and practices. The overriding methodological objective of the thesis is sociological rather than theological, but as this thesis argues, respectful relations between Christians and Muslims are unlikely to be found by trying to ignore, or paper over, the very substantial differences in their respective theologies. Neither is it valid to suggest some sort of theological syncretism in order to improve these relations. Especially from the Muslim viewpoint, sociology cannot be divorced from theology; to many Muslims no part of life is separate from religious belief and practice. An examination of theological issues is therefore conducted in order to achieve this sociological objective. Likewise, in the final part of the thesis, the argument becomes philosophical, even metaphysical, but the overriding objective remains sociological. The thesis does not take sides as to who is theologically correct, Christian or Muslim, but it does strongly affirm, that regardless of conflicting theologies, Christians and Muslims must find ways to live and work together in mutual respect and peace.

I have lived in Alice Springs for thirty years. Like all communities, Alice Springs has substantial social problems, but negative relations between Christians and Muslims are not an issue. The Alice Springs Afghan Mosque represents the second oldest extant

Muslim community in Australia; the Adelaide-Darwin rail passenger service is named "The Ghan" in honour of the early Afghan cameleers who were essential to both exploration of the inland and to the construction of the Darwin-Adelaide Overland Telegraph Line in the 1870s. Every few years the Alice Springs Islamic Society extends a general invitation to the wider community to an Open Day and shared meal. The suburb, primary school, and road "Sadadeen" are named after an early cameleer, as are "Ghan Road" and "Mahomed Street."

Why then do I regard respectful relations between Christians and Muslims to be so important, and why have I written this thesis? From my local perspective, sociologically there would be little point, but from a world perspective, and indeed recently from a broader Australian perspective, a very different scenario unfolds.[1] As John Donne phrases it in *Meditation 17*, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main" (Donne, 1623/2012, p. 46). What affects one person, in one part of the world, affects everyone. Even if it is impossible to find theological commonality, the aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that mutually respectful relations are both achievable and necessary.

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[1] After the 15-16 December 2014 terrorist siege in Sydney, Imam Abdul Aziz from the Alice Springs Islamic Society, was quoted in the *Centralian Advocate*, as affirming that, "The Koran is totally against terrorism; the Koran is giving the message of love for all and hatred for none. ... We are deeply saddened at the tragic event of the siege at Sydney" (Garrick, 2014, p. 9).

General Notes:

1. In the context of this thesis, *Towards Respectful Relations between Christians and Muslims: An Interfaith Dialogical Approach*, unless contra-indicated, "relations" refers to the actual objective state of affairs between Christians and Muslims; "interfaith dialogue" relates to a method of interreligious contact which endeavours to make these relations more positive.

2. Unless contra-indicated, all Qur'anic quotations are from Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language* (Madinah, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex).

3. Unless contra-indicated, all Biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible.

4. Except when using direct quotations "God" is used throughout and not "Allah" because the Arabic word "Allah" is "God" in English and has the same meaning.

5. Except when using direct quotations, I use the English spelling of names and other nouns rather than the Arabic. For example "Abraham" rather than "Ibrahim;" "Jesus" rather than "'Isa."

6. All years are expressed in CE (Common Era) chronology.

7. Where available, John Bowker (Ed.) (1999) *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford, Oxford University Press) has been used for Arabic spellings.

8. Foreign words not found in the *Macquarie Dictionary* 6th ed. are italicised.

Abbreviations used:

ACU	Australian Catholic University
AH	*Anno hegirae*, the *Hijra*, the emigration of Prophet Muhammad to Medina; 622 CE
A Common Word	"A Common Word Between Us and You"
ACW	"A Common Word Between Us and You"[2]
BCE	Before Common Era
c.	circa
CE	Common Era
CMS	Church Missionary Society
d.	died
FRS	Fellow of the Royal Society
ISIS	"Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," a fanatical group even denounced by al-Qaeda. ISIS is also known as "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) or "Islamic State" (IS).
NKJV	New King James Version of the Bible
NT	New Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
OP	*Ordinis Praedictorum* (Order of Preachers); a Dominican
OSB	Order of Saint Benedict (Benedictine)
OSF	Order of Saint Francis (Franciscan)
OSM	*Ordo Servorum Beatae Mariae Virginis* (Servite Friar)
SJ	Society of Jesus (Jesuit)
SM	Society of Mary (Marist Father)
UCA	Uniting Church in Australia
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
US	United States
WCC	World Council of Churches

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[2] Because "A Common Word Between Us and You" is so frequently cited in this thesis, ACW is also used as a convenient, shorter alternative (Lumbard, 2012, p. 13).

O Master, grant that I may never seek

so much to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved, as to love with all my soul.

(*Together in Song: Australian Hymn Book II*, 2000, p. 607)

O my Lord, if I worship you from fear of hell, burn me in it;

if I worship you in the hope of paradise, exclude me from it.

But if I worship you for your own sake, then do not hold me

back from your eternal beauty.

(Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, cited in Bowker, 1999, p. 789)

Introduction:

Why bother about relations between Christians and Muslims? Why not let both groups continue to go their separate ways? Tony Blair asserts that whether Christians and Muslims, who together make up 55% of the world's population, like it or not, "peaceful coexistence ... [and] active cooperation ... is a necessary component in making the 21st century work more humanely and the earth a better place for all its inhabitants" (Blair, 2010, p. x). This is the raison d'être for this thesis. Relations between the adherents of these two faiths have often been fraught. This thesis suggests (in Chapter 2) that interfaith dialogue is the only way for a degree of peace to be established and maintained. If we speak with our neighbour we can at least understand why they think and act as they do. We may not always agree with what they think and why they act as they do, but by dialogue we will at least know *why*. If both neighbours know the *why* of the other, then there is at least the hope that they will be able to live in peace together, or failing that, to at least agree to mutual non aggression. If neighbours are in dialogue then there is no open aggression. If neighbours refuse to speak to each other there can be no dialogue, no mutual understanding.

As explained in General Note 1 (p. x), in this thesis the word "relations" usually refers to how Christians and Muslims perceive each other. However, "relations" also has another meaning, that of, in a sense, the two faiths being traditionally/historically related through Abrahamic descent; Christians (and Jews) claiming descent through Isaac, and Muslims through Ishmael. Whether Abraham is a figure of tradition or of history is irrelevant (Millard, 2008, p. 37) to the concept of Jews, Christians and Muslims all claiming to be his descendents. Aaron Hughes, Chair of Jewish Studies at Rochester University (Hughes, 2012, p. 18), is one who strongly opposes any use of the

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word "Abrahamic," stating that the word has no place in academic theology. In his opinion, historically, Jews, Christians and Muslims have never "shared a common understanding of scripture" and thus, to speak of Abrahamic commonality "is grossly inaccurate." He grudgingly concedes, however, that the word is widely used in relation to interfaith dialogue, and in that context "make[s] some sense" (2012, p. 18). In the context of this thesis I consider an Abrahamic connection between Christians and Muslims to be legitimate. The question of whether or not the Bible and Qur'an are to be taken purely literally is further explored in Chapter 3.

In Genesis 22:17[3] God says to Abraham, "I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring [through Isaac] as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore." God also tells Abraham, "I will bless him [Ishmael] and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous ... and I will make him a great nation" (Genesis 17:20). In Genesis 21:18 God says to Hagar, "Come, lift up the boy [Ishmael] and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." The only mention of Hagar in the New Testament is in Galatians where Paul allegorically refers to Hagar being "in slavery with her children" (Galatians 4:25. Michel, 2005, p. 100). In the Qur'an, Abraham acknowledges both sons, "All praise and thanks are Allah's Who has given me in old age Isma'il (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac)" (Qur'an 14:39).[4] In Genesis, God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; in the Qur'an God tells Abraham to sacrifice an unspecified son; Abraham says to his son:

> 'O my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you (offering you in sacrifice to Allah). So what do you think!' He said: 'O my father! Do that which you are commanded, *Insha Allah* (if Allah wills), you shall find me of *As-Sabirun* (the patient).' (Qur'an 37:102)

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[3] Unless contra-indicated, all Biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.
[4] Unless contra-indicated, all Qur'anic quotations are from al-Hilali and Khan's translation (*Translation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, n.d.)

Early commentators favoured the son as being Isaac, but from the mediaeval period to the present, the mainstream view has been that Ishmael was the son being sacrificed (Kessler, 2013, pp. 207-209). The transition from Isaac to Ishmael represents a long and tortuous path, but Edward Kessler offers a précis by citing Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (838-923) and Ismail ibn Kathir (1301-73), both of whom wrote *tafsir*[5] on the Qur'an (2013, p. 207). al-Tabari argues that Abraham asked God for a child "before he knew Hagar, who was to be the mother of Ishmael" and also that the Qur'an has God giving tidings of Abraham's sons Isaac and Jacob, but does not include Ishmael (al-Tabari, 1987, p. 89). Five centuries later ibn Kathir expresses the opposing view, "And this son is Ishmael for he is the first son whose good news was brought to Abraham. He is older than Isaac" (*Tafsir ibn Kathir* on Qur'an 37:101, cited in Kessler, 2013, p. 208). Reuven Firestone, Jewish rabbi and Islamic scholar, in an extensive study, offers that whether exegetes accepted Isaac or Ishmael depended on where they understood the sacrifice to have taken place; if in Syria then Isaac; if in Mecca then Ishmael (Firestone, 1989, p. 115). Firestone argues that the switch from Isaac to Ishmael was substantially the result of an increasing Arab understanding of genealogical relationship to Ishmael and a resultant "reactive theology" (1989, pp. 129-131). Mishael Caspi and Sascha Cohen would concur with Kessler, indicating that "until the 10th century there is no clear decision as to who is the object of the *dhabih* [binding] in the Islamic tradition;" the decision resting on the alternative locations of Jerusalem or Mina[6] (Caspi & Cohen, 1995, p. 121).

A recent book by Kessler, *Jews, Christians and Muslims in Encounter* (Kessler, 2013) looks at Christianity and Islam through Jewish eyes and thus provides a valuable insight

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[5] *A Tafsir* is a recognised Commentary on the Qur'an. The noun may be singular or plural.
[6] During the annual Hajj, pilgrims ritually stone Satan at Mina.

into these inter-relationships. Kessler devotes considerable space to a discussion of how the three traditions view this sacrificial event. He offers an intriguing insight from early midrash:

> God said to Abraham: 'Please take your son.' Abraham said: I have two sons, which one?' God: 'Your only son.' Abraham: 'The one is the only son of his mother and the other is the only son of his mother.' God: 'Whom you love.' Abraham: 'I love this one and I love that one.' God: 'Isaac.'
> (Genesis Rabbah 39.9 and 55.7 cited in Kessler, 2013, p. 206).

Jonathan Culver, Mission Professor at the Tiranus Bible Institute in Bandung, Indonesia (Culver, 2008, p. 85), is no Islamic apologist, proclaiming that "Islam is essentially a human religion energized by Satan" (Culver, 2000, p. 61). In spite of his denunciation of Islam he nevertheless concedes that "there is ... a significant element of divine involvement in the remote origins of Islam beginning with Hagar and Ishmael" (2000, p. 61). The significance of citing a Christian polemicist such as Culver is to demonstrate that even a Christian of his viewpoint can concede that, at least in relation to Ishmael, a divine element is evident.

The question of Isaac or Ishmael is but one of the seemingly small differences between Christianity and Islam. I say "seemingly small" because these differences have led to all manner of conflicts, theological, political and military. Bruce Feiler proposes that "the true victim of Abraham's offering" was neither Isaac nor Ishmael but "accord among his descendants" (Feiler, 2002, pp. 106-107). Kessler, perhaps surprisingly teaches New Testament, and gets his students to reflect on the polemic, "[W]ith whom do you argue most?" Their answers are usually along the lines of, "We are [*sic*] argue with those to whom we are closest" (Kessler, 2012, p. 617). It is somewhat ironical that in spite of the seemingly vast differences between Christians and Buddhists, and Christians and Hindus, more authors have written on positive Christian-Buddhist and

Christian-Hindu relations than on the kindred religions of Christianity and Islam. Catherine Cornille lists a number of authors in the former category but only Louis Massignon in the latter (Cornille, 2008, pp. 74-75).[7] As sceptics have pointed out, before Christians and Muslims can dialogue, they both need to get their own houses in order. For much of the twentieth century, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland were in continual conflict; in 2015 the situation in Iraq and Syria involving Shiites, Sunnis and above all ISIS, continues to escalate. As Reza Aslan summarises Sunni-Shiite controversies, "God may be One, but Islam most definitely is not" (Aslan, 2011, p. 272). Mainstream Australian churches are in no position to cast aspersions on off-shore religious disputes; the internecine disputes within the Anglican Church of Australia are interminable, as witnessed by Muriel Porter's strong condemnation of the Diocese of Sydney concerning its practices and policies (Porter, 2011) and the equally rigorous defence mounted by Michael Jensen (M. P. Jensen, 2012). In Porter's assessment the two most contentious issues are on the ordination of women and on who may preside over the Eucharist/Holy Communion (Porter, 2011, p. 77). These Anglican disputes may seem trivial to outsiders, but they are anything but trivial to those Anglicans involved. Likewise, the question of Isaac or Ishmael may seem to be of peripheral interest to many, but to others the question is of monumental importance.

Rowan Williams has said of the Bible that it is impossible to read with a mind "free of selection and interpretation" (Williams, 2000, p. xiii); this of course applies to any book of scripture. We are all products of our individual mindsets or hermeneutics of suspicion, the concept that we can only grasp the true meaning of a particular text by interpreting it through relating it to our previous experience (Stewart, 1989, p. 296).

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[7] The former includes Henri Le Saux, Bede Griffiths, Raimon Panikkar and Aloysius Pieris.

This concept was first mooted by Paul Ricoeur when considering Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud as masters of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 32). As Ricoeur succinctly phrases it, "You must understand in order to believe, but you must believe in order to understand" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 298). John Hick goes further, metaphorically advocating a Copernican (pluralist) rather than a Ptolemaic (exclusivist and solipsismal) attitude towards other faiths, and indicates that in 99% of cases one's "Ptolemaic centre" is determined by where one has had the good (or bad) fortune to have been born (Hick, 1976, pp. 30-31). As previously declared (thesis p.viii), I am a Christian, but if I had been born in a different latitude, longitude, and moment of history I would almost certainly have been raised into a different belief system. For those living in Spain during the Inquisition it was wise to have presented as devout Roman Catholics: Present day citizens of Saudi Arabia *must* be Muslim. This thesis suggests that in both cases orthopraxis would have been, and is, more important than orthodoxy: What one is *seen* to practise outweighs what one *actually* believes (or disbelieves).

This Introduction, among other things, has considered the traditional or historical (Isaac or Ishmael) connection between the two religions. Chapter 1 will begin by discussing ways in which Christians and Muslims have perceived and/or do perceive each other.

Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

a. Race's Typologies of Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism. One of the pioneers in developing a Christian theology of religions was Alan Race in 1982 with his seminal *Christians and Religious Pluralism*. In 1993 Race published a second edition, containing a few amendments but with an additional chapter 7 entitled, "Ten Years Later: Surveying the Scene," which reflected developments in the field during that time (Race, 1993). From the Christian perspective Race identifies three broad categories of attitudes towards other religions, namely exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism; he has since postulated that these positions are too simplistic (Race, 2013, pp. 75-87).[8] Henry Fielding, in *Tom Jones*, has Parson Thwackum identifying a very particular exclusivism, "When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England" (Fielding, 2008/1749, p. 109). Christian exclusivism can be summated by the attitude of "Protestant fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals": "No other religion is true because no other religion can be true" (Inbody, 2002, p. 195). Exclusivism is taken to extremes by sects such as the Jehovah's Witnesses; in their opinion anyone who professes to be a "Christian" but is not of their particular persuasion, cannot be a Christian and is thus relegated to belonging to what they understand to be "Christendom." J. F. Rutherford therefore thunders that Christendom "is hypocritical in the superlative degree" (Rutherford, 1934, p. 71). "Jehovah God bids the peoples to abandon and forever forsake 'Christendom' ... because [it is] the Devil's organization" (1934, p. 64).

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[8] John Cobb would concur; even if one accepts a pluralistic position, there is no "notion of an essence of religion" (Cobb, 1990a, p. 84).

Hamid Algar illustrates Islamic exclusivism when he disagrees with the New

Testament's interpretation of Jesus:

> [W]e have in the Qur'an, as revelation, the only sure source of knowledge
> concerning Jesus; other sources, including the scriptures of the Christians
> themselves, have to be measured very carefully against what we find in the
> Qur'an. ... The supreme source of the truth in the matter is the Qur'an itself.
> (Algar, 1999, p. 46)

Islam, like Christianity, also has its sects. The Saudi Wahhabis, in similar manner to the

Jehovah's Witnesses, are passionate in broadcasting their ideologies throughout the

world; as controllers of the annual Hajj pilgrimage, and with billions of petroleum

dollars, they have a captive audience (Aslan, 2011, pp. 250-251). In the unequivocal

words of Reza Aslan, most Muslims consider the Saudis as "little more than a crude

band of unsophisticated puritans" (Aslan, p. 250). As Mahmut Aydin posits, "the

majority of Muslims today are making the same exclusive claims [made by some Jews

and Christians] by allocating paradise only to those who follow the message of the

Prophet Muhammad" (Aydin, 2000, p. 152).

Inclusivism, in the Christian sense, is a theology which expounds how non-Christians

can unknowingly experience the salvific power of Christ. This is particularly so in the

Roman Catholic theology of Karl Rahner with his concept of anonymous Christians:

> [T]he "anonymous Christian" in our sense of the term is the pagan after
> the beginning of the Christian mission, who lives in the state of Christ's
> grace through faith, hope and love, yet who has no explicit knowledge of
> the fact that his life is orientated in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ.
> (Rahner, 1976, p. 283)

In the Catholic tradition it is formulated in a clear Trinitarian context in the Second

Vatican Council's declaration, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*:

> Since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is
> in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a

> manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with his paschal mystery.
> (*Gaudium et Spes 22*, cited in Amaladoss, 1986, p. 223)

Commenting on this, Rahner writes:

> [T]he Second Vatican Council has recognised the possibility that even non-Christians, polytheists and atheists can live in a subjective state of freedom from serious sin. ... So the possibility cannot be denied to any other group of men, whatever their externally verifiable attitudes and beliefs. (Rahner, 1979, p. 202)

In Islam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others were Muslims because they submitted to God.[9] Sura 3:67 of the Qur'an declares that Abraham "was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a true Muslim." Qamar-ul Huda, whose specialisation is Islamic intellectual history, explains that the Qur'an accepts Jews and Christians as "people of the Book *(ahl al Kitab)*," because they, like Muslims, also have a book from God. Both the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad claim however, that these *ahl al Kitab* have distorted the truths of their own scriptures (Huda, 2003, pp. 295-296). Indirectly, I perceive Huda to be saying that Jews and Christians are anonymous Muslims. One would venture to suggest that the vast majority of Jews and Christians would be outraged to be considered anonymous Muslims; in like manner Jews and Muslims would be highly offended to be regarded as anonymous Christians. This is the great weakness of inclusivist theology – no inclusivist, by definition, can accept being labelled an anonymous other.

The challenge of pluralism is to accept that no one person has the complete truth; as St Paul once phrased it, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Philip Kennedy OP neatly encapsulates the essence of the Christian understanding of pluralism:

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[9] A Muslim is one who practises *Islam*, that is, submission to God.

> Jesus Christ is not the complete revelation of God in history, but a partial manifestation of what God may be like. Since Jesus is not the unveiling of the fullness of God in the world, other religions may have their say about God's salvific nature. (Kennedy in Marty, Imbelli, & Kennedy, 2000, p. 15)

Kennedy's opinion is given in response to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's declaration of *Dominus Iesus* (2000), which instructs that God only offers salvation through Christ (Kennedy in Marty, et al., 2000, pp. 14-15). Many Christian theologians would take issue with Kennedy's opinion, and herein lies one of the intrinsic problems with pluralism; is it possible for a pluralist to accept the validity of another's theology without conceding, in the slightest, that (s)he might not have absolute knowledge of God's salvific nature? In an Abrahamic context, Kennedy asserts:

> Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all Abrahamic religions by definition. Christians, like Jews and Muslims, believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac[10], and Jacob. Therefore the faith of Jews and Muslims is properly theological because it is given to God. (2000, p. 15).

Christians and Muslims (and for that matter, adherents of *any* faith) accept that their particular belief is the most appropriate for themselves. As Geoffrey Parrinder rationalises, "It would indeed be strange if a religious faith, firmly held, were to consider the object of its devotion and author of its salvation as inferior to others, or even on the same level as them" (Parrinder, 1973, pp. 195-196). This applies to any passionate believer, "whether Christian or Hindu, Islamic or Marxist" (1973, p. 196). Any believer must echo the words commonly attributed to Martin Luther, "Here stand I: I can do no other" (Chadwick, 1990, p. 56). A Christian will always be guided by the Bible and a Muslim by the Qur'an, but nevertheless, if considered through a pluralistic outlook, each could see value in the other's sacred book. This topic is explored in

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[10] It could well be argued that Muslims would choose Ishmael rather than Isaac, but that does not negate the thrust of Kennedy's assertion.

greater depth in Chapter 2 (Christian-Muslim Dialogue) where Jürgen Habermas'

theory of communicative action is considered as a way forward for interfaith dialogue

(Douglas, 2009). As the *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue* (1989) from the

Catholic Bishops' Conference of India express it:

> The plurality of religions is a consequence of the richness of creation itself and of the manifold grace of God. Though all coming from the same source, peoples have perceived the universe and articulated their awareness of the Divine Mystery in manifold ways, and God has surely been present in these historical undertakings of his children. Such pluralism therefore is not to be deplored but rather acknowledged as itself a divine gift.
> (cited in Dupois, 2002, p. 184)[11]

These pluralistic pathways are also further explored in Chapter 2 in the discussion of

interfaith dialogue.

Ilia Delio OSF sees pluralism as a cosmic given. Citing quantum physics, where

subatomic particles can simultaneously be and not be, she suggests that human salvation

is somehow analogous; salvation is not "exclusively for one person or one religion. ...

[W]e will either be saved together or we will not be saved at all" (Delio, 2009, p. 838).

This thesis would make the glaringly obvious observation that polemic (such as that

offered by Rutherford and Algar) (thesis p. 7-8) is most unlikely to improve

understanding and acceptance between believers with different perceptions of faith.

Pluralists would be better placed to accept the existence of divergent theologies, but it is

suggested that such understanding and acceptance would be through dialogue and not

through comparative theology. As is demonstrated in Chapter 2, a pluristic

understanding of the theology of religions would *help* towards improving relations

between Christians and Muslims, but by itself and without interfaith dialogue, would

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[11] The primary document is unobtainable.

not achieve a great deal. Delio (cited above) although ignoring conservative dogmatics, at least offers a tentative pathway to dialogue. Such speculations, involving analogies to physics, are further explored in the final chapter (Mysticism: A Pathway to Dialogue) of this thesis.

b. Supersession and Abrogation. Jesus was never a Christian; as Kessler reminds the forgetful, Jesus was born of Jewish parents, was raised a Jew, followed Jewish tradition and "lived and died a Jew" (Kessler, 2013, p. xv). Tyron Inbody is appalled by the number of his students who assume that Jesus, somehow or other, was not Jewish and preached some sort of supersessionist theology (Inbody, 2002, p. 165). John Pawlikowski OSM is of the opinion that Jesus did not convey "to his disciples and followers any sense that he was creating a totally new and distinct religious entity called the church" (Pawlikowski, 2003, p. 113). Many Christians cannot accept "that what the church called Jewish stubbornness, was, from Israel's perspective, fidelity to Torah and Torah's Author" (van Buren, 1995, p. 276). Inbody affirms, "God has not abandoned God's people. Jews remain the people of the covenant, to which Christians are newcomers through a sheer act of grace, through a parallel but novel covenant" (Inbody, 2002, p. 185).

Whether or not Christianity is, or is not, supersessionist leads us to the nub of the problem. Terrence W Tilley goes to the heart of this impasse by arguing that if Christianity is supersessionist, then the Jewish Covenant is abrogated and Jews should either be converted or be co-opted in an inclusivist manner (Tilley, 2009, p. 75). If the Jewish Covenant is abrogated then God has reneged on a contract, which in Christian philosophical terms is logically inconsistent; an Almighty (as distinct from an

Omnipotent) God has the "ability to do all things which are compatible with His nature" (van den Brink, 1993, pp. 183-184). On the other hand, if the Jewish Covenant is not superseded then the universal salvific claims for Jesus Christ become untenable (Tilley, p. 75).

In the same manner that some Christians consider that Christianity has superseded Judaism, there are Muslims who consider that Islam supersedes both Judaism and Christianity, or rather, that Judaism and Christianity never really existed in the first place, "Ibrahim (Abraham) was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a true Muslim" (Qur'an 3:67). This is a substantial Islamic position. As Kessler posits, by asserting that Islam is the final religion ordained by God, Judaism and Christianity can both be dismissed by being considered superseded (Kessler, 2013, p. 217). Classical Muslim exegetes attested "to the superseding validity of the Islamic revelation over Christianity and Judaism" (Sachedina, 1994, p. 95). Jane McAuliffe, in her understanding of the intent of the Qur'an, is in no doubt that the message is abrogationist:

> In no way, then, does Biblical Christianity remain a fully valid 'way of salvation' after the advent of Muhammad. It is inconceivable under the Qur'anic definition of authentic Christianity ... that a 'true' Christian who had been exposed to the Prophet's message would refuse to become a Muslim. Not to acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad, which has been clearly foretold in the untainted version of the *injil* [Gospels], would itself constitute a betrayal of 'true' Christianity. (McAuliffe, 1991, p. 290)

As Aydin laments, too many of his fellow Muslims argue that "only those who acknowledge the prophethood of the prophet Muhammad and follow his message in the Qur'an can be acceptable to God" and thus find salvation (Aydin, 2000, p. 150). Likewise, many Christians cannot accept the validity of the existence of Islam. It is

suggested that most Christians, especially if they were ignorant of its origins, would happily affirm, "There is no God but God"[12] but certainly would *not* affirm the second part of the Shahada, "and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

I would argue that a Muslim, who accepts Islamic supersession, would be unable, on Qur'anic theological grounds, to find much understanding as to why Christians do not convert to Islam. Nevertheless it is submitted that a Christian and a supersessionist Muslim could still find commonality through dialogue; not a commonality of theology, but a commonality of respectful relations. As previously indicated (p. viii) the aim of this thesis is to promote mutual respect (sociology) rather than mutual religious agreement (theology). Religious disagreement does not have to automatically mean disrespect for those of a different theological persuasion.

To a Muslim, Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets; there will be no more prophets (Charfi, 2009, pp. 77-83). Groups such as the Baha'is (Baha'i Faith, 2014) and Mormons (Richards, 1969) would disagree. The issues of continued revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit are contentious but do lead to the reinterpretation of religious dogmas. For example, current issues in Christianity include the ordination of both women[13] and homosexuals (personal communication, Brian Douglas, email November 14, 2013). The latter issue has been off-limits until late in the twentieth century. During the American Civil War, Confederate soldiers died in their tens of thousands in defence of their biblical understanding of the institution of slavery; today, few, if any Christians would subscribe to such a belief.

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[12] *Lâ ilâha illâ Allâh.*
[13] The Salvation Army has always accepted the ordination of women. Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (c713-801) was accepted by the Islamic Sufis to be the equal of any man.

c. Historical Disputes. On September 16, 2001, five days after the al-Qaeda attacks on the Twin Towers, New York, and the Pentagon, Washington, President George W Bush declared, "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while" (Bush, 2001). Bush's use of the word "crusade" created a storm of protest. Karen Armstrong confirms the "disgraceful" nature of the eleventh to thirteenth century Crusades and the devastation they caused in the Near East, but suggests that for the majority of Muslims they were "remote border incidents" (Armstrong, 2001, p. 81). She goes on to say that it was in the twentieth century when the Islamic world felt threatened by the West, "that Muslim historians would become preoccupied by the medieval Crusades, looking back with nostalgia to the victorious Saladin" and wishing for a leader to "contain the neo-Crusade of Western imperialism" (2001, p. 81). The ongoing contretemps in the Holy Land is, in part, a legacy of these Crusades. A more over-riding problem is the existence of the State of Israel in a predominantly Muslim region; to Muslims it is "a religious and political anomaly" (Kessler, 2013, p. 197). Armstrong opines that Islamists fight back against Western hegemony "and in the process, they depart from the core values of compassion, justice and benevolence that characterize ... Islam" (Armstrong, 2001, p. 153). Aslan argues that it is not the Traditionalists and Jihadists who are the biggest stumbling-blocks to genuine Islamic democracies, but those Westerners who refuse to accept that true democracy "can never be imported" (Aslan, 2011, p. 262). Mehmet Özalp indicates that the only parts of the Muslim world not colonised by European powers were parts of Turkey and the mountains of Afghanistan: Iran, although not colonised, was part of a British and Russian power play. Özalp submits that, "Most of the Muslim world's present problems can be attributed to colonisation" (Özalp, 2012, pp. xxii-xxiii).[14]

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[14] Not all historians of religion would agree with Özalp, William Emilsen being one such dissenter.

By no means is this hatred of the other a one-way street. The Serbian hatred of Muslims dates back to 1389 when the Ottomans defeated the Serbians at Kossovo Field and captured and executed Prince Hrelbeljanovic, national hero and martyr (Armstrong, 2001, p. 93). Since the time of the Crusades, Christians have had misconceptions of Islam, including linking it to conquest, conversion by the sword, perverted sexual practices, irrationality and anti-science (Bouma, 2011, p. 433). Other non-Qur'anic misconceptions include "forced marriages, child marriages, honour killings, preference for a male child and female circumcision" (Özalp, 2012, p. 116). Public statements, such as the one glowingly accorded by Cal Thomas to then US Attorney General, John Ashcroft in 2001, are indicative of these perceptions: Thomas states that during an interview, Ashcroft asserted, "Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for him, Christianity is a faith in which God sends his son to die for you" (C. Thomas, 2001). Such beliefs and statements, if true, are anathema to the promotion of respectful Christian-Muslim relationships. The species *Homo sapiens* is capable of holding grudges and bitter memories for generations, and often theology and religious differences play very little part in these inherited schisms.

Christian-Muslim relations have not always been so dire. Steven Runciman describes a situation during the days of the eleventh century when Constantinople and Baghdad were respectively the centres of great Christian and Islamic empires:

> [A] Byzantine felt far more at home in Cairo or Baghdad than he would
> feel at Paris or Goslar, or even at Rome. Except in rare times of crisis
> and reprisals the authorities in the Empire and Caliphate agreed not to force
> conversions on either side and to allow the free worship of the other
> religion. (Runciman, 1965, p. 88).

Emilsen regards Özalp's submission as being too simplistic (personal communication, 7 January 2015).

Also significant is the fact that Islam kept the study of classical philosophy alive during the Western Dark Ages. Referring to the late eighth-early ninth centuries, Philip Hitti tellingly writes that while the Baghdadi caliphs, "[W]ere delving into Greek and Persian philosophy their contemporaries in the West, Charlemagne and his lords, were reportedly dabbling in the art of writing their names" (Hitti, 1943/1996, p. 120).

Özalp writes from an Australian Western Islamic perspective, proposing that modernity in the West has deeply challenged Muslims and that they now face the "mammoth task of relating Islam persuasively to modern life" (Özalp, 2012, p. xiii). Nevertheless, he comments:

> Interestingly, Western countries would qualify to be more Islamic from the religious freedom perspective than many Muslim majority countries where religious education and association may be tightly restricted. (Özalp, 2012, p. 241)

Özalp submits that most analysts categorise Muslims as belonging to one of three groups, namely extremist (fundamentalist), moderate or modernist (pp. 125-131).[15] The former can also be identified as puritans; they will not wear a suit but happily drive cars and use laptops and mobiles. The moderates are in the majority and constitute normative Islam. Modernists tend to be westernised, educated, and not particularly devout. The extreme puritans may be described as terrorists, but as Özalp aptly phrases it, "A 'Muslim terrorist' is, in fact, an oxymoron" (p. 247).[16] Özalp reminds the Christian West that "It is in the interests of the Muslim world that conflicts should end because Muslims also suffer in wars and are the principal victims of terrorism" (p. 273). He indicates that al-Qaeda ideologues justify their terrorist activities by invoking an extreme form of jihad, and goes on to question, "If victory comes by compromising just

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[15] Özalp personally prefers to use only the classifications of puritanical or moderate (personal communication, email, 6 October, 2014).

[16] Emilsen (personal communication, email, November 2013) indicates that these terrorists are still in fact, devout Muslims; in the same manner that paedophile priests remain Christian (see also thesis, p. 78).

about all the virtues and values of Islam, what kind of victory have they won" (pp. 252-253)? Özalp considers that these acts of gratuitous violence poison the public perception of Islam; "[W]ho can blame outside observers and the media for reporting [terrorist] claims that are ill-founded and illegitimate" (p. 257). Khaled Abou El Fadl from UCLA is of similar opinion; because of these acts, Islam has become associated by many worldwide with "intolerance, persecution, oppression, and violence" (Fadl, 2007, pp. 3-4). Fadl suggests that even if non-Muslims were to do no more than reject the preaching of those who incite hatred, they would be contributing to peaceful coexistence (2007, p. 3).[17] Violence begets violence, and in the opinion of this thesis, Christian-Muslim relations will never be improved by the use of force, either in the form of military intervention or by political coercion.

d. Summary of Chapter 1: Setting the Scene. An understanding of the theology of religions is of *some* help in improving Christian-Muslim relations, but by itself is insufficient. In addition, pluralists are arguably more likely to find some accommodation than are exclusivists. In similar vein, Christians who do not accept that Christianity has superseded Judaism, and Muslims who do not concur that Islam has superseded Christianity, are in a better position to establish respectful relations than supersessionists. Again, those who can learn from the mistakes of history are better equipped to positively influence the future than are those who are rooted in the past. Nevertheless, without genuine interfaith dialogue, this thesis maintains that substantial improvement in Christian-Muslim relations cannot proceed. This leads on to Chapter 2, the main thrust of the thesis, the possibilities of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

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[17] This is not to say that military intervention is never justified; but the thesis is saying that force cannot improve interreligious relations.

Chapter 2: Christian Muslim Dialogue

> [N]o human life together without a world ethic for the nations;
> no peace among the nations without peace among the religions;
> no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions.
> (closing statements in Küng, 1991, p. 138)

a. What is Dialogue? Chapter 1 has endeavoured to accomplish what its title advertises, namely, to set the scene. It indicates that theology and history, although instructive, cannot by themselves result in the development of more respectful relations between Christians and Muslims. By advocating the use of dialogue, this thesis hopes to demonstrate that even exclusivists and supersessionists may achieve a better understanding and accommodation with the other.

What then is interfaith dialogue about? Its importance to the thesis has previously been stressed; I will now endeavour to explain how it operates in practice. James Haire (personal communication, seminar, 5 March 2014) lays out three varieties of interreligious dialogue, the first being a "getting to know you," finding out what the other believes. The second is in the nature of a "peace treaty," for instance in 2001-2005 after interreligious butchery in Indonesia. The final type is "doing a deal," you can build mosques here when Saudi Arabia lets us build churches there. This third type is what Daniel Madigan SJ refers to as "reciprocity," indicating that while it is perfectly permissible to hope for reciprocity as an *outcome* of dialogue, in what he calls an "exaggerated generosity", it is unacceptable as a *condition* for such dialogue (Madigan, 2013, p. 256). This thesis will only consider the first variety, although it would propose that if the "getting to know you" was sufficiently implemented, then the second category of "peace treaty" would be less likely to be necessary. B Jill Carroll is of the same thought, maintaining that dialogue is the means of finding commonalities

"especially when, we strongly disagree with their ideas. ... Such difficult dialogues may, in fact, be the most important ones to have" (Carroll, 2007, p. 82). Reduced to simplistic and pragmatic terms, if potential or past combatants are talking, they cannot be fighting, or as Hans Küng phrases it, "Instead of dispute, dialogue" (Küng, 1985, p. 892). Sulaiman bin Ali Al Shuaili from Oman submits that if the parties can identify the issues, then dialogue can help contain the conflicts (Al Shuaili, 2014, p. 76). Neither party is required to abandon their opinion; they are only required to abandon their fanaticism for that opinion (2014, p. 80). Jane Austen's "demure drawing-rooms" (Cragg, 1959, p. 69) no longer exist. Today we are faced with "the unbounded world, with neither charm nor seclusion, but only exposure and inescapable uncertainty" (1959, p. 70).

David Lochhead sees interfaith dialogue not so much as a "search for *agreement*," but rather as a "search for *understanding*" (italics in original, Lochhead, 1988, p. 64). He postulates that it is possible to understand another tradition without having to agree with what that tradition is affirming (1988, p. 64). Whilst not advocating that those in dialogue should, in any way, accept syncretism, he does concede that, to completely avoid any chance of syncretism, "I would have to close myself to reality ... [and live] in splendid isolation from all of life" (1988, p. 64). Dialogue cannot be restricted to merely those situations where both partners have considerable empathy for each other, although of course, a degree of empathy would be advantageous. Lochhead reminds the reader that "every tradition, including our own, has its dark side as well as its light" (p. 45).

In order to lay out the "ground rules" for interreligious dialogue, Leonard Swidler's, "The Dialogue Decalogue" is directly cited (italics in original, removed in thesis, Swidler, 1983).[18]

1. The primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly.

2. Interreligious dialogue must be a two-sided project.

3. Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.

4. Each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners.

5. Each participant must define himself [as a Christian, Muslim or whatever].

6. Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are.

7. Dialogue can only take place between equals.

8. Dialogue can only take place on the basis of mutual trust.

9. Persons entering into interreligious dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious traditions.

10. Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion 'from within.'

Cornille would, in effect, reduce Swidler's ten ground rules for dialogue to only one rule, namely to what she terms "hospitality," which she defines as one religion recognising "truth in the other." She would affirm that, "Such hospitality constitutes the sole sufficient condition for dialogue" (Cornille, 2008, pp. 177-178). Culture and language are determinants of our deepest perceptions and purposes of life, and we

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[18] Swidler lists his Rules as "First Commandment," Second Commandment," and so on (all capitalised).

cannot assume that other cultures and language groups share the same perceptions and purposes. Nevertheless, "Dialogue has to go beyond selecting groups that appear to share the same core values" (Geaves, 2004, p. 68). James W Heisig formulates, among other things, two related rules or "sutras", the first being that the purpose of dialogue "relies on being purposeless," (Heisig, 2005, p. 167) in other words, dialogue is conducted with no thought of preconceived or hidden agendas. Notte Thelle expresses the same concept by writing that "the purpose of dialogue is to establish a situation in which dialogue has no other purpose than being in a trusting relationship" (Thelle, 2003, p. 130). Hesig's second sutra states that even though dialogue is a religious activity, it does not lead to any form of either religious conversion or convergence (Heisig, 2005, p. 169). Jacques Dupois SJ clarifies that even though dialogue *should* lead to conversion, it is not "the 'conversion' of one partner to the religious tradition of the other. Rather it tends to a more profound conversion of each to God. The same God speaks in the heart of both partners; the same Spirit is at work in all" (Dupois, 1997, p. 383). Cornille, Heisig and Dupois' understandings of the nature of interfaith dialogue would coalesce with those of Swidler's "Dialogue Decalogue."

Lesslie Newbigin offers some practicalities for dialogue. Although dialogue must be approached with an open mind, we all enter into a conversation with our personal presuppositions. As he expresses it, "No one can bring a totally open mind to a dialogue except an imbecile who has not yet learned to use human language" (Newbigin, 1977, p. 253). Those in dialogue must be aware of these preconceptions and be prepared to listen to the other's point of view. There is always a risk in dialogue that the encounter could lead to a loss of faith, but as Newbigin makes clear, "A dialogue which is safe from all possible risks is no true dialogue" (1977, p. 269). This thesis would argue that any faith

which could be endangered by any form of rigorous examination would not be worth having in the first place.

It is constructive to précis what Aydin considers are the nine "Qur'anic Guidelines" for Muslims to establish better relations with non-Muslims (Aydin, 2002, pp. 147-150).

1. In this world there are believers[19] and nonbelievers; when endeavouring to live at peace with others, it is immaterial whether the other is a monotheist, atheist, or anything else.

2. Only God "can lead people to the right way." Muslims may share their faith and witness to others, but they may not coerce others to convert.

3. No one can be compelled to accept a particular faith; what is more, we are free to choose, or not choose, whatever we want.

4. God has created us in different ways and in different communities; "O mankind, we have created you male and female and made you nations and tribes, so that you might come to know each other" (Qur'an 49:13, author's translation, 2002, p. 148).

5. Because of our differences, there will always be disputes and disagreements.

6. If the disputes are of a religious nature, then only God can make a judgement.

7. Unless a non-Muslim is creating serious mischief, a Muslim should live in peace with others. If such mischief does arise then a Muslim must take similar action against the aggressor.

8. Muslims should "not be eager to take revenge." In order for different religious, cultural and ethnic groups to live together, all people should "help one another

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[19] See next paragraph (p.24) on whether Aydin regards Christians as believers.

in righteousness and piety, but not in sin and aggression" (Qur'an 5:2, author's translation p. 149).

9. Islam is a religion whose aim is to lead people to God, but unfortunately some "theologians and jurists have converted Islam to a political religion in the course of Islamic history" (p. 149).

Most of the above Qur'anic advice that Aydin gives to Muslims would be instructive for Christians to heed in their own relations with non-Christians. In his conclusion Aydin makes a salient point; where Muslims are in the majority, the minority should be treated with honour and respect. Similarly, where Muslims are in the minority, the majority should treat them with the same honour and respect (p. 150).

In relation to Aydin's first Guideline above, an interesting question is to ask whether or not Aydin sees Christians as believers; the answer being a tentative yes. Aydin is cautious and prefaces his opinions with, "As a Muslim student of interreligious dialogue, whatever remarks I make ... are my own" (Aydin, 2001, p. 334) and goes on to say, "To me [religious pluralism] ... means that those who attain God's grace are saved by their own religious traditions" (2001, p. 336). Nevertheless, he is at pains to indicate that his opinion is not that of "the majority of Muslim commentators" (Aydin, 2001, p. 346).

In the Introduction (p. 1) Tony Blair is cited as presenting the primary reason for pursuing this thesis. Whether Christians and Muslims, who together make up over half of the world's population, like it or not, they must peacefully coexist and work together to make the world a more humane place for all its inhabitants (Blair, 2010, p. x). Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan uses an analogy from physics to summarise the

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problem: Both sides have used fundamentalism, terrorism and missionaries to generate powerful, negative centrifugal forces; these forces have combined to greatly outweigh the positive centripetal forces generated by interfaith and intercultural centres, and by world governments (Muhammad, 2010b, p. 6). In other words, the forces ripping Christians and Muslims apart are greater than the forces holding them together. There are those who are more than eager to create division in the world, regardless of the human cost; there are others who lament the current state of affairs, but are of the belief that there is nothing that can be done to prevent this clash of civilisations, and are reluctantly resigned to the inevitable (Obama, 2009). Barack Obama, in a 2009 speech in Cairo, expresses his thoughts with eloquence:

> All of us share this world but for a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort – a sustained effort – to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings. (Obama, 2009)

Martin Marty in *When Faiths Collide*, argues that mere toleration of the other is unlikely to be very successful in solving serious religious clashes. His thesis is that "hospitality" is a better pathway; "Hospitality permits – indeed, it insists on - regarding the other as being really different" (Marty, 2005, p. 124). In its ancient context, hospitality meant offering a meal and a bed to a stranger; in a more modern sense, hospitality can be viewed as the "welcoming of outsiders" (Marshall, 2014, pp. 212-213). Tolerance is only "the negation of a negation, a counter-intolerance" (Marty, 2005, p. 126). This "counter-intolerance" only allows the tolerant person to grimly hang on to a fragile faith, and will only signal to the other that the tolerant one will not act against them (2005, p. 127). To Marty, hospitality means being courteous to the other, but at the same time being honest to both oneself and the other. He gives the example of

inviting a Muslim to his home, but leaving the house's religious symbols (such as a crucifix) in place (p. 128). Hospitality does not have to be literal as in Marty's example, but can be metaphorically applied by accepting the other as he or she is. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10: 30-37 is a classic example of such hospitality. Mark Swanson (2014, p. 351) points Christians to Hebrews 13: 2, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." As the Evangelical Lutheran Church says in *Was jeder vom Islam wissen muss*:

> From of old, in both the Islamic ethic and in many Christian testimonies, hospitality and neighbourliness have had a high status [and help]. ... Christians and Muslims ... [to] live together in a friendly and peaceful way. (cited and translated in Kuschel, 1995, pp. 187-188).

The chronicler Jean, Lord of Joinville (c. 1224-1317) admiringly cites Saladin (1137-1187), the leader of the Muslim armies which captured Jerusalem in 1187, as having declared, "[Y]ou should never kill a man once you had shared your bread and salt with him" (Joinville, 1967, p. 245). In the opinion of this thesis, the Crusades were undoubtedly a monumental blot on the Christian escutcheon; but the underlying concept of such an example of mediaeval chivalry would not go amiss in the context of current Christian-Muslim relations.

Of course there are limitations to hospitality; Marty himself admits to almost losing heart, and gives as an example of such hopelessness as, "Picture trying to get militant Shi'ite and Wahhabi Sunni Muslims to the table with non-Muslims ... For that matter, picture there even being a table!" (Marty, 2005, p. 146). A contemporary Islamist website, www.answering-christianity.com (thesis, p.61), would not even contemplate Sunni dialogue with Shi'ites, let alone with Christians, "The Shias are not Muslims. They are polytheists and idol worshipers of mere creations from dust. They deify and

seek and call unto those creations whom they worship" (Are Shias Really Muslims?, 2014).

This thesis takes a positive slant on the possibilities of improving respectful relations between Christian and Muslim. To state the obvious: If I were to believe that the destiny of Christian-Muslim relations is to result in ultimate disaster, no matter what anyone might do to try and improve such relations, then such a thesis would be pointless. On the other hand, it is equally pointless looking at the problem through rose-coloured spectacles. If Christian-Muslim relations are at all possible of being improved, it will not be done in the manner of an early childhood teacher trying to maintain order by exhorting her charges to "stop being silly and instead start play nicely together."[20] US Senator John Kerry paints on an even broader canvas. As a keynote speaker at the Yale Common Word Conference in July 2008 (thesis p.55), he did not mince words:

> In a world where today a Catholic, a Protestant, a Russian Orthodox Christian, a Confucian ex-Communist, a Hindu, a Muslim, and possibly even a Jewish finger sits on a nuclear button, it's a delusion to think we can retreat to our safe places. Not when Christians, Hindus and Muslims number in the billions. (Kerry, 2010, pp. 193-194)

Paul Knitter is of like mind, "The realization that the entire population of the planet could be snuffed out by the pressing of a few buttons by a few political figures ... terrorizes us all" (Knitter, 1990, p. 29).

So far in this thesis, the literature has shown that relations between Christians and Muslims have little, or no, hope of being improved by mere recourse to dogmatic theologies or rewriting of histories. Race sees two tracks for a Christian to interface with other religions, Track One being an understanding of the Christian theology of religions (outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis) and Track Two being interfaith dialogue

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[20] As a one-time early childhood teacher, I have given this exact advice to children I have taught!

(Race, 2001). Küng echoes Race in broader terms, "There can be no dialogue between the religions without research into theological foundations" (Küng, 1991, p. 105). Understanding theology is instructive for dialogue, but in addition to understanding our own theology "we need to be in dialogue with other religious identities and communities" (Race, 2001, p. xiii). Cornille would concur that in dialogue both a personal faith and "a certain religious competence" are essential (Cornille, 2008, p. 67). She continues by stressing that each dialogical situation is unique and by way of illustration suggests that a Shi'ite-Methodist dialogue would be different to a Sunni-Orthodox encounter (2008, p. 67). An added complexity and criticism is offered by Christopher Duraisingh who laments that much dialogue "is grounded primarily on doctrinal formulations of predominantly middleclass, university-based, privileged and often male intellectuals" (Duraisingh, 1988, p. 400). Küng stresses that each participant must come to dialogue with their own steadfast roots in their own tradition; otherwise, if the participants have no strong personal beliefs, the result of the dialogue would already be predetermined, namely the participants could already be in agreement before even engaging in such dialogue (Küng, 1991, p. 100). These many caveats notwithstanding, the only practical way forward would nevertheless appear to be through dialogue. Arnold Eisen writes:

> We know the others are out there, but most of the time we would rather believe ourselves to be living on the island, surrounded not by competing certainties as uncertain as our own, but only by waves of wonder that lap invitingly at our shores. If that is true, the first task for would-be pluralists is not long-distance swimming practice. It is rather standing up on our little spaces of dry land looking around with both eyes open and walking next door to meet the neighbours. (Eisen, 2009, p. 14)

It is well worth noting that James L Heft SM, whilst recognising the importance of dialogue, would propound that personal friendships with others are even more important in promoting better interfaith respect and relations (Heft, 2004b, p. 13). Brian Douglas,

an Anglican priest seriously involved in interfaith dialogue with Muslims, would agree with Heft, maintaining that in such dialogue "friendship is very important" (personal communication, email, 15 August 2014). Friendship in dialogue will be further considered in Chapter 3.

Dialogue and pluralism are not one and the same thing; for instance, to a Christian, Christ's death and resurrection are key tenets; for a Muslim such a belief is un-Qur'anic, unacceptable and non-debatable (Parrinder, 1973, p. 201). Dialogue is not proselytising: In a 2001 radio interview Peter Jensen, then Archbishop-elect of Sydney, offered that in the tenth to thirteenth centuries Islam saved Western civilisation, but then went on to say that he considered dialogue with Muslims as a situation where, "I hope that I can persuade them of the truth of God's word as I understand it, and of the central saviourhood of the Lord Jesus Christ" (P. Jensen, 2001). John Stott, Anglican Evangelical, is even more pointed; dialogue is only to "disclose the inadequacies and fallacies of non-Christian religion [*sic*] and to demonstrate the adequacy and truth, absoluteness and finality of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Stott, 1977, p. 69). Likewise, an imam or mullah extolling the centrality of the revelation given to Prophet Muhammad, is not in dialogue. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (see also thesis p.38) asserts that the Qur'an is correct in stating that Jesus was not crucified; therefore the New Testament (NT) version of events must be rejected (Nasr, 1987, pp. 99-100). A contemporary website is titled, "Answering Islam: a Christian-Muslim Dialog" www.answering-islam.org (thesis, p.61) but its function is not to dialogue with Muslims, but rather to refute Islamic belief (Bennett, 2008, p. 163). All of these illustrations are examples of what Thomas McCarthy, Habermas' English translator, would describe as "hermeneutic idealism;" an example of the individual participants each being culturally independent

and autonomous "and ... [remaining] blind to causes, connections and consequences that lie beyond the horizon of everyday practice" (McCarthy, 1984, p. xxvi). Hermeneutic idealism is by no means restricted to Christian belief; it applies equally to Islam or to any other belief system.

Pieter de Jong posits, "Commitment without openness leads to fanaticism. Openness without commitment ends in relativism. The answer lies in the balance between commitment and openness" (de Jong, 1989, p. 88). Cornille likewise points to a certain tension between religious commitment and intolerance on the one hand and openness on the other. She indicates that there is an erroneous conception that those who possess a strong religious conviction are, of necessity, religiously intolerant of others; and conversely, that those who are open to others are necessarily more loosely related to the truth of their own tradition (Cornille, 2008, p. 59). Nevertheless she is forced to observe that those involved in dialogue are often looked upon by mainstream traditionalists as being somewhat suspect (2008, p. 213). Douglas suggests that Habermas may help us to resolve the problem of dialoguing with the other, both parties being true to their own understandings, but neither trying to patronise or diminish the other. In hermeneutic idealism, one or both parties harangue the other; in communicative action genuine dialogue is possible (Douglas, 2009, pp. 46-47). Douglas offers a simple précis of Habermas' argument; hermeneutic idealism (haranguing) is "subject-object" based and is not true dialogue; conversely, communicative action, "subject-subject" orientated, where both parties are equals, does lead to genuine interfaith dialogue (Douglas, 2014, pp. 97-99). In essence, Habermas is saying that both parties must be authentic to their own beliefs, yet at the same time, each must stand aside from their own tradition in

order to more clearly hear the other (2014, pp. 100-101). Both parties are thus in a position to benefit from such dialogue.

Fethullah Gülen, in *Yenilenme Cehdi*, (2012), offers a modern-day parable which effectively echoes Habermas:

> A person who does not take into account others in traffic, and only
> concentrates on driving his own vehicle cannot be a good driver.
> Instead he should take into account those who will come from the left
> and the right, those coming from the opposite direction, and those who
> will keep changing lanes in a nonplussed way.
> (cited and translated in Sertkaya, 2014, p. 311)

 As Rita M Gross suggests, by developing an understanding of another's religion, an individual is better placed to more fully understand their own faith (Gross, 1989, p. 41). Kenneth Woodward accepts as a "theological rule of thumb" (Woodward, 2003, p. 10) that you cannot truly understand your own faith unless you can understand another faith to the same depth. Max Müller adopts Goethe's paradox[21] and adapts it for an understanding of religious belief, "*He who knows one* [religion], *knows none*" (italics in original, Müller, 1874, pp. 10-11). Unless we have an understanding of another religion, we have no yardstick by which to measure the "specificity and uniqueness" of our own individual belief (Gross, 1989, p. 41).

b. Some Specific Problems Facing Christian-Muslim Dialogue. In an address in Tehran, Iran, on "Islam and Christianity" in 1985, speaking from the Christian point of view on Christian-Muslim dialogue, Küng expressed three opinions (Küng, 1985, p. 893). His first point was that Christians may not "look upon Islam as a path to hell." His second point was that Christians may not "dismiss the prophet [*sic*] Muhammad as a false prophet;" and his final injunction was that Christians may not "discredit the

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[21] "*He who knows one language, knows none.*"

Qur'an as ... [being derived] from old Arabic-Jewish-Christian ideas." Christians would do well to bear this in mind when entering dialogue with Muslims.

Madigan is of the firm opinion that Christian-Muslim dialogue is strongly beneficial, even if the reasons for such dialogue are stated to be on purely pragmatic grounds, namely both because of the sheer number of people involved and the quantities of the world's resources under Christian[22] or Muslim control. He adds however, that for both historical and theological reasons, such dialogue is among the more challenging (Madigan, 2013, p. 244). He concedes that Christian-Muslim dialogue is "most particular" and "more robust" than the often irenic exchanges between other religious groupings (2013, p. 245) (see also, Kessler, thesis, p.4). Without entering into a theological exposition which would be outside the parameters of this thesis, suffice it to say that there are both Christians who refuse to see Muhammad as a Messenger of God, and Muslims who cannot understand why Christians refuse to accept the Qur'an and its Prophet (p. 245). Christians are unable to accept that Muhammad is the last Prophet; neither can Muslims accept "Christ as the final and complete revelation" (Wingate, 1988, p. 32). Christians and Muslims are both convinced that they are in possession of all necessary truth and are at a loss as to why the other does not see such truth in the same light, but instead view the other's profession as "preposterous" (Madigan, 2013, p. 252). In view of such religious impasses, Madigan is more surprised that "there has been *any* dialogue at all" (italics added, Madigan, p. 246) rather than the fact that such dialogue has often been difficult. Mahmoud Ayoub is even more forthright, stating that until recently, any dialogue that did take place was "either on the battlefield or between colonizing and colonized" (Ayoub, 1984, p. 50).

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[22] In this context, "Christian" and "Muslim" are used in a broad ethno-political, rather than a more precise religious, sense.

Madigan stresses that, throughout history, any religious engagement of Christians and Muslims has also involved aspects of both culture and politics (Madigan, 2013, p. 247). This is not necessarily a bad thing; if issues of a social or political nature are impeding such putative religious discourse, then "inter-cultural" rather than "inter-religious" dialogue becomes the primary consideration. Madigan suggests that "in most cases" cultural and political dialogue is both more urgent, and more satisfying, than mere theological discussion. (2013, p. 258). This does however create a conundrum; as Madigan indicates, cultural and political issues *must* be resolved before religious discussion can commence, but such cultural and political matters cannot become a *substitute* for interfaith dialogue, because our cultural and political habits and practices are very much determined by our religious backgrounds (p. 258). Modern politeness is to be applauded, but it can lead to dialogue partners courteously refraining from pointing out that their partners' theoretical, admirable ideals are not matched by their practical commitment to such lofty standards (p. 259) (see also Heft, thesis, p. 96). Both parties must be prepared to admit to their own failings, but such admissions require humility, and humility can be misconstrued as weakness (p. 259). Events in this current century have both made dialogue more difficult, but at the same time have inspired others to attempt this seemingly difficult but essential enterprise (p. 252).

Adnan Silajdzic, a Muslim theologian, writes on the necessity of Christian-Muslim dialogue from the perspective of the Balkans and the breakup up the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. What he says in 2002 about the Balkans is applicable to broader and current Christian-Muslim tensions in the world today. He stresses that not only are the conflicts of a Christian versus Muslim nature, but also involve Christian against Christian and Muslim against Muslim (Silajdzic, 2002, p.

186). Omid Safi, an US Muslim academic, expresses a similar opinion; it is just as essential for Muslims to attach the same importance to Sunni-Shi'ite dialogue as to that between Muslim and Christian (Safi, 2010, p. 258). Paul Mojzes, a Christian academic born in Bosnia, would agree; interreligious dialogue cannot be successful without intrareligious dialogue (Mojzes, 2002, p. 5). Even after a millennium, the Catholic-Orthodox schism is still not fully resolved, and the current (as at 2015) Islamic sectarian violence in Iraq and Syria is seemingly more and more out of control. As Bronislaw Malinowski states, "Aggression .. like charity, ... begins at home" (Malinowski, 1948-2004, p. 285). Silajdzic echoes others by stating that Muslims often perceive Christian devotion to God as being expressed by military campaigns and by the occupation of Palestine (Silajdzic, 2002, p. 186) and conversely, that Christians perceive Muslims as "adherents of fanaticism, regressivism, and now terrorism" (2002, pp. 186-187). Silajdzic suggests that before Christian-Muslim dialogue can have much success, Christians must revise their reception of Islam with respect to the Qur'an, the Prophet and Shari'a; likewise Muslims must revise their reception of Christianity as regards the nature of the church and the teaching, magisterium and ministry of Jesus (p. 189). Using the Balkans as a case study, Silajdzic laments that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox, instead of drawing together through their physical proximity, have instead used their religious differences to become a "conflict zone of civilizations" (pp. 189-190). Mojzes concurs with Silajdzic; the majority of people in the Balkans have little desire for positive relations "with those of another ethnicity and religion" (Mojzes, 2002, p. 3). Unfortunately, as this thesis suggests, there are too many people, both Christian and Muslim, who do not desire better relations with those who are not of the same thought and mould as themselves. Silajdzic reiterates what others also stress; the truth of one religion cannot be assessed through the lens of the truth of

another religion; only God can judge (Silajdzic, 2002, p. 191). For Christian-Muslim dialogue to prosper, a priest cannot hate a Muslim because his/her creed invokes the Prophet Muhammad; conversely, neither can an imam hate a Christian because his/her creed invokes the incarnation (Silajdzic, p. 192). Alija Izetbegovic, then President of Bosnia-Herzegovina, offers a refreshing alternative to confrontation. Speaking to the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Tehran 1997, he declared:

> Islam is best, but we Muslims are not the best. The West is neither corrupted nor degenerate. It is strong, well educated and organized. Their schools are better than ours. Their cities are cleaner than ours. The level of respect for human rights in the West is higher, and the care for the poor and less capable is better organized. Westerners are usually responsible and accurate in their words. Instead of hating the West, let us proclaim cooperation instead of confrontation. (cited in Schwartz, 2003, p. v)[23]

On 16 October 1987 Hans Küng addressed Harvard Divinity School's Jerome Hall Dialogue Series with a keynote presentation, "Christianity and the World Religions: The Dialogue with Islam as One Model." Three scholars, Muslim, Hindu and Unitarian-Universalist respectively, formally responded to Küng's paper (J. I. Smith, 1987). The response of the Muslim, Nasr, is of particular significance to this thesis, both Professor Küng and Professor Nasr being theologians of international repute. In his address, Küng made the following statement:

> However one wishes to settle the Islamic question of the origin of the Qur'an, today it is important that the Qur'an as the word of God be regarded at the same time as the word of a human prophet. This viewpoint is also shared by Muslim scientific reflection (such as the work of the Pakistani Fazlur Rahman). (Küng, 1987, p. 87)

Küng does not directly cite Rahman, but Rahman is indeed of the opinion that, "The objectives of the Qur'an must be understood and fixed, keeping in full view its sociological setting, i.e. the environment in which the Prophet moved and worked" (Rahman, 1970, p. 329). Nasr takes great exception to Küng's statement, to the extent

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[23] Primary source untraceable.

that he quotes Küng's statement verbatim, with the curious exception of replacing

"Qur'an" with "Koran" (Nasr, 1987, p. 98), while he (Nasr) always uses "Qur'an" when

referring to the sacred book. Nasr is at pains to make clear, that notwithstanding this

isolated case of "an eminent scholar [namely Rahman]" (1987, p. 99) that nevertheless,

all Muslims, from the most fundamentalist to the most liberal, will only accept "that the

Prophet of Islam received the Qur'an verbatim from heaven" (p. 98). Nasr makes it

abundantly clear that a Muslim will not pick and choose verses of the Qur'an in order to

befriend Christians, or to achieve world peace, or for any other laudable objective.

Either the Qur'an is accepted in toto, as the Word of God, or else it must be totally

rejected (p. 100). Neal Robinson, a Christian theologian, would agree; if Christians

wish to dialogue with Muslims they must respect the Muslim exegetical tradition; to the

orthodox Muslim "the Qur'an in its entirety is a revelation from God" (Robinson,

1991a, p. 99).

Not all Muslim theologians would concur with Nasr; Ayoub writes:

> [M]any have insisted on the transcendent character of the Qur'an, thus
> limiting or altogether denying the fact that the Qur'an is inextricably
> bound to human history. ... It ... came to speak not in a vacuum, but
> within a historical context. (Ayoub, 1997, p. 106).

McAuliffe expresses cautious optimism on Qur'anic exegesis; in spite of the orthodox

position, she believes that there is still some room to manoeuvre. In carefully measured

words she writes:

> [W]ithin the inherited contours a healthy profusion of interpretive perspectives
> has flourished. Those multiple tones and notes sound the necessary prelude for
> new exegetical voices, voices that can again recast the traditional refrains with
> both fidelity and freedom. (McAuliffe, 1991, p. 292)

Heikki Räisänen, a Finnish Christian theologian, suggests that Muslim theologians

should critically examine the Qur'an in the same manner that their Christian

counterparts have analysed the Bible, adding that "a really penetrating dialogue between the two faiths can only begin when both sides are prepared to take historical criticism seriously" (Räisänen, 1980, pp. 124-125). In spite of Küng's reference to Rahman, Rahman's opinion, Ayoub's observation, McAuliffe's prediction, and Räisänen's suggestion, this thesis considers that it would behove any Christian contemplating dialogue with Muslims to tread very carefully if expressing any doubts on the origin of the Qur'an. The aim of this thesis is "Towards Respectful Relations between Christians and Muslims" and would strongly urge that such an approach towards dialogue would *not* be helpful or beneficial for more positive encounters. Nasr states a principle which must always be kept in mind when attempting Christian-Muslim dialogue, namely that one can never assume that the party on the other side of a dialogue will, in any way, accept the premise being proffered by the first party (Nasr, 1987, p. 99). John Cobb proposes that Christians, Muslims and Jews all accept the one common reality of God, and therefore "the Christian might assume ... [that] the dialogue partner ... must be experiencing the same aspect of that one reality," (Cobb, 1990b, p. 5) when, in fact, that is not the case. Christoph Schwöbel is of like mind; Christians and Muslims may agree on the oneness, but not the sameness, of God (Schwöbel, 2012, p. 8). Reza Shah-Kazemi adds an extra layer of subtlety and complexity by detailing how Shi'ite and Sunni theologians do not share the sameness of God, as neither do their Catholic and Orthodox counterparts[24] (Shah-Kazemi, 2012, pp. 96-97) "People can cooperate for the achievement of common goals in the same reality while having very different reasons for it" (Schwöbel, 2012, p. 8). Although we live in the same world, we interpret it differently; but for our common good we must act together (2012, p. 17).

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[24] As in the *filioque* clause of the Nicene Creed.

Nasr (thesis, p. 29) contends that if a Christian were to suggest that the Christology as expressed in the Qur'an is incorrect, then that would make "absolutely impossible any dialogue with Islam" (1987, pp. 99-100). As Cobb explains, "[I]f the [religious] traditions are sufficiently different, the likelihood of flat contradictions is remote" (Cobb, 1990b, p. 14). In this particular case (concerning whether or not Christ was crucified) the traditions are anything but sufficiently different. Nasr, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, does offer a solution. He postulates, that from traditional philosophy, it is possible, as in the case of Jesus' final demise, for the Christian world to see it one way and the Muslim world another, "without there being an inner contradiction" (Nasr, 1987, p. 100). I can accept this as being a philosophical answer, analogous to quantum physics where it is possible for a particle to either be, not be, or be in two places simultaneously; or for Schrödinger's cat to be both alive and dead at the same time. Chuang Tsu illustrated this principle in the fourth century BCE:

> Suppose you and I argue. If you win and I lose, are you indeed right and I wrong? And if I win and you lose, am I right and you wrong? Are we both partly right and partly wrong? Are we both all right or both all wrong? If you and I cannot see the truth, other people will find it even harder.
> (Chuang, 1974, p. 46)

S Wesley Ariarajah, a former director of the Dialogue Sub-unit of the WCC, explains this conundrum by using a simple illustration. When his little daughter tells him that he is "the best daddy in the world ... she is speaking the truth" (Ariarajah, 1985, p. 25). The little girl living next door will say the same thing about her father, and she also will be speaking the truth. As Ariarajah rationalises, "we are dealing not with absolute truths, but with the language of faith and love" (1985, p. 26). During an October 2002 Sufi-Orthodox panel discussion, Nasr offered a precise explanation of how it is possible for a Muslim to both accept and reject Christianity's Trinitarianism:

> The doctrine of the Trinity, on a metaphysical plane, is in perfect accord with the doctrine of *tawhid,* of Unity, and I for one have no qualm or

difficulty about that whatsoever. But this agreement does not involve a
change of perspective on the theological level.
(recorded in Cutsinger, 2002c, p. 266)

 Further discussion, on how two apparently opposite points of view may both be correct,
is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3 "Mysticism – A Pathway to Dialogue" of this
thesis.

This thesis is not intended to be in the nature of a discourse on the respective theologies
of Christianity and Islam, but Nasr's declarations are a timely reminder that those
entering upon such Christian-Muslim dialogue must be aware of the parameters and the
ground rules of such interchange. Ayoub offers some such parameters; dialogue is a
conversation and not a confrontation: Muslims should seek to understand what God is
saying through Christianity: Christians should seek to understand what God is saying
through Islam: although we follow different roads they do meet at different points and
we share the common goal of seeking God (Ayoub, 1984, p. 70). It is important to
recognise that we can only dialogue with the other by accepting the other on his or her
own terms. Martin Kretzmann, Lutheran Mission Study Director, makes this very clear;
from a Christian stance it is a big mistake to try "to meet the Muslim within the
framework of *our* understanding of him rather than willingness to meet him at the point
of *his* self-understanding" (italics added, Kretzmann, 1966, p. 405). The Protestant
church in Germany in *Christen und Muslime im Gespräch*, (1982) offers sage advice:

> The most important point of all is that Christians and Muslims live in the
> same world and have to prove their faith. They will not always react in the
> same way to all the challenges of this world. Yet despite all the differences,
> both are obliged by their faith to live responsibly before God and to serve
> the human community. In full respect for one another, they cannot fail to
> provide evidence of their faith for each other.
> (cited and translated in Küng, 1987, p. 95)

Qur'anic exegetical techniques notwithstanding, there is still plentiful scope for Christian-Muslim dialogue in a Biblical-Qur'anic context. In 2014 Zeki Saritoprak was a plenary speaker at the *International Theological Conference on Inter-faith Dialogue* in Melbourne. As Saritoprak lectures, it was only when he reread the Qur'an, expressly looking for sources for dialogue, that he was surprised by the number of positive references to Christianity and Judaism. To an Islamic theologian "a verse, a word, or even a hint in the Qur'an is substantially important for any theological discussion" (Saritoprak, 2014, pp. 14-15). Saritoprak concurs that there are Qur'anic verses that are very critical of the People of the Book, but argues that such criticism is based on friendship rather than hate (2014, p. 18).[25] Such a verse is Qur'an: 5:51 which is unfortunately also favoured by those opposed to dialogue (Calis, 2014, p. 127):

> O you who believe! Take not the Jews and Christians as *Auliya'* (friends, protectors, helpers), they are but *Auliya'* of each other. And if any amongst you takes them as *Auliya'*, then surely he is one of them. Verily, Allah guides not those people who are the *Zalimun* (polytheists and wrong-doers and unjust).

Fethullah Gülen and other theologians would submit that in such verses, the Qur'an is criticising unacceptable behaviours rather than non Islamic religions (Calis, 2014, p. 137). Saritoprak suggests that Muslims who have deeper understandings of the Qur'an are more likely to be involved in interfaith dialogue than are those whose understandings are but shallow. Likewise, "The more pious one is, the more engaged [in dialogue] he or she is, as can be seen in the case of many Muslim mystics" (Saritoprak, 2014, p. 19). This thesis would submit that the case for genuinely pious Christians (such as Desmond Tutu or Mother Theresa) would be analogous to that which Saritoprak is suggesting apropos Muslims.

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[25] The issue of friendship is further considered in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

From a sociological perspective, colonialism cannot be dismissed as a reason for Muslim reluctance to dialogue. The West colonised much of the Islamic world, resulting in Muslim states that are economically and politically weak (Rane, 2010, p. 222). As Halim Rane, an Islamic academic, argues, this Orientalism has had more of a negative impact on current Muslim thought than does understandings of the Crusades. In recent history, the West (the Occident) sees itself as being superior to the Orient and especially to the Muslim section of that world (2010, p. 222). On the other side of the coin, there are Muslims attracted to the concept of Occidentalism, the belief that "Western values, norms, systems and institutions are the antithesis of Islam" (p. 223) and are therefore to be rejected. Such a dichotomy between Orient and Occident is not inducive to dialogue between equals. Ron Geaves suggests that, especially as so many Muslims now reside in the pluralist West, the traditional "divisions of *Dar al-Harb* and *Dar al-Islam* may need to be reinterpreted or radically revisited" (Geaves, 2004, p. 72). Desperate times call for desperate measures; to give up when the problems seem insurmountable is not an option in the current world climate. Such an example of admirable enterprise is detailed in the ensuing section of this chapter, "A Muslim Approach to Christians." It is significant to note, that on this particular occasion, the *initial* approach was from Muslim to Christian, and *not* from Christian to Muslim.

c. A Muslim Approach to Christians. As recently as 1997 Ataullah Siddiqui, a Muslim academic, was able to write that Muslims are suspicious of Christian overtures to dialogue. Siddiqui details a number of reasons, including the perception that because their economies and technologies are dependent on the West, the dialogue would be one-sided (Siddiqui, 1997, p. xiv). Muslims are also suspicious that Christian dialogue is merely a camouflage for either religious evangelisation, or conversely, an advocacy

towards Western secularism (1997, p. 51). M D Thomas, Catholic priest from New Delhi, speaking from an Asian perspective, would concur, suggesting that the Vatican document *Missio Ad Gentes* goes against the spirit of Vatican II and seeks to impose its Western religious and socio-cultural values on a diverse multicultural portion of the world (M. D. Thomas, 2014, p. 371). Interfaith dialogue must be liberated "from outdated, one-sided and lifeless stereotypes" (2014, p. 387). Jonathan Tan from Australian Catholic University (ACU) Melbourne indicates that many Malaysian Muslims refer to Christianity as "*agama orang putih* (literally, the religion of the white people)" (Tan, 2004, p. 88). Another factor, perhaps not realised by Western Christians, is that they choose to dialogue in a European language, such as English or French, and not the Muslim preferred languages of Arabic, Turkish, Farsi or Urdu (Siddiqui, 1997, p. 52). At the General Audience of 5 May 1999, Pope John Paul II (speaking in Italian) did hold out an olive branch by declaring:

> By walking together on the path of reconciliation and renouncing in humble submission to the divine will any form of violence as a means of resolving differences, the two religions [Christianity and Islam] will be able to offer a sign of hope, radiating in the world the wisdom and mercy of that one God who created and governs the human family. (Pope John Paul II, 1999)

Muslim attitudes to dialogue, of necessity, began to change post 11 September, 2001. From an Islamic viewpoint, Natana DeLong-Bas writes, that to many Muslims, this event "marked a turning point of recognition of the need to condemn terrorism publically and unequivocally while reclaiming Islam as a faith" (DeLong-Bas, 2006, p. 3). These attitudinal changes were not necessarily either swift or easy. Without doubt, post 9/11, for better or for worse, relations between Christians and Muslims have dramatically changed; we can only hope that these relations "are increasingly addressed by thoughtful and well-informed citizens, Muslim and non-Muslim, and not left to be

determined by those whose words and actions are guided by frustration, anger and intolerance" (J. I. Smith, 2004, p. 219).

On 12 September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI gave an address to the University of Regensburg, Germany. Inter alia, Benedict spoke on an interfaith discussion circa 1391 between the Byzantine Emperor Paleologus and an unnamed Persian. Benedict cited the Emperor as challenging the Persian, "Show me just what Mohammed [*sic*] brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached" (Ratzinger, 2006, para. 3). Benedict did precede his quotation by saying that Paleologus "addresse[d] his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable," and in a footnote to his speech acknowledges that "In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation" (Ratzinger, 2006, footnote #3). In relation to this, and like incidents, Tariq Ramadan, Professor of Islamic Studies at Oxford University, observes that:

> Popular demonstrations, so excessive in the Muslim world ... reveal
> far more about societies where critical debate is lacking, where
> civil society is muzzled ... where hypocritical formalism is
> institutionalized, than they do about the specific object of the anger.
> (Ramadan, 2009, p. 305)

Be that as it may, as a result of Benedict's "controversial and potentially incendiary" (Muhammad, 2010b, p. 8) lecture, one month later on 13 October 2006, thirty eight Muslim scholars issued an *Open Letter to His Holiness*. As Miroslav Volf makes clear, these scholars did not reply in like aggressive language, but in the language of "benevolence and beneficence" (Volf, 2010a, p. 19). The Vatican's response was tepid and consisted of a "perfunctory courtesy visit ... from some Vatican officials" to Prince

Ghazi bin Muhammad, the principal Muslim scholar involved (Muhammad, 2010b, pp. 8-9). Ghazi recalls that these officials "recommended to me that I should 'write to the Vatican Secretary of State if I wanted to have a dialogue'" (Muhammad, 2012, p. 131). One year later, on 13 October 2007, "A Common Word Between Us and You"[26] was released as a fifteen-page open letter to Christian leaders worldwide (Lumbard, 2012, pp. 12-13). The letter was authored by Ghazi, checked and approved by a number of senior *Ulama*[27] (Muhammad & Nayed, 2010, p. 172) and signed by 138 (symbolically 38 + 100 = we are many) Muslim scholars and leaders (Muhammad, 2010b, p. 9).[28] Based on purely theological grounds, the scholars involved raised no objections. A number of them however, wished "to add their own touches" to the document, but for practical purposes, this would have been unworkable (Muhammad & Nayed, 2010, p. 177). This letter was an important breakthrough, suggesting that Jesus' commandment to love both God and our neighbours was subsequently confirmed by the Prophet Muhammad (Volf, Muhammad, & Yarrington, 2010c, p. xii). Many Christians leaders responded by enthusiastically signing a November 2007 response, "Loving God and Neighbour Together: A Christian Response to 'A Common Word Between Us and You'" (Volf, Cumming, & Yarrington, 2010). The texts of these two documents are published in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* (Volf, Muhammad, & Yarrington, 2010d). The intent of the publication of *A Common Word* was "simply to try to make peace and spread harmony between Muslims and Christians globally" (Muhammad, 2010b, p. 8). It was published in the name of friendship, fellowship, goodwill and interreligious peace (2010b, p. 8). As Ghazi explains in a 2008 speech, "We wanted to stop the drumbeat of what we feared was a

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[26] Henceforth abbreviated to either *A Common Word* or ACW (Lumbard, 2012, p. 13).
[27] Muslim clerics.
[28] By 2012 the number of signatories had increased to 308 (*A Common Word Between Us and You*, 2012, p. 101).

growing consensus (on both sides) for world-wide ... Muslim-Christian jihad/crusade. ... [P]eace efforts required also another element: knowledge" (Muhammad, 2008, p. 5). It is significant that *A Common Word* was first written by Ghazi in English and later translated into Arabic for the benefit of Muslim readers (Muhammad, 2012, pp. 131-132). Madigan is of the opinion that ACW was therefore not only written for a Christian audience but is also "implicitly addressed to Muslims" (Madigan, 2012, p. 168) to be used by them both as a methodology, and a textual authority in Muslim-Christian dialogue.

In his commentary on ACW, Prince Ghazi makes seven numbered points, all germane to how genuine interfaith dialogue should be conducted (Muhammad, 2010b, pp. 9-12):

1. It was not a ploy to either convert or preach to Christians, nor was it an invitation for Christians to convert or preach to Muslims. It deliberately does not mention the Christian Trinity because in Ghazi's understanding, Jesus himself never mentions it.[29] Ghazi does concede that the Trinity is a point on which "Muslims and Christians differ irreconcilably;" (2010b, p. 9) but, in his understanding, Christians accept the unity of God.

2. Although based on the respective commandments in the Qur'an and the Bible, it was not a call to artificially unite the two faiths by this commonality of love of God and neighbour.

3. It was not a claim that God first loved Muslims; God loved humanity before humanity loved God.

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[29] Matthew 28: 19 has the resurrected Jesus proclaiming, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." M Eugene Boring however would appear to concur with Ghazi by stating, "Like the rest of the NT, the Gospel of Matthew has no developed doctrine of the Trinity" (Boring, 1995, p. 504).

4. It neither intended to exclude or diminish Judaism. *A Common Word* chose to concentrate on Christians on purely pragmatic grounds, namely the sheer total number of Christians and Muslims in the world's population.

5. It was not a signal that Muslims would move one iota theologically to welcome Christians, and neither were Christians expected to budge one inch – equal peace, not capitulation.

6. It does not mean that Muslims are going to welcome Christian evangelism in the Islamic world; the purpose of the document is to seek mutual understanding and rapport.

7. The language of love simply was to recognise "that human beings have the same souls everywhere ... and the experience of love must have something in common everywhere" (2010b, p. 12).

Ghazi posits that ACW has "in many ways become the world's leading interfaith dialogue initiative between Christians and Muslims," (Muhammad, 2010b, p. 13) and it would be difficult to disagree with him. This letter, and the wave of positive responses it has generated, does indeed provide a way forward for Christian-Muslim relations. Ghazi is greatly encouraged by this interfaith initiative, and offers thanks to God in gratitude for its success to date. If it were not for two Arabic phrases in the prayer, it could easily be a prayer offered by any Christian of any stripe or denomination:

> *Praise God/Al-HamduLillah* that we are continually astonished by the
> spectacular way God has answered the prayer that was His gift in
> the first place. One of the great wonders of God's love for humanity
> is that He rewards human beings for gifts He has given them in the first
> place. He keeps giving and giving, and all that He requires from us is to
> accept! *Subhan Allah!* Glory be to God! (italics in original, 2010b, p. 15)

Likewise, the invocation to God in the Qur'an, the *Fatiha* (Qur'an 1:1-7) recited at least seventeen times a day by Muslims, would be acceptable to many Christians, especially if they were unaware of its source:

> In the Name of God, the Infinitely Good, the All-Merciful.
> Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds.
> The Infinitely Good, the All-merciful.
> Owner of the Day of Judgement.
> Thee we worship, and Thee we ask for help.
> Guide us upon the straight path,
> The path of those on whom is Thy Grace, not those who deserve
> anger nor those who are astray. (translation in Muhammad, 2010a, p. 33)

The title of the document, "A Common Word Between Us and You" is taken from an English translation of Qur'an 3:64 (translation in Muhammad, 2010a, p. 29):

> Say: O People of the Scripture [Christians and Jews]! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

ACW is divided into three sections, (1) "Love of God," (2) "Love of the Neighbour," and (3) "Come to a Common Word Between Us and You." In section (1) "Love of God," inter alia, the document quotes, using the NKJV, the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."

Also quoted is Matthew where Jesus expounds upon the Shema:

> Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'" (Matthew 22: 37-40, NKJV)

Section (1) concludes by strongly implying that the Judeo-Christian concept of the first and greatest commandment is in essence, the same message as presented in the Qur'an. As the document phrases it, "[T]he Prophet Muhammad was perhaps, through

inspiration, restating and alluding to the Bible's First Commandment" (Muhammad, 2010a, p. 42). The letter is very careful in its wording, and never categorically states that Muslims and Christians perceive God in exactly the same manner, but nevertheless does stress that the respective scriptures do present "a common word between us and you." I would submit that the versions of the English translations of both the Qur'anic and biblical verses quoted, were carefully chosen to emphasise this commonality. This, it is suggested, is in the spirit of interfaith dialogue where both parties are equals and are trying to see the other's point of view (Swidler, 1983, pp. 3-4).

In section (2) "Love of the Neighbour," the letter draws a connection between the second commandment reiterated by Jesus (see above) and the dictums stated by the Prophet Muhammad, "'*None of you has faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself.*' And: '*None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself'*"(italics in original, cited and translated in Muhammad, 2010a, p. 44). Ghazi states, "Love of the neighbour is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God because in Islam without love of the neighbour there is no true faith in God and no righteousness" (2010a, pp. 43-44). If the word "Islam" were to be replaced by "Christianity," then this thesis would suggest that most Christians would have no problem in agreeing with Prince Ghazi.

Section (3) "Come to a Common Word Between Us and You," summarises the whole document. It makes a number of valuable points; firstly that Islam and Christianity are not the same religion, and that their formal differences cannot be minimised. Nevertheless Ghazi accepts that the two great biblical commandments, love of God and neighbour, arise out of the Unity of God; "there is only one God" (2010a, p. 45).

Ghazi's second point is that the Unity of God, and the love of God and neighbour "underlie all true religion" (p. 46). Later he writes, "As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them – so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes" (pp. 47-48). This is based on Qur'an 60:8, "Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity." Saint Paul says much the same thing, "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12: 18). Ghazi stresses that the common ground of love of God and neighbour should "be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us" (p. 49). There can be no peace in the world if Muslims and Christians are not at peace. Therefore we should not let our differences lead to hatred and conflict. Let us treat each other with respect, fairness, justness and kindness "and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill" (pp. 49-50). The letter suggests that Muslim-Christian relations will only be improved by interfaith dialogue; both parties are recommended to leave dogmatic theological arguments alone as being unhelpful. The letter concludes by quoting Qur'an 5:48, the final sentence of which being, "Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ" (translation in Muhammad, p. 50).

Prince Ghazi admits that Muslims have been asked whether it would be better to stop their own in-house fighting before trying to make peace with non-Muslims (Muhammad & Nayed, 2010, p. 175). This is a fair question and one that has been alluded to in the Introduction to this thesis (p.5). It is equally valid to reverse the question and to ask whether it would be better for Christians to do likewise with their own internecine

disputes. Ghazi's response to this question (concerning Muslims) would be equally valid in a Christian context:

> [A]ddressing others unites Muslim hearts in ways that can be healing to our own inner wounds. Only God's compassion can unite people. The more compassion Muslims practice towards others, the more compassion toward each other they will have. (Muhammad & Nayed, 2010, p. 175)

Muslims have also been asked, what happens if ACW is ignored? Ghazi responds that such has not been the case, and even if it were, Muslims should keep trying, "It is a religious duty for all Muslims to wish the best for humanity, no matter what the response. For doing so is precisely a part of loving the neighbour" (2010, p. 175). Surely such an attitude and approach is one that all Christians should also embrace?

This thesis would concur with the general thrust of the letter and its conclusions; it is far better for Christians and Muslims to quietly love and worship God in their respective ways, but to love each other as neighbours, and to leave the answers to their substantial theological differences to God. It is significant that Ghazi continually emphasises the positive spirit of both Islam and Christianity. It seems apparent, that in both faiths, there are those adherents who follow the *letter* of their scriptures, and those others who follow the *spirit* of their respective scriptures. I would posit that those of both faiths, who are able to see beyond a black-letter interpretation of certain sections of their scriptures, would be better placed to come together in interfaith dialogue. This theme is further pursued in Chapter 3 (Mysticism – A Pathway to Dialogue). In the spirit of mutual understanding and tolerance, it is encouraging to note that Saudi Arabia, criticised in Chapter 1 for promoting Wahhabism, has through King Abdullah begun to promote dialogue with three 2008 meetings: Muslims leaders (June), world religious leaders (July) and world political leaders (November) respectively (Alhomoudi, 2010, p.

289). It is also encouraging to note that five of the original signatories to *A Common Word* are from Saudi Arabia (Volf, Muhammad, & Yarrington, 2010a, pp. 202-213).

d. A Christian Response to Muslims. One month after the release of ACW, a Christian response, "Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to 'A Common Word Between Us and You,'" was published as an advertisement in the *New York Times* of 18 November 2007 (authored by Attridge, Cumming, Townes, & Volf, 2007). This letter is also known as the Yale Response. The Yale Response is to the point because the authors were very aware of responding in an expeditious manner. The Muslims who had signed ACW had bravely extended their hand and "there is only so long a hand can remain outstretched in midair" (Volf, Cumming, et al., 2010, p. 51). In the circumstances, a long and detailed response, requiring months of careful rewriting and editing, would have been self-defeating. The Yale Response begins by acknowledging the Muslim overture and the signatories thus extend their "own Christian hand in return" (Volf, Cumming, et al., 2010, p. 52). The Response concurs with ACW that peace between Muslims and Christians is essential to ensure the "future of the world"(Volf, Cumming, et al., p. 53). It goes on to acknowledge the "undeniable differences" between Christianity and Islam, but warmly applauds the common ground of love of God and love of neighbour which both faiths share (pp. 53-54). The Yale Response does not minimise the practical problems of improving Christian-Muslim relations, but agrees with ACW that, for the future of the world, we must live peacefully together. Its closing suggestion is that "our leaders at every level ... [should] meet together and begin the earnest work of determining how God would have us fulfil the requirement that we love God and one another" (p. 56). Miroslav Volf, Joseph Cumming and Melissa Yarrington stress the point that during the first five centuries

after Prophet Muhammad emigrated to Medina (AH), Muslims generally looked upon the Bible as merely being misinterpreted by Jews and Christians, but after this time (twelfth century CE) changed to the view that Jews and Christians had intentionally corrupted their scriptures. This generally is now how Muslims explain the fact that the Bible, in many instances, does not agree with the Qur'an (p. 59). Volf, Cumming and Yarrington are encouraged by the fact that ACW does not jump to this assumption concerning the Judeo-Christian scriptures, but rather extensively exegetes the biblical texts by making use of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts that were not available at the time of Prophet Muhammad. (p. 59). These three authors suggest that "perhaps Muslims and Christians will be able to return to dialogue focusing on the interpretation of these texts rather than on questions of reliability" (pp. 59-60). Shared readings of the Bible and Qur'an, together with thoughtful and mutual respect for each other's observances and beliefs, will be far more beneficial than polemics and invective (p. 60). Volf, Cumming and Yarrington concur with Ghazi (thesis p. 46) that neither Christians nor Muslims are expected to budge one iota to theologically embrace the other; from the Christian perspective neither the Trinity nor the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be denied. As Volf, Carrington and Yarrington starkly express it, some of the theological impasses between Christian and Muslims "may be not only undeniable but also irreducible" (Volf, Cumming, et al., 2010, p. 66) A handshake of peace means precisely that – Christians and Muslims will work together in interfaith dialogue to promote world peace (Volf, Cumming, et al., p. 60); it does not imply any sort of readiness or willingness to indulge in explorations towards religious syncretism. In section (g) (Mysticism as a Pathway to Dialogue) of Chapter 3 of this thesis, it will be suggested that perhaps, under certain conditions, there is room, not so much for

theological flexibility, but for flexibility in finding commonality by means of mystical or metaphysical considerations between these two faith traditions.

The second paragraph of the Yale Response, citing Matthew 7:5, "[F]irst take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye," goes on to ask forgiveness of God and the Muslim community for past and present sins, namely the Crusades and the "war on terror" (Attridge, et al., 2007, para. 2). This apology does not mean that Muslims have always been blameless, but does demonstrate that Christians take Jesus' words seriously. Volf, Cumming and Yarrington confirm that this apology has, in fact, been very positively received by the Muslim world and that Muslim bloggers have in turn suggested to their Muslim leaders that they should respond in kind (Volf, Cumming, et al., pp. 62-63). Cumming acknowledges that even though not everyone is in agreement with Christian doctrine, nevertheless, "everyone" would agree that mutual forgiveness and love would make the world a better place (Cumming, 2010, p. 152). This thesis would err on the side of caution and substitute Cumming's use of the word "everyone" with "all reasonable people." The conciliatory language of both ACW and the Yale Response is to be commended as an exemplar of how interfaith dialogue should be conducted. ACW honours Jesus by repeatedly addressing him as "Jesus Christ," and the Yale Response honours Muhammad by addressing him as the "Prophet Muhammad." This does *not* mean that Muslims have the same understanding of the title "Christ" as do Christians, and *neither* does it mean that Christians have the same understanding of the title "Prophet" as do Muslims (Volf, Cumming, et al., 2010, p. 73). To Muslims' great credit, they are respectful when speaking of *any* prophet, of which Jesus is one of the

more pre-eminent, by using an Arabic honorific, which translates to the effect, "peace

be upon him" whenever a prophet is named.

The Yale Response is a very carefully crafted document, as is ACW. Both, however,

represent much more than mere polite and conciliatory words. Both documents tackle

very serious issues unflinchingly. It is worthwhile therefore citing Volf, Cumming and

Yarrington's opinions on how, under these circumstances, consequent interfaith

dialogue should be conducted:

> The goal of interfaith dialogue under these conditions is to understand
> our respective faiths better, to communicate with each other more
> effectively, to identify ways in which our convictions overlap, and to
> seek ways in which, all the differences notwithstanding, we can live
> together in peace. (Volf, Cumming, et al., 2010, p. 74)

Whilst most Christian responses to ACW and the Yale Response have been positive,

some have been negative. Joseph Lumbard, a US Muslim, singles out John Piper, a

Calvinistic Baptist preacher (Lumbard, 2012, p. 27). In a video, Piper propounds that

Muslims "don't worship the true God" because they will not accept that Jesus was sent

in "propitiation for our sins" (uploaded by Mathis, 2008). This thesis suggests that a

number of both Christians and Muslims alike would reject both ACW and the Yale

Response on theological grounds. As Williams phrases it, "When different communities

have the same sort of conviction of the absolute truth of their perspective, there is

certainly an intellectual and spiritual challenge to be met" (Williams, 2012, p. 204).

Nevertheless, it is contended that groups who are opposed theologically, can still co-

exist without violence.

e. Muslim Perspectives on Love of God and Neighbour. As a consequence of ACW and the Yale Response, in July 2008, prominent world-wide Muslim and Christian leaders met for an eight day meeting, subsequently known as the Yale Common Word Conference. One keynote speaker was Habib Ali al-Jifri.[30] He summarises the conference and its purposes in three numbered points (al-Jifri, 2010, pp. 80-81):

1. In spite of God's good creation, humanity has corrupted the earth with greed, power and destruction.

2. Even though God gave humanity religion for guidance, humankind has now made religion "part of the problem." Interfaith dialogue should therefore be used to make religion "a means for the solution and not part of the problem."

3. All virtuous people, whilst respecting each others' differences, should form an alliance against the corruption indicated in point two.

al-Jifri, whilst demurring from the Christian concept of the Trinity (2010, p. 83), affirms that it is the love of God that is the essential part of our humanity; pride, anger and greed are transient things that veil God from us. Our spirit is trapped in a physical body and we must rise above physical needs and desires (pp. 83-84). I am reminded of how close, in this particular instance, al-Jifri, as a Muslim, comes to Buddhist teachings. al-Jifri does not reject practicalities; he reminds the reader that we have no choice in who our neighbours are; we cannot relocate to another planet. Since God has chosen our neighbours for us, we must accept God's will (pp. 84-85).

Reza Shah-Kazemi also spoke at the Yale Common Word Conference. His paper, "God, 'The Loving'" is in three parts, love from a (Qur'anic) theological aspect, love from the

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[30] It is perhaps interesting that al-Jifri was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (Volf, Muhammad, & Yarrington, 2010b, p. 239).

mystical viewpoint, and love as *rahma*[31], the compassionate "heart" of God (Shah-Kazemi, 2010, p. 89). Shah-Kazemi readily admits that speaking about the love of God strictly from the Qur'anic theological aspect requires the exercise of "extreme caution" (2010, p. 93). The problem lies in the principle of *tawhid*, the unity of God as expressed in Qur'an 42:11, "There is nothing like Him." If God is utterly transcendent, absolutely unique, and infinitely perfect, then how can any human quality, such as love, be ascribed to such a Being (p. 93)? Shah-Kazemi can understand therefore why many Christians see the Muslim understanding of God to be as a Being "utterly remote and aloof from his creation" as distinct from their own Christian understanding that God is love (p. 88). Shah-Kazemi moves on to suggest that, rather than concentrating on narrow theology, that Muslim-Christian dialogue is better served by discussing the spiritual dimension, such as that emphasised by the Sufis. Shah-Kazemi is direct in his opinion:

> [T]he spiritual perspectives of the Sufis had, and to some extent still have, a much greater resonance with grass-roots Muslims than do the abstruse concepts of the theologians or the legalistic precepts of the jurists. (p. 95)

This thesis is suggesting, that like Shah-Kazemi's "grass-roots Muslims," that there would be a body of some "grass-roots Christians" who likewise would be more comforted by the knowledge of the love of God, rather than being preoccupied with some of the more abstruse arguments of Christian theology, such as trying to understand what exactly the Nicaea-Constantinople Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition are saying. Shah-Kazemi's mystical viewpoint is further addressed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

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[31] "al-Rahman," "The Merciful" is one of the names of God.

The final keynote address at the Yale Common Word Conference was delivered by

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (previously cited in part (b) of this chapter). It is most significant

that, at a 1984 seminar at Harvard, Nasr is recorded as stating that "Islam is *not*

interested in dialogue" with Christians because they (Muslims) see the West as only

being interested in themselves and not the Muslims (italics in original, Nasr in Küng,

Nasr, Das, & Kaufman, 1987, pp. 128-129). Muslims have been in such dialogue since

Damascus in the seventh century and absolutely nothing has been achieved by it, for

Muslims, in the ensuing 1300 years (Nasr in Küng, et al., 1987, p. 122). It would thus

appear that *A Common Word* has caused Nasr to revise his opinion on the efficacy of

such dialogue. Thus at a Catholic-Muslim Forum in November 2008 he voiced:

> For both us and you, God is at once transcendent and immanent, creator
> and sustainer of the world, the alpha and omega of existence – the Almighty
> whose Will prevails in our lives, the Loving whose love embraces the
> whole of the created order. (Nasr, 2012, p. 242)

Nasr shares Shah-Kazemi's opinion that contentious theological debate on the nature of

God serves no useful purpose, and like a number of both Muslims and Christians,

suggests that such questions are best left to God (Nasr, 2010, p. 116). He gives an

alternative and instructive meaning to "Word" as used in "A Common Word." In

Arabic, *kalimat Allah,* is another name for the Qur'an and literally means "Word of

God," which Nasr points out has the same meaning as the Greek *logos* in John's Gospel.

"The Word of God" means the Qur'an to the Muslim; to the Christian it refers to Christ

(2010, p. 111). Nasr, in the same metaphysical sense, sees acceptance of the Divine

Unity being expressed in both the Catholic creed beginning "*credo in unum Deum*," and

the Muslim *Shahada, "la ilaha illa'Llah*" (italics in original, 2010, p. 112). Volf would

be in agreement with Nasr over the use of "the Word" and further adds that "Son of

God" is also a Christian metaphor. It is ironic that not only does "Son of God" not mean

"what most Muslims fear" it means, but also that "Christians actually use the phrase to

oppose what most Muslims fear it expresses" (Volf, 2010b, pp. 126-127)! Nasr strongly favours deep interfaith dialogue between scholars and theologians rather than leaving any dialogue merely to diplomats (Nasr, 2010, p. 114). Kerry accepts that theological exchange is essential, but also maintains that political and social issues must be addressed (Kerry, 2010, p. 198). Theological dialogue will not necessarily mean that either side will defer to the other, but both sides can at least agree to disagree. Nasr sees the ultimate in dialogue as rising above mere formal definitions in order to reach the "transcendent truth" (Nasr, 2010, p. 114). These mystical considerations are considered further in Chapter 3. Nasr closes his paper and address with some very sound advice; rather than Muslims and Christians first asking whether or not their neighbour is Muslim or Christian, "Is he or she one of us?", that they should rather recognise that, "He or she is one of His" (p. 117). Muhammad Salim Abdullah, in *Islam: Für das Gespräch mit Christen,* expresses a similar sentiment, "The Qur'an admonishes people of the most different faiths not to sing the praise of God against one another but with one another" (cited and translated in Kuschel, 1995, pp. 223-224).

Nasr's closing advice is reminiscent of the sapient response that Wilfred Cantwell Smith once gave when he was questioned, "Professor Smith, are you a Christian." Smith replied, "Am I a Christian? Well maybe I was, last week, at lunch, for about an hour. But if you really want to know, ask my neighbour" (Hussain, 2003, p. 261). What we think we are is of no consequence; rather what is important is what God, and the people who know us, think. In the words of Amir Hussain, who was one of a group of Muslim students to whom Smith once lectured, "I often felt that he was a better *muslim* [*sic*] (one who submits to God) than I was, a fact that inspired me more than I can

express" (italics in original, 2003, p. 261). Mystical and metaphysical understandings, such as expressed by Smith, are further considered in Chapter 3.

f. Opposition to Christian-Muslim Dialogue. There are both Christians and Muslims who would see no point in dialogue. In the USA there are bumper stickers proclaiming, "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it." If "Qur'an" was substituted for "Bible" and the language changed, the result would be the same (Kimball, 2005, p. 106). John Esposito avows that many Christians and Muslims would declare, "My faith is right and therefore yours is wrong; you are going to hell" (Esposito, 2013, p. 174). On the Christian side there are those who believe that they already are in possession of all truth and therefore see no good reason why they should contemplate other viewpoints (Heft, 2004b, p. 3). Woodward cites three such people (Woodward, 2003, p. 9):[32] Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, describes Islam as "a very evil and wicked religion;" Pat Robertson, evangelist-broadcaster, considers that Muhammad is "an absolute wild-eye fanatic;" and Jerry Vines, a past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, damns Muhammad as a "demon-possessed pedophile" (2003, p. 9). In 2002, riots in India, induced by Vines' remarks, led to five deaths (Bennett, 2008, p. 166). It is unnecessary to comment further on the polemic of these three identities, except to add that Woodward considers that such conservative evangelicals also "insist that they are different from other Christians – and in this instance, unfortunately, they are right" (Woodward, 2003, p. 9).

In like vein to Graham, Robertson and Vines, would be Robert A Morey, evangelist and author of *The Islamic Invasion*. In this publication he states, without offering any

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[32] Woodward does not cite his primary sources.

citation, that "Western scholars have concluded that Allah is not God, Muhammad was

not his prophet, and the Quran [*sic*] is not the Word of God" (Morey, 2011, p. 182). He

also claims that Islam "is sheer idolatry and must be rejected by all those who follow

the Torah and Gospel" (2011, p. 272). Morey has been cited as accusing the Prophet of

being guilty of racism, murder, irrational zeolotry and paedophilia (Beverly, 2002, p.

34). After the events of September 11, 2001 Morey invited his followers to sign a

pledge which began:

> In response to the Muslim Holy War now being waged against us, We [*sic*],
> the undersigned, following the example of the Christian Church since the 7th
> century, do commit ourselves, our wealth, and our families to join in a
> Holy Crusade to fight against Islam and its false god, false prophet, and
> false book. (cited in Beverly, 2002, p. 34)[33]

In 2008, Rod Parsley, an US evangelical Christian, was recorded (on youtube) as stating

that "Islam is an anti-Christ religion" and that "Muhammad received revelations from

demon spirits, not from the living God" (in Greenwald, 2008). Neither al-Qaeda or ISIS,

nor the likes of Morey or Parsley, would have the slightest interest in Christian-Muslim

dialogue such as proposed in this thesis.

Of particular concern are those American evangelical Christians (including Graham,

Robertson and Vines) who are advocates of Christian dispensational theology. Among

other things, dispensationalists hold that the two mosques in Jerusalem, built on the

Haram al-Sharif, (Temple Mount to Jewish and Christian Zionists) must be destroyed

before the Jewish Messiah comes or the Christian Messiah returns (Musser, Sutherland,

& Puchalla, 2005, p. 90). Dispensationalists see violence with Islam to therefore be

inevitable. Not only do they distrust anything to do with Muslims, they associate "them

with an evil that must be obliterated" (2005, p. 94). It is ironic that in their seeing

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[33] Primary source cannot be located.

"Islam as a religion of violence, they are blinded by the log in their eye that keeps them from seeing the violence in their [own] script of the future" (p. 101). Dialogue with such people is thus seemingly impossible.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in *Preaching and Preachers* (1982) does not directly address Christian-Muslim dialogue, but nevertheless his rationale in opposing any sort of religious discussion does make a useful case-study in describing the thought processes of some of those, both Christian and Muslim, who would be strongly opposed to any sort of cross-religious dialogue. Lloyd-Jones describes how in 1942 he was invited to publicly debate with Dr C. E. Joad, who had "atheistical views" (Lloyd-Jones, 1982, p. 46). He declined the invitation on the grounds that:

> God is not to be discussed or debated. God is not a subject for debate,
> because He is Who He is and What He is. ... [W]e cannot in any
> circumstances allow Him to become a subject for discussion or of
> debate or investigation." (pp. 46-47)

Lloyd-Jones continues his rationale by declaring that dialogue is impossible with those who are not Christian, because of their "spiritual ignorance." He is nothing if not forthright in expressing his opinion:

> I maintain that the man who is not a Christian is incapable of entering
> into a discussion about these matters. That is so, of course, for the good
> reason that he is blind to spiritual things and in a state of darkness." (p. 49).

If the word "Christian" were to be substituted by "Muslim" then this thesis would suggest that there would be those on both sides of the Christian-Muslim divide who would share a like opinion. From the Christian side, such a blinkered outlook is indicative of the missionary hymn:

> Can we, whose souls are lighted/ With wisdom from on high,
> Can we to men benighted/ The lamp of life deny?
> Salvation! O salvation!/ The joyful sound proclaim,
> Till each remotest nation/ Has learned Messiah's name.
> (*The Methodist Hymn Book: With Tunes*, 1954, p. 693)

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Clinton Bennett's research leads him to two accessible but opposing websites, namely www.answering-islam.org (thesis, p. 29) and www.answering-christianity.com (thesis, p. 26) (Bennett, 2008, p. 163), which hurl mutual and rival polemics at each other. In the past these sites have included exchanges between Jimmy Swaggart and Ahmed Deedat (1919-2005), the latter being the recipient of the 1986 "King Faisal Award for outstanding services to Islam" (2008, p. 167). As Bennett succinctly writes:

> Confrontationists on both sides generally refuse to listen to alternative explanations, even though both are happy to cite what they perceive to be sources sympathetic to their view by the 'other side'. (p. 185)

Like Swaggart, Deedat also attracted a sizeable following of those in agreement with his opinions. Deedat, like other confrontationists, makes sweeping statements, such as branding "as a liar" (Deedat, n.d., p. 54) anyone who suggests that the Prophet was descended from Abraham through Isaac, rather than through Ishmael (see thesis, p. 1). Deedat concludes his polemic, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, with the hope that "even one sincere disciple of Jesus (on whom be peace) were to be led to the truth and be removed from fabrications and falsehoods" (Deedat, p. 64). Prominent among other such Muslims opposed to dialogue would be the Indonesian cleric, Abu Bakar Bashir,[34] leader of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* network who, in 2003 prayed:

> O Allah, please help every one [*sic*] who help your religion [Islam], save Osama bin Laden, and also save the *mujahidin* all around the world. Oh Allah, destroy every one who wants to destroy your religion, as you have destroyed those who disobeyed you. Destroy George Bush, Sharon, Howard, Lee Kuan Yew, demolish Tony Blair, Goh Tjok Tong. And demolish all your enemies. Please answer [my prayer] oh Allah! (cited and translated in Sirozi, 2004, p. 181)

Mohamed Fathi Osman, who has studied both in Egypt and the USA, indicates that ultra-conservative Muslims such as the Salafis (some connected to violent jihad) are completely opposed to any form of modernism which they associate with Europe and

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[34] In July 2014 Bashir swore his allegiance to ISIS (Lloyd & Dredge, 2014).

the West (Osman, 2004, p. 66). In places such as Egypt, many Muslims are confronted with postcolonial legacies and centuries of poverty, illiteracy, political instability and economic stagnation. Such situations breed hostilities, not only with non-Muslims, but also with fellow Muslims (2004, pp. 68-69). Esposito affirms that Wahhabis and Salafis are "literalist, rigid, puritanical, exclusivist, and intolerant," such religious intolerance extending even to "other Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi Muslims" (Esposito, 2013, p. 167). In such environments the possibilities for interfaith dialogue are bleak.

There are others who are not so much opposed to Christian-Muslim dialogue per se, but rather are wearied and made cynical by the rationale behind past attempts. Bernard Lewis, in *Faith and Power* (2010, p. 182), refers to this as "constructive engagement – *Let's talk to them, let's get together and see what we can do"* (italics in original). Lewis indicates that this approach existed when Saladin allowed Christian merchants to remain in the Holy Land because they were useful as arms dealers, and would even sell armaments that would eventually be used against themselves (2010, pp. 182-183). Lewis considers that it is "extraordinary" that a contemporary pope should apologise for the Crusades, considering that in 846 a Muslim naval fleet had attacked Rome (p. 183). Lewis muses on whether Europe will be Islamised or Islam will be Europeanised (p. 189).

In spite of the multitude of problems, this thesis holds that there is no alternative but for thinking and compassionate Christians and Muslims to work together "for good governance, for freedom of religion, speech, and assembly, and for economic and educational advancement" (Esposito, 2013, p. 199).

g. Epilogue to Chapter 2: Christian-Muslim Dialogue: The following is a very simple illustration of interfaith dialogue at work, and demonstrates how a Muslim and Christian may mutually benefit each other. In 2004 this author happened to be in weekly dialogue with Ahmed Hussain, the then imam of the Alice Springs Mosque. One evening we were discussing Muslim perceptions of morals in Western society. Ahmed was visibly startled when I paraphrased from Matthew 5:28, "everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." This made such an impression on the imam, that when later the faithful arrived for prayer, he asked me to repeat the words to his congregation. On a different occasion Ahmed was visibly distressed. His neighbours were going away on holidays and had asked him to take care of the (neighbours') guinea-pigs. Ahmed well understood the Qur'anic injunctions on having anything to do with "pigs," but as he explained, the Qur'an also forbade him to be cruel to any animal, and therefore he must obey the latter command, even though he would be dealing with "pigs!" On these two occasions both participants learnt something positive and valuable from the other's faith.[35]

It is worthwhile to conclude this chapter on Christian-Muslim dialogue with the advice given by the then General Secretary of the CMS, Canon Max Warren, over fifty years ago:

> Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More seriously still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival. (Warren, 1959, pp. 9-10)

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[35] The story has a happy ending. I was able, the next week to come back and present Ahmed with a classification chart showing that, if anything, guinea-pigs are more closely related to camels than to pigs!

This chapter has tried to set the parameters, possibilities and limitations for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. In the next and final chapter, a specific example of interfaith dialogue is outlined by a focusing on the commonalities of Christian and Muslim mysticism. As indicated in the Abstract (thesis, p. vii) this discussion is of a somewhat speculative and tentative nature and would be dismissed by both many Christians and many Muslims. On the other hand, it is suggested that a substantial number of both Christians and Muslims would embrace such a mystical approach to dialogue, and therefore it warrants a place in advancing the cause of improving relations between these two faith traditions.

Chapter 3: Mysticism – A Pathway to Dialogue

> If one
> Ponders on objects of sense, there springs
> Attraction; from attraction grows desire,
> Desires flame to fierce passion,
> passion breeds recklessness;
> then the memory – all betrayed –
> Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,
> Til purpose, mind, and man are all undone.
> (*Bhagavadgita* 2: 61-62, cited in Gandhi, 1990, p. 219)[36]

a: Prologue: Chapter 2 began by outlining what is meant by interfaith dialogue and cited Swidler's "Dialogue Decalogue" (thesis p. 21) as an exemplar of the "ground rules" for such dialogue. Christianity and Islam both have defined canons of sacred texts and both have understandings that are firmly based on orthodox belief and practice. The aim of this final chapter is to specifically focus on mysticism as a possible pathway to Christian-Muslim dialogue. This chapter will discuss what is meant by mystical dialogue, but as the thesis attempts to make clear, because of the somewhat nebulous nature of mysticism, it is not possible to formulate the equivalent of Swidler's ground rules for a dialogue without words. Nevertheless, this author considers that many mystics would be in accord with Swidler. This chapter therefore will take the form of a consideration of those aspects of mysticism which are relevant background material for such dialogue. The final section of this chapter (g: Mysticism as a Pathway to Dialogue) then gives suggestions as to how such dialogues might be conducted. Much of this chapter will focus on what could be regarded as "saintly mysticism," citing some of the "great" historical mystics (such as Jesus and al-Hallaj), but the final section will endeavour to elucidate how "ordinary" believers who have some mystical leanings, may use these intuitions in interfaith dialogue.

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[36] This is cited exactly as in the original.

b: What Is mysticism? Some Christians and Muslims would be mystified by the concept of mysticism itself, let alone have any idea of how mysticism and interfaith dialogue can in any way be connected. This final chapter endeavours to help clarify these two puzzles. Firstly, it is necessary to try to formulate some definition of mysticism, but this is by no means straight forward. Louis Jacobs indicates that there are more than twenty six different definitions of "mysticism" (Jacobs, 2003). Defining mysticism is akin to defining time; as Saint Augustine wrote circa 397, "I know well enough what it [time] is, provided that nobody asks me" (Augustine, *Confessions, Book XI*, cited in Breeze, 2007, p. 14). Evelyn Underhill's classic definition, however, will suffice for the purposes of this current discussion:

> Mysticism, according to historical and psychological definitions, is the direct intuition or experience of God, and a mystic is a person who has, to *a greater or lesser degree*, such a direct experience – one whose religion and life are centred, not merely on an accepted belief or practice, but on that which he regards as first-hand personal knowledge. (emphasis added, Underhill, 1925/2002, pp. 9-10)

In the opinions of the neurologists, Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg, "God, ultimate reality, absolute unitary being [and] void consciousness ... are ... essentially the same thing" (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999, p. 4). Thus, as in the case of Buddhism, mysticism does not have to be theistic, but "mystical experiences [do] tend to reflect the doctrinal and ritual context in which they occur" (Bowker, 1999, p. 671). In the context of this thesis, a Christian mystic's contemplation and experience would be based on Jesus and the Bible; his/her Muslim counterpart's based on the Qur'an and the Prophet.

The Eastern religions, as exemplified by Buddhism, have a long tradition of meditation; indeed it was by meditation that Buddha (Sakyamuni) found enlightenment. In the Christian tradition, the fourth century Desert Fathers, whose hermitic lives led to the foundation of the earliest monastic orders, by the austerity and purity of their lives, led

others to Christian contemplation and lives of simplicity. Like Jesus, they retreated into the desert and in that sacred space came to a closer awareness of the love of God (Sedmak, 2007, p. 151). The Rule of St Benedict (c. 480-550) subsequently became instrumental in the conduct of these orders. In recent years the World Community for Christian Meditation, set up by John Main OSB and Laurence Freeman OSB, has established Buddhists contacts and has shared meditation sessions with the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan Buddhist Lamas. To this author's knowledge there has been no such analogous movement towards Christian-Muslim group meditation, but this does not necessarily invalidate the possibilities of Christian and Muslim mystical concepts being used as pathways to dialogue. Just because little work has been done on the possibilities of using Christian-Muslim mystical understandings as a point of commonality in dialogue, does not, of necessity, mean that such an approach is futile.

c. Apophatic Pathway (Path of Negation.) Mysticism follows the apophatic pathway (Bowker, 1999, p. 81); if the mystic tries to explain God then (s)he enters the kataphatic pathway (1999, p. 23) (affirmative way) and is frustrated in trying to explain the inexplicable. Mystics from many traditions share the same basic experience. They all "know that if they ever imagine that they understand God, they are wrong; it is not God" (Kolakowski, 2008, pp. 87-88). Raimon Panikkar avows that, in all senses of the verb *to know,* it is "impossible to know God." There is only one way of knowing God and that would be "to become God" (Panikkar, 2006, p. 131). The mystic Angelus Silesius (1642-1677) in *Der cherubinische Wandersmann* writes, "The more that you know God, the more you shall confess/That you are able to know less of what he is" (cited and translated in Panikkar, 2006, p. 132). Walter Kaufmann affirms, "The only God worth talking about is a God that cannot be talked about" (Kaufmann, 1996, pp.

25-26). Vladimir Lossky describes apophaticism "as an attitude of mind which refuses to form concepts about God[; it]. ... excludes all abstract and purely intellectual theology which would adapt the mysteries of the wisdom of God to human ways of thought" (Lossky, 1976, pp. 38-39). John Polkinghorne FRS, Anglican priest and physicist, suggests that we are able to glimpse a little of God's truth, but we will always be limited by the apophatic nature of the divine reality (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 514). Cornille offers an analogous thought; whilst all religions offer guidance to the faithful, "doctrinal humility" should make us aware that no one is privy to ultimate truth (Cornille, 2013, p. 22). It is suggested that because Christian and Muslim mystics alike are au fait with apophatic thinking, they present an example of latent interfaith dialogue; both are able to recognise that neither has a complete knowledge of God, yet each is able, in their own way, to receive a glimpse of the divine reality, and to recognise that the other has also received such a glimpse. This thesis proposes that because both the Christian and the Muslim mystic have a direct subjective experience of God, but recognise that God cannot be explained, they would both realise that the other, in his or her own way, has also had an analogous direct subjective experience of God, albeit that their subjective experiences are, necessarily, not the same. This would constitute what could be described as an "interfaith dialogue of silence." It would be unnecessary for such people to have to communicate by words. In fact, it would be impossible unless they resorted to the language of allegory and poetry. A classic example of such allegorical poetry is *Mantiq Ut-tair*, translated into English as *The Conference of the Birds* (Attar, 1967), originally written in the mid twelfth century by the Persian Sufi and poet, Farid ud-Din Attar. It purports to tell the tale of an assembly of birds setting out on pilgrimage to the court of the *Simurgh*, the City of God. In some circles, the book is so misunderstood, that it has even been classified under "Zoology" (personal experience,

1971). Such is the nature and difficulty of transposing mystical insights into spoken or written language.

d. Sufism. Martin Lings, in confirming that "the kingdom of God is among (or within) you" (Luke 17: 21), suggests that Sufism is Islam's response to "search and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you" (Matthew 7:7). Lings' question, posed by the title of his book *What is Sufism?* is answered by stating that it is the art of such searching and knocking (Lings, 1981, p. 7). Thus, in Western eyes, Sufism is looked upon as the inward approach to Islam. Even though Islamic puritans have tried to destroy the tradition, Nasr sees Sufism as both "the most powerful antidote" to Islamic fundamentalism and as a "central link" between the spiritual dimensions of Islam and those of Western mysticism (Nasr, 2007, p. xvi). Saladdin Ahmed suggests that most scholars think that Sufism's relationship to Islam is comparable to the role of Yoga in Hinduism, Zen in Buddhism and mysticism in Christianity (S. Ahmed, 2008, p. 233). To consider that one could be a Sufi without being a Muslim is the equivalent of suggesting that one could be a Benedictine without being a Christian (Stoddart, 1985, p. 19). The consensus of opinion is that the word is derived from *suf* or wool, of which the Sufis' coarse garments were made. Other suggestions of *safa* or raised platform in the Medina mosque and *sophos* from the Greek are not well supported (Rahman, 2002, pp. 132-133). Sufis lay claim that they are following the mystical path experienced by the Prophet when he was still in Mecca (2002, p. 128). Modern scholarship however proposes that Sufism was strongly influenced by "outside influences" and especially those of a Christian or Gnostic nature (p. 131). Fazlur Rahman states that, in the early years of Islam, individual Sufis, using materials from Christian, Jewish, Gnostic, Buddhist and Zoroastrian sources, were very popular preachers who "exerted powerful

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influence on the masses" (p. 132). The authorities, however, did not take kindly to the Sufis' idea of having a "negative attitude to this world" (p. 134) in that they (the Sufis) preached that God was to be found within; the authorities were especially alarmed at the tendency towards monasticism which was made haram by the hadith, "There is no monasticism in Islam" (p. 134). Rahman posits that had Islamic monastic orders been established, "The whole fabric of Islam would surely have been destroyed" (p. 134). The Turkish Mevlevi lodges (of whirling dervish fame) came close to monasticism, in that those wishing to join underwent 1001 days of cloistered training, known as *çile*, in the lodges' kitchens (Bakirci, 2010, p. 27). Indries Shah however submits that Sufism requires neither monasticism nor detachment from the world. Neither does it require organised structures or religious dogma; Sufis believe that Sufism is the "inner, 'secret' teaching that is concealed in every religion" (Shah, 1971, pp. 26-27). It is the common search for God who is found "closer to them than themselves" (Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on Qur'an 56:85, cited in Moucarry, 2002, p. 251).

Shah-Kazemi (see also thesis, p.55) states that theology does not play the same prominent role in Islam as it does in Christianity. In Islam, the theologian only knows the outward or exoteric (see thesis, p.77) aspects of the faith (Shah-Kazemi, 2010, pp. 94-95); as al-Ghazali (d. 1111) explains in *Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din* (1992), "spiritual knowledge cannot be obtained by the science of theology" (cited and translated in Shah-Kazemi, 2010, p. 95). In Shah-Kazemi's opinion, it is Sufism which is responsible for probing "the deepest spiritual values" of Islam without "drifting from the moorings of Islamic society" (2010, p. 96). Shah-Kazemi confesses, that when speaking of the Sufis, "we are overwhelmed by the sheer exuberance of their proclamation of love, human and divine" (p. 96).

e. Some Comparisons between Sufism and Christian Mysticism. Whilst in Iraq in 1908, Louis Massignon (1883-1962) had a religious epiphany which restored him to his Catholic faith. Massignon avowed that this conversion was through the intercession of an early Muslim Sufi holy man, al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922) (Griffith, 2004, pp. 299-300). Massignon's doctoral thesis on al-Hallaj became a monumental tome "almost singlehandedly responsible for arousing scholarly interest in Sufism and Islamic mysticism" (Griffith, 2004, p. 300). A definitive four volume English translation eventually appeared in 1982, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (2004, p. 313). Massignon was so immersed in al-'Hallaj that they were "*mutatis mutandis ...* 'of one mind'" (p. 301). In Massignon's opinion, al-Hallaj is the supreme example of the Holy Spirit at work in a Muslim saint (Robinson, 1991b, p. 192).

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), a Cistercian Trappist monk, was a mystic with a special interest in Zen Buddhism. He was introduced to Sufism by Massignon (Griffith, 2004, p. 299). Consequently, since 1960, Merton "had been engaged in a remarkable correspondence" with a Pakistani Sufi, Abdul Aziz, whom Massignon had been instrumental in introducing to Merton (Griffith, 2004, p. 303). In the 1960s Merton was reputedly the only US Catholic engaged in serious dialogue with Islamic thought (p. 305). In November 1960 he was able to write to Aziz, "May your work on the Sufi mystics make His Name known and remembered, and open the eyes of men to the light of His truth" (Merton, 1985, pp. 45-46). In June 1964 Merton again wrote, asking the pertinent question:

> How can one be in contact with the great thinkers and men of prayer of the various religions without recognizing that these men have known God and have loved Him because they recognized themselves loved by Him? (Merton, 1985, p. 58)

Griffith avows that Merton's question "anticipated a principle which would be stated in the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*" (Griffith, 2004, p. 305). He submits that the most profound of what Merton learned from the Sufi masters is summated in his (Merton's) distillation of prayer, "[A] direct seeking of the Face of the Invisible, which cannot be found unless we become lost in Him who is Invisible" (Merton, 1985, p. 64). Merton, whilst focussing on the sublime, does not neglect the pragmatic and offers advice which would not go astray when considering interfaith relations, "Pay as little attention as you can to the faults of other people" (Merton, 1972, p. 255).

The Sufis led lives of strict asceticism and were regarded by the common people as saints; to the *Ulama* they were regarded as heretics (O'Leary, 1951, p. 58), a situation not completely foreign to the history of Christianity. Sufism taught that individual, direct revelation from God was preferable to that which was recorded in the Qur'an or Hadith. This was offensive to the *Ulama*, but even more offensive was the claim by some Sufis that they were so close to God that they were actually in union with God, in breach of the orthodox view of *tawhid* (1951, p. 58). Such a claim is immediately guilty of its antithesis, namely *shirk*, the most unforgivable, blasphemous and heinous of sins, associating anyone or anything with God (Bowker, 1999, p. 893). Most Sufis, such as al-Junayd (d. 909), expressed such beliefs very cautiously, and then only to chosen "intimate disciples and within closed doors, precautions which safeguarded his reputation for orthodoxy" (O'Leary, 1951, p. 58). Analogies can be drawn to Christianity during the Middle Ages: Hans Ur von Balthasar, Catholic theologian, notes that the period when theologians were also saints ended during the time of Scholasticism in the thirteenth century (Balthasar, 1989, p. 181). von Balthasar suggests that the mystics became intimidated by being engaged in theological dispute and threat

of heresy, and were thus content to leave dogma to the theologians, and "as saints become lyrical poets"[37] (1989, p. 192). "[T]heology at prayer was superseded by theology at the desk" (p. 208). For both Christian and Muslim, regardless of private belief, one was well advised not to let any personal unorthodoxy come to public attention. In other words, if one could not practise orthodoxy, then one was well advised to at least practise orthopraxy. I would suggest that even in modern times, there would be many who would hesitate in revealing to others, their innermost beliefs and understandings of God. In fact, as already indicated, in the apophatic tradition, it would be impossible to do so. This thesis would propose that, of those tending towards the mystical, there would be both Christians and Muslims who would instinctively recognise in the other an analogous relation to God. As also already indicated, this would represent a "dialogue of silence" (thesis, p. 69).

al-Hallaj, previously mentioned in relation to Massignon, did not practise orthopraxy; some of his declarations could be interpreted with an orthodox meaning, but he gave offence to many Muslims (O'Leary, 1951, p. 59): On the other hand his oratory and verse could reduce many listeners to tears, "O you [who hear me]. Save me from God! He has ravished me from myself, and does not restore me to myself. Alas for anyone who finds himself abandoned after such a union" (square brackets in original, cited in Bowker, 1999, p. 45). He enquired of God, "Who art Thou? and ... [was] answered, 'I am thou!'" (*Muqqatta'at* 10.1, cited in O'Leary, 1951, pp. 59-60). Because he felt no separation between himself and God, he was able to declare:

> I have become Him whom I love, and my Lover has become me; we are two souls fused together in one body. When thou perceivest me, thou perceivest Him, and when though perceivest Him, though perceivest me.
> (al-Hallaj, *Diwan* 57, cited in O'Leary, 1951, p. 60)

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[37] See also *Conference of the Birds* (thesis p.69).

Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327), in *Mystische Schriften*, uses different words to explain this declaration, "If I am to know God directly, I must become completely he and he I: so that this he and this I become and are one I" (cited and translated in Katz, 1978, p. 41). Christians may be reminded of Jesus' words, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. ... Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? ... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14: 9-11).

Like Jesus, al-Hallaj was found guilty of blasphemy and executed (Bowker, 1999, p. 45). As Saladdin Ahmed explains, al-Hallaj is innocent of such a charge; because the self is completely denied, there is no longer any self remaining "to claim partnership with God" (S. Ahmed, 2008, p. 235). This thesis would cautiously propose that al-Hallaj's perhaps too honest declarations, could represent a bridge between Islam's strict interpretation of monotheism and Christianity's Trinitarian interpretation. This author is well aware that such a suggestion would meet with strong opposition from many Christians and Muslims.

Sufis, like all Muslims, are monotheists. However, Ahmed states that Sufism is pantheistic in that God is both everywhere and is the only Reality (S. Ahmed, 2008, p. 235). We are not Reality, and by eliminating our self, the unreal (the *batil*, the transitory (Bowker, 1999, p. 408)) only the Real (the *Haqq; Al-Haqq* the supreme title of God remains (1999, p. 408)). As al-Hallaj expresses it, "Between me and You, there is only me/Take away the me, so that only You remain (cited in S. Ahmed, 2008, p. 235). al-Hallaj's teachings are reminiscent of those of Salih ibn 'Adb al-Qaddus, who was executed as a heretic in 783 (O'Leary, 1951, p. 60). al-Hallaj's trial in Baghdad, "The *cause celebre* of its time" (italics in original, 1951, p. 61) lasted seven months and in

March 922 he was publicly executed in the most gruesome manner by flogging, amputation of his hands and feet, then decapitation. Some sources say that he was crucified (S. Ahmed, 2008, p. 235). Onlookers at his execution are reported as having called out, "[M][ay his blood fall on our necks" (Robinson, 1991b, p. 192); reminiscent of the crowd at Jesus' trial calling out, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). al-Hallaj's last recorded words as he was being tortured and executed are revered by the Sufis, "Forgive the people and do not forgive me. Do with me what you will ... all who have known ecstasy long for this, alone with the Alone" (cited in Bowker, 1999, p. 45). This thesis suggests that al-Hallaj's words may remind some Christians of Jesus' words upon the Cross, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Whilst still able to speak, al-Hallaj prayed:

> Oh Lord, make me grateful for the *baraka* [divine blessing] which I have been given in being allowed to know what others do not know. Divine mysteries which are unlawful to others have become thus lawful to me. Forgive and have mercy upon these Thy servants assembled here for the purpose of killing me; for, had Thou revealed to them what Thou hast revealed to me, they would not act thus. (cited in Shah, 1971, p. 425)

Christians may see some similarity between the words of al-Hallaj and the words of Jesus in John 17, specifically 17:25, "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you." The analogy to Jesus may be carried a step further, Annemarie Schimmel indicating that al-Hallaj was "willing to suffer for himself and for others" (Schimmel, 1975, p. 72). Èmile Dermenghem in *Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrebin* writes of such Muslim saints, "The saint is he who takes upon him the sins and the pain of the world; the unjust death is, for him, one of his means of accomplishments" (cited and translated in Schimmel, 1975, pp. 72-73).

al-Hallaj's disciples, the *Hallajiya* (O'Leary, 1951, p. 62) established three "distinctive doctrines" (1951, p. 62); the first being that the Five Pillars—faith (*ash-Shadada*),

prayer (*salat*), almsgiving (*zakat*), pilgrimage (*hajj*) and fast (*sawm*)—may be replaced by other good works. The second declares that God is transcendent, but the uncreated Divine Spirit can be united with the ascetic's created spirit, hence, "I am the Truth." The final doctrine teaches that absolute submission and the acceptance of suffering lead to the complete union of God and the individual. Christian analogies may be suggested; firstly from James 2:20, "Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?" Secondly citing Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," the concept that God is both transcendent and immanent. Finally, concerning submission and suffering, Catholic monastic orders traditionally followed a vow of obedience to the Superior, and rigorous penances were regarded as being a path to God. Küng goes further in suggesting that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Sufic orders increasingly resembled Christian religious orders; in addition to obedience they extended hospitality, wore distinctive clothing, followed prescribed prayers and had a semblance of organisation connecting kindred groups (Küng, 2009, p. 337). Some Muslims found (and find) the *Hallajiya* doctrines abhorrent; in like manner not all Christians would be accepting of monastic doctrine and practice.

Knitter affirms Frithjof Schuon by indentifying two classes of believers, the exoteric and the esoteric. To an exoteric the externals are paramount; Muhammad literally heard God's voice; Jesus literally ascended into heaven. The beliefs, rituals and practices of the faith are absolute; they have to be understood or performed in the *exact* prescribed manner (Knitter, 2003, pp. "To be deeply religious," para. 1). Strict adherence to the prescriptions of the book of *Leviticus* would represent an example of extreme exotericism (Schuon, 2008, p. 65). Esoterics, on the other hand, regard the externals as but a means to an end, that end being a "personal, transformative, unitive experience of

the Divine" (Knitter, 2003, pp. "To be deeply religious," para. 3). Exoterics are "true-believers," but as Knitter suggests, their belief is somewhat superficial compared to the deeper understandings of the esoterics (2003, pp. "To be deeply religious," para. 2). This thesis would concur with Emilsen (thesis p. 17) that both Muslim terrorists and Christian paedophile priests may remain devout believers, but would add the caveat that they are believers in a strictly exoteric, rather than esoteric, sense. James Cutsinger, (2002a, p. vii) Orthodox theologian, writes:

> Christians and Muslims who limit their approach to the dogmatic
> letter of their religions will find their perspectives to be mutually
> exclusive, and their 'dialogue'—if and when they discuss their
> beliefs at all ...—will be reduced to two parallel monologues.

Huston Smith explains that exotericism concentrates on the individual; "Does God love me?" being the overriding religious question (H. Smith, 1976, p. 722). Exoterics incline towards moralism; esoterics towards contemplation; Martha versus Mary (1976, p. 722). Esoterics proceed apophatically, but this route leaves exoterics "with nothing, period" (p. 722). Esoterics accept that absolute objective reality is unknowable, but, "For the exoteric, the Cloud of Unknowing so veils the Infinite that it seems alien, remote, and discontinuous with our daily experience" (p. 722). Huston utilises a simple analogy; the exoteric is the prophet with his or her feet on the ground; the esoteric is the mystic with his or her head in the clouds. Prophets are preoccupied with the here and now rather than the cosmic concepts of the mystic (p. 724). Esoterics are reticent in explaining their understandings, not because they operate within some sort of secret society, but "because the truth to which they are privy is buried so deep in the human composite that they cannot communicate it, not in any way the majority will find convincing" (H. Smith, 1993, p. xv). Back in antiquity Lao Tzu succinctly phrased the problem, "Those who know don't talk. Those who talk don't know" (Lao Tzu, 2009, p. 60, ch. 56).

A supreme example of such an esoteric, who was only interested in worshipping God for God's own sake, and not for hope of reward nor fear of punishment (S. Ahmed, 2008, pp. 244-245), was Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (c. 713-801) who poignantly prayed:

> O my Lord, if I worship you from fear of hell, burn me in it;
> if I worship you in the hope of paradise, exclude me from it.
> But if I worship you for your own sake, then do not hold me
> back from your eternal beauty. (cited in Bowker, 1999, p. 789)

Saint Ignatius Loyola (c. 1491-1556) offers an equivalent prayer:

> Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and
> all my will – all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given that to me.
> I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according
> to your will. Give me your love and grace, for that is enough for me.
> (*Spiritual Exercise* #234, cited in Healey, 2009, p. 41)

Abraham Joshua Heschel echoes Rabi'a, "The mind surrenders to the mystery of spirit, not in resignation but in love" (Heschel, 1984, pp. 94-95). The unknown fourteenth century Christian author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* offers analogous sentiments: When meditating, all extraneous thoughts should be banished from the mind, including the thought of all others, the hereafter, and even thoughts on the kindness, nature and worthiness of God (Griffin, 1981, p. 99). Rather, "It is far better to think on his simple being and to love and praise him for himself" (1981, p. 23). The unknown author (under a different editor) goes on to advise the putative mystic neither to be within nor outside themself, to be "not yet above, nor behind, nor on one side, nor on [the] other" (Underhill, 2003, p. 116).

Christians, like Muslims, are deeply polarised as regards mysticism, the concept frequently being completely misunderstood and opposed. Luke Timothy Johnson, a New Testament theologian, suggests that within the Abrahamic traditions, the current major battle is not between believers and unbelievers, but between exoterics and esoterics. Nonetheless the esoteric traditions continue among both Christians and

Muslims.[38] (Johnson, 2010, p. 11). In both traditions, mysticism has trodden a somewhat chequered path. In both Christianity and Islam the practice has often been both discouraged and persecuted (Küng, 2009, p. 323). From the Muslim perspective such a vehement critic was Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) (Bennett, 2008, p. 139), Godfather to the Wahhabis (thesis, p.63), the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis (S. Ahmed, 2008, p. 239). Orthodox Islam, as represented by him, says that God cannot be understood by the human mind (an apophatic position also accepted by mystics) but goes on to say that God must be feared and completely obeyed (2008, p. 239). To use a recent example of evangelical Christian opposition, a few years ago the Alice Springs Christian Meditation group, part of the mainstream OSB World Community for Christian Meditation (thesis p.68), approached their local Scripture Union Bookshop to ascertain whether they would be interested in selling, for profit, a magazine published by the Community. The Bookshop happily sold crucifixes and images of saints to its Catholic customers, but the meditation group were told, in no uncertain terms, that the Bookshop was not in the practice of stocking publications belonging to cults and sects! This thesis suggests that those Christians and Muslims who are firmly rooted in their own particular, individual, exoteric traditions would find no commonality even *within* their own broader Christian or Muslim communities. To give two extreme examples of exoteric, intrafaith inflexibility, it would be impossible to envisage a Jehovah's Witness in meaningful dialogue with a Mormon, or an ISIS operative endeavouring to better understand a Shi'ite.

Mystics of both faiths, who see the external (exoteric) apparatuses of their respective faiths as being but the scaffolding to support the inner deeper (esoteric) meanings, are in

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[38] Likewise, the esoteric continues in Judaism.

a prime position apropos interfaith dialogue. It is suggested that they would be well set up to dialogue on their essential similarities, rather than on the seemingly non-essential externals. At this point a note of caution must be added; not all mystics are esoterics. Hwaga Mir Dard (1721-1785) was a mystic and a "sincere Muhammadan" and leader of the *at-tarika al-Muhammadiyya* (the true Muhammadan path) (Schimmel, 1973, pp. 221-222), but considered that "someone who is not a Muhammadan remains outside the fold of the faithful; he is, so to speak, not a human being at all, but intrinsically worse than an animal" (*'ilm ul-kitah*, cited and translated in 1973, p. 224). Dard stressed strict adherence to the Qur'an and Sunna; to him, anyone who was "not a Muhammadan," would include all Muslims not of his own particular sect (pp. 223-224).

This thesis accepts that the esoteric apophatic pathway is not to be recommended for all Christians and Muslims. There again, it would not recommend that Christian-Muslim dialogue, of *any* ilk, would be suitable for all Christians and Muslims; many Christians and Muslims have problems enough coping with intra-religious, let alone inter-religious dialogue; the current (2015) sorry state of affairs in Iraq and Syria being a case in point. Leszek Kolakowski writes approvingly on the mysticism of Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327), commanding us to be overpowered by God, but cautions that such a path is "clearly inappropriate ... for ordinary churchgoers" (Kolakowski, 2008, p. 90), as it would be for ordinary practising Muslims. Indeed the Muslim teacher Said Nursi (1878-1960) was inspired by Sufic writings, but concurred that the time had not *yet* come for Sufism to be universally embraced (Markham & Pirim, 2011, p. 40), the implication being that, hopefully, such a time to embrace Sufism *would* arise. Ibn Taymiyya would go much further in the opposite direction, maintaining that Sufis are even worse than Christians. In his view Christians accept that *only* Jesus who "was even superior to the

majority of prophets and messengers" (Taymiyya, 1984, p. 344), was at one with God; on the other hand, Sufis such as al-Hallaj, claim that it is possible for *many* to claim divine union. Massignon takes an opposing tack; after the death of the Prophet it was only the Muslim mystics who prevented Islam from falling into error (Madigan, 2013, p. 250). It is interesting to note that while Massignon sees Islamic mysticism as a path leading to Christianity, Nursi sees Christian mysticism leading to Islam (Griffith, 2008, p. 8). Nevertheless, in the 1910s, these two scholars were the first since the Crusades to speak positively of the other's religion. As Sidney Griffith succinctly phrases it, "This in the end may be the only way in which people of different faiths, even Abrahamic faiths, might be able to find the will to live together in interreligious harmony" (2008, p. 12).

At the mystical level there is a degree of fusion, or at least commonality, between Islam and Christianity. Robert Graves posits that Christian mystics see "ecstasy as a union with God" (Graves, 1971, p. xv) and therefore the pinnacle of all religious achievement; Sufis, whilst seeing the same ecstasy as also being union with God, nevertheless declare that the true Sufi must afterwards return to the world (Graves, 1971, p. xvi). In the context of this thesis, I consider it significant that, after Jesus was baptised (Matthew 3:13-17) and tempted for forty days (Matthew 4:1-11), he immediately returned to the world and began his ministry to others (Matthew 4:17). al-Hallaj regarded Jesus as a Sufi master, to the extent that he (al-Hallaj) was accused of being a secret Christian (Shah, 1971, p. 425). Mevlana Jelaleddin Rumi (1207-1273) wrote, "If there be any lover in the world O Moslems [*sic*], 'tis I./ If there be any believer, infidel, or Christian hermit, 'tis I" (cited in Nicholson, 1914/1989, p. 161). To Muslims, Prophet Muhammad is "The Seal of the Prophets;" there will be no more prophets (Qur'an

33:40). Notwithstanding this Islamic proclamation, Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240) describes

Jesus as, "The Seal of the Saints" and is recorded as declaring, "[I]t is he [Jesus] who

converted me and prayed for me that I may persevere in religion in this world and the

next" (*al-Futuhat al-makkiyya*, cited and translated in Moucarry, 2002, p. 250). To 'Abd

al-Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), the founder of the first Sufi *tariqa* (order), Jesus represents

"pure human altruism" (Ruthven, 2000, pp. 242-243). Jilani and many other Sufis were

inspired by Jesus' dictum of pacifism and his injunction of "turning the other cheek"

(2000, p. 243), at times practising this injunction themselves. Nasr explains that

Christianity lacks either a Jewish Torah or a Muslim Shar'iah; instead it substitutes an

esoteric code of ethics in lieu of an exoteric Divine Law. These ethics are seen by

Muslims "as being too sublime for ordinary human beings to follow, the injunction to

turn the other cheek being meant only for saints" (Nasr, 1990, p. 130). Muslims would

revere the Sermon on the Mount, but realise that such exalted teachings are beyond

ordinary human ability to follow: On the other hand, Jesus is important in Islamic

esoterism and is regarded by the Sufis as the prophet of the inward spiritual life (1990,

pp. 130-131). Extrapolating from Nasr's explanation, this thesis proposes that from

Nasr's point of view, anyone who is/was capable of living according to these teachings

of Jesus, would be regarded by him as a saint. Therefore, any Christian who could live

up to these teachings would also be regarded as a saint, notwithstanding the fact that

they happened to be Christian rather than Muslim. Douglas perceives a shared concept

between Nasr and the NT where it teaches that "saints [lower case] are those who

believe and live in the community of the Church (personal communication, email 20

November 2014). Chawkat Moucarry suggests that in current times, people find Sufism

attractive because it is perceived as a "universal spirituality," free of conflicting Islamic

and Christian theologies, which instead are "transcended in God who is said to be beyond theological definitions" (Moucarry, 2002, p. 251).

f. Mystical Considerations in the Modern World. It is not necessary to invoke interreligious theologies, as in the case of separate Christian and Muslim perceptions, to demonstrate support or opposition to an apophatic approach to God; both traditions have their internal disagreements. For illustrative purposes only, I use an Anglican Christian example of such a dichotomy between the apophatic and the kataphatic. Peter Carnley, a past Anglican Primate of Australia, perceives God as "an infinite mystery, an ineffable transcendent reality" (Carnley, 2004, p. 27); it is beyond human capability to explain God in finite word or thought. Michael Jensen, past lecturer at Moore (Anglican) Theological College, has a conflicting perception. He concurs that humans can never completely understand God, but takes particular exception when Carnley pronounces, "At the end of the day we must confess that 'God as God is in God's self' is an unsearchable mystery" (Carnley, 2004, p. 29). Jensen affirms that the Nicene Creed gives the lie to Carnley's assertion (M. P. Jensen, 2012, pp. 45-47). The Nicene Creed begins with, "We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty," and inter alia goes on to declare, "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God," that he died and rose again and that "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" (*A Prayer Book for Australia*, 1995, p. 123). Thus Jensen refutes Carnley's claim that God is an unsearchable mystery. Jensen represents the kataphatic, Carnley the apophatic. This thesis suggests that Carnley does not reject the Creed; rather he has an alternative understanding and interpretation:

> The revelation of God in Christ does not somehow bring the infinite and
> divine down to our finite level; rather it invites us finite human beings up
> to contemplate the infinite, but the infinite remains unchangeably as it is,
> a surpassing mystery before which humans must respond in awe and

wonder. (Carnley, 2004, p. 43).

There are those who might argue that to use an argument, such as the Anglican example illustrated above, has little or no significance in discussing analogies between Christian and Muslim esoteric commonalities. This thesis maintains however, that such niceties, in both Christian and Muslim faith systems, would determine whether or not adherents would be prepared to accept the other's viewpoint as an esoteric understanding.

Again, for illustrative purposes, I use an Islamic illustration on the dichotomy of Muslim understanding of the nature of reality.[39] Reynold A. Nicholson, in *The Mystics of Islam*, asserts:

> There is no real existence apart from God. Man is an emanation or a reflexion or a mode of Absolute Being. What he thinks of as individuality is in truth not-being; it cannot be separated or united, for it does not exist.
> (Nicholson, 1914/1989, p. 154)

Nicholson is expressing Ibn 'Arabi's concept of "Unity of Being" (*wahdat al wujud*). As Kevjm Lim clarifies, "[O]nly *wujud* [Being] is Real (*al-haqq*); the cosmos and all else that is 'not He' (*la huwa*) but that is nevertheless included therein is merely 'imaginary' (*khayali* or *mukhayyal*)" (Lim, 2012, p. 58). Ibn 'Arabi declares that the only attribute of Absolute Reality is its own self-existence (Rahman, 2002, p. 145). In *Fusus al-hikam* (1229), Ibn 'Arabi explains his concept of pure being thus:

> We ourselves are the attributes by which we describe God: our existence is merely an objectification of His existence. God is necessary to us in order that we may exist, while we are necessary to Him in order that he may be manifested to Himself.
> (cited and translated in Schimmel, 1975, p. 266)

Mysticism, as enunciated by Ibn 'Arabi, and modern theoretical physics may seem strange bedfellows, but this thesis is suggesting that they are not incompatible. The astrophysicist Paul Davies considers that there is a strong mathematical case for arguing

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[39] Likewise, Christians are in no way united on the nature of reality.

that the universe does not really exist; we perceive that we exist, but it is possible that everything in the universe is all a figment of our imagination; even to the point, "*you* are a figment of your imagination" (author's italics, Davies, 2007, pp. 179-180).

Özalp (personal communication, email 6 October 2015) would demur from describing human individuality as non-existent and instead states, that, for Islam in general, it would be more theologically correct to describe human individuality as being "contingent" rather than "not-being." Özalp suggests that other Islamic mystics would side with Ahmad Sirhindi's "Unity of Experience" (*wahdat al-shuhud*) rather than with Ibn 'Arabi's "Unity of Being." Lim clarifies Sirhindi's "Unity of Experience" by likening it to the sun and the stars; by night we see the stars, but during the day they are overwhelmed by the sun; nevertheless the stars still exist (Lim, 2012, p. 72). We are overwhelmed by God, but nevertheless, we still exist.

The purpose of the above discussion on Being versus Experience, and the previous Anglican debate on whether or not God is "an infinite mystery" is not included in this thesis as some sort of theological or metaphysical excursus; rather its purpose has been to demonstrate that, as in the Islamic case, not all such mystics are united; and as in the Anglican example, there can be learned disagreement as to whether God can be considered apophatically or kataphatically. Nevertheless, it is suggested, perhaps erroneously, that if there were more esoterically minded Christians and Muslims, not only would Christian-Christian and Muslim-Muslim relations be improved, but this would offer a pathway for better Christian-Muslim relationships. This author is however, a realist, but nevertheless would offer the words of Martin Luther King, "I have a dream."

Edwin Abbott (1838-1926) is the author of a celebrated (albeit somewhat sexist) little book titled *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1952). The book depicts the problems the inhabitants of a two dimensional (2D) locality have when visited by a person from our three dimensional (3D) universe. The Flatlanders can have no conception of the third dimension, but the 3D visitor has no problem in seeing all of Flatland at a glance. Abbott goes on to illustrate that, just as an inhabitant of a 2D universe cannot possibly conceive of a 3D universe, neither can we in our 3D universe conceive of a fourth dimension.[40] Purely for illustrative purposes, if we were to perceive of God as being in (at least) four dimensions,[41] then God would easily embrace our 3D universe, but we would be unable to understand the extra dimension(s) of God. The Christian would attempt to explain the inexplicable in terms of Christ and the Bible; the Muslim in terms of the Qur'an and the Prophet; the mystic would simply try to be lost in God's love.

There is a serious school of physics which claims that mathematically the universe was created *ex nihilo* because, overall there is nothing there. This school concurs with Albert Einstein that $E = mc^2$, but posits that the positive energy (E) of mass (m) is exactly balanced by the negative energy of gravity (Filippenko & Pasachoff, 2002). This is also the opinion of Stephen Hawking[42] and Leonard Mlodinow:

> On the scale of the entire universe, the positive energy of the matter *can*
> be balanced by the negative gravitational energy, and so there is no restriction
> on the creation of whole universes. Because there is a law like gravity,
> the universe can and will create itself from nothing.
> (italics in original, Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, p. 180)

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[40] In this illustration time is discounted as being a fourth dimension.

[41] In other words, I am not for one moment suggesting that God can be represented as a four dimensional Presence.

[42] Until his 2009 retirement, Hawking was the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University. Hawking's Chair was once held by Sir Isaac Newton.

In other words, if the grand total of everything is put together, then this total balances out to zero. Everything is nothing and nothing is everything. This gels with al-Hallaj's concept of reality; except for God, paradise consists of nothing; the human souls issues from God, and ultimately "returns to and is absorbed in the Deity" (O'Leary, 1951, p. 60). I would suggest that, metaphysically, the author of Ecclesiastes is expressing a comparable hypothesis:

> [W]hatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by. (Ecclesiastes 3: 14-15)

Nicholson likens ultimate union with God to a raindrop falling in the ocean, in that "the disembodied soul becomes indistinguishable from the universal Deity" (Nicholson, 1914/1989, p. 167). On the nature of material existence, a number of Christian mystics, Muslim Sufis and theoretical physicists would seemingly display a degree of consensus. Reality (God) is not to be described in material terms.

In the tradition of mystics trying to explain the inexplicable by resorting to poetry (thesis, p.69), this thesis will resort to the Brothers Grimm's story of *The Fisherman and His Wife*, (Grimm & Grimm, 1819/1978, pp. 70-76) in order to illustrate God being both everything and nothing. A poor fisherman and his wife live in a pigsty. One bright and sunny day he catches a talking flounder and releases it. His wife is furious and demands that he goes back and ask the fish for a little cottage. Her wish is instantly granted. The wife however grows increasingly greedy and successively demands that her husband ask the flounder for a castle, for her to be king, to be emperor, to be pope. Each wish is immediately granted, although each time the fisherman is more and more fearful and the sea more and more tempestuous. Finally the wife commands her husband to, "Go and see the flounder. I want to be like God." In mortal fear the

wretched man obeys. Above the cataclysmic tumult the flounder is heard to say, "Just go home, she's back in the old pigsty already" (Grimm & Grimm, 1819/1978, p. 76).

g. Mysticism as a Pathway to Dialogue. It is true that reducing Christianity and Islam to a purely *clinical,* mystical baseline is akin to describing Christianity solely by looking at Quakerism (William Emilsen, personal communication, December 2013). In the everyday exoteric world, the mystical pathway is *not* the way to improve relations between Christians and Muslims. Nevertheless there are both Christians and Muslims to whom this path is both attractive and appropriate, and it is suggested that Muslims and Christians of this ilk would find mysticism to be a helpful pathway towards interfaith dialogue; albeit the dialogue being mainly in silent, mutual understanding and respect. Such an example (albeit in a Christian-Buddhist, rather than Christian-Muslim context) would be that of the Benedictines, Main and Freeman, meditating and dialoguing with the Dalai Lama (thesis, p.68). Knitter writes:

> The Divine, for mystics, is both unable to be contained in any one expression and at the same time in need of many expressions. This leads naturally, and interpersonally, to what one might call mystical friendship. When mystics get to know each other, they naturally become friends. They sense that there is something in what all of them have discovered or are searching for that makes them brothers and sisters, or fellow travelers [*sic*]. (Knitter, 2003, pp. "To be deeply religious," para. 6)

The total number of fully-fledged mystics (of the stature of an al-Hallaj or an Angelus Silesius) (thesis, p.68) may be small, but this thesis submits that the total number of Christians and Muslims worldwide, who have some tendencies towards mystical leanings, would be anything but small. Husain Haqqani, at one time Pakistani Ambassador to the United States, suggests that "half of the Muslims in the world either are Sufis or consider themselves to be pretty much under Sufi influence or in some ways follow Sufi precepts" (quoted in Tolson, 2008). Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Howell

have been involved in studies of Indonesian Sufism and deplore the fact that journalists

and scholars have focussed on Islamist ideologies and interfaith conflict rather than the

irenic qualities that Sufism represents. In their opinion, "In terms of numbers of people

involved, ... Sufi orders and Sufism-inspired currents in Islam are probably much more

important, not only in Indonesia but throughout the Muslim world" (Bruinessen &

Howell, 2013, p. viii). Kyriacos Markides declares that mysticism has always been

prominent in the Christian Orthodox tradition (Markides, 2008); James Bill and John

Williams maintain that in Catholicism, the Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans and

Jesuits are the closest Orders to the Sufi Brotherhoods (Bill & Williams, 2002, pp. 77-

78). James Haire perceives a relationship between Sufism and the Ignatian spirituality

of the Jesuits (personal communication, email, March 10, 2014). Like the Sufis (thesis,

p.70), those following the Ignatian pathway retreat from the world to undergo

prescribed spiritual exercises. In both the Sufic and Ignatian tradition, the retreatant is

assisted by a spiritual director (Katz, 1978, p. 44). At the end of this time the retreatant

returns to the everyday world to "continue the process of finding God in all things and

seeking above all the praise and service of the Divine Majesty in all the actions of one's

life" (Healey, 2009, p. 41). I would suggest that even amongst Protestants, a not

insubstantial number would tend towards the esoteric, rather than the exoteric. This

thesis advances the hypothesis that those Christians and Muslims who are able to see

beyond the external exoteric borders of their respective faiths, and rather, look towards

their inner, esoteric truths, are well placed to better understand, respect and empathise

with the other.

There are a number of caveats to be placed against the indiscriminate use of "mystic"

and "esoteric" concepts in willy-nillying declaring that mysticism is the answer to

Christian-Muslim dialogue. A mystical, or universalist, approach to dialogue is indeed

beneficial, but not at the expense "of belittling the significance and importance of a

definite and unequivocal commitment to one particular tradition" (Austin, 1985, pp. 12-

13). Whilst supporting universalism, Ralph Austin warns that such an approach:

> is also adopted by the host of mystic cult pedlars who take refuge in a vague,
> blurring universalism in order to conceal their unwillingness to submit or
> commit themselves to the spiritual, mental and psychological obligations
> incumbent upon any genuine seeker after truth. (1985, p. 13)

The eighteenth century Moroccan Sufi, Mulay al-ʿArabi ad-Darqawi, warns against

such dilettantism (Lings, 1981, p. 21). Shaykh ad-Darqawi describes such dabblers thus:

> They are like a man who tries to find water by digging a little here and a
> little there and will die of thirst; whereas a man who digs deep in one spot,
> trusting in the Lord and relying on Him, will find water; he will drink
> and give others to drink. (ad-Darqawi, 1998, pp. 61-62)

Steven Katz asserts that "classical mystics" do not talk about mysticism in the abstract;

they only recognise their own tradition as being legitimate. Katz continues, "The

ecumenical overtones associated with mysticism have come primarily from non-mystics

of recent vintage for their own purposes" (Katz, 1978, pp. 45-46). In the case of mystics

such as Dard (thesis p.81), Katz's assessment would be correct. This thesis however is

not primarily concerned with suggesting that only "classical mystics" may be

considered in an ecumenical or interfaith context; it is far more engaged with

considering the dynamics provided by the substantial number of current Christians and

Muslims with mystical leanings. The Iraqi, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, declares that

Sufism "is not an intellectual exercise for scholarly investigations and postgraduate

studies" (Haeri, 1990, p. 27). He also alleges that Sufis are not esoterics, they are also

involved in society, politics and in all the other matters of daily life (1990, p. 25). Taken

at face value, such statements, if empirically true, would demolish the whole thrust of

this current chapter, namely that mysticism may be used as a pathway to dialogue. In

the understanding of this author, what Haeri is *actually* saying, is that the Sufi's esoteric understandings allow him or her to obtain divine knowledge which can then be used in the everyday world exoteric world, of which he or she remains a member (pp. 24-30). The Sufi is thus well-placed to see truth and the world with clearer vision. Christians with analogous mystical tendencies also live in this everyday world. If this world were populated solely by saintly mystics (not to be confused with Katz's "classical mystics") then the problem of how to improve Christian-Muslim relations would not exist. Unfortunately, saints, of any religious persuasion, are in very short supply. The previous paragraph (thesis, p 89) has indicated however, that there are a substantial number of both Christians and Muslims, who, although by no means fully-fledged mystics, nevertheless would have a inner conviction that the other person, like themselves, also has a personal relationship with God, and is thus prepared to simply accept this fact, rather than argue theological niceties, ad infinitum, to prove that they are right and the other is wrong.

The esoteric is aware that, because of the apophatic nature of God, no one can claim to have complete knowledge of absolute truth, because, by such definition, absolute truth is God. Schuon argues that only "aspects of the total Truth" may be implied and such Truth can only be grasped by "metaphysical thought alone ... ordinary theological thought ... is in fact transitory and limited by definition" (Schuon, 1993, p. 2).

Underhill's definition of mysticism has previously been cited (thesis, p .67). A mystic "has, to a greater or lesser degree" a "direct intuition" of God. The mystic's life is not merely centred "on an accepted belief or practice" but is also based on that which has been learned by direct experience. This intuition or experience of God (or Ultimate

Reality) goes by various names in different traditions and situations; an epiphany, revelation, eureka moment, divine guidance, the Holy Spirit, inspiration, enlightenment, insight, dream, vision. Such intuition begs the question; is this mystical experience derived from a source representing good, or from one representing evil? This thesis advises that intelligent discernment should be employed, both by the person receiving the intuition and by the dialogue partner. The advice given by the Pharisee Gamaliel is invaluable; if it comes from God it cannot be defeated; if it comes from evil it will fail (Acts 5: 38-39). These intuitive experiences are not the same for everyone, or of the same intensity. Such an experience may come by deep meditation or sustained, repetitious spiritual or rhythmic physical exercise (such as long distance running.)[43] Others have achieved such moments by intense study of a particular subject or speciality. To witness the birth of one's first child (at least for the father) may induce such an experience. Confirmed atheists have been moved to tears by listening to sacred music.

Douglas (personal communication 7 August, 2014) suggests that mystical insights are non-rational, as distinct from the rational processes of everyday life. In the exoteric world, both Christians and Muslims accept their respective beliefs as being rational; in this exoteric world, any thought or action which strays from this theological concept would be regarded as non-rational. Douglas (personal communication, 7 August, 2014) confirms that, as a Christian, when in dialogue with Muslims he has to non-rationally (that is mystically) accept what the Muslim is saying about his or her faith, rather than try to rationally transcribe those Muslim understandings into Christian theological values. The situation on the other side of the coin is, of course, identical; the Muslim

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[43] On occasion, I have experienced insights by distance jogging.

partner non-rationally (mystically) accepts at face value, what the Christian is in turn saying. Shah-Kazemi would express similar sentiments, but in lieu of contrasting the rational to the non-rational, he contrasts theology with metaphysics: Theology "is rational thought focused upon the data of revelation, while metaphysics is the rational expression of intellection, intuition, or inspiration" (Shah-Kazemi, 2012, p. 78). Theologically, there are irreconcilable differences between Christianity and Islam, but the "apophatic approach to the supreme Reality opens up a path that transcends all divergences as regards theological descriptions of God" (2012, p. 111). Shah-Kazemi cites Cutsinger (see also thesis, p.78), and affirms his "principle finally articulated" (Shah-Kazemi, 2012, p. 80) in "Disagreeing to Agree: A Christian Response to 'A Common Word'" (Cutsinger, 2010), a paper delivered at a 2009 Symposium on "Theory and Application of *A Common Word Between Us and You*." Cutsinger and Shah-Kazemi are in lock-step as regards the theological versus the metaphysical. Cutsinger concludes his paper by proposing that if his "Muslim interlocutors. ... will disagree with me theologically in order to agree metaphysically, we may indeed 'come to a common word' not only 'between us and you' but *within* us as *I*" (italics in original, Cutsinger, 2010, p. 127).

Even in the exoteric world, not everything is strictly "rational." In the Western tradition, why should any one person fall in love with, and marry one particular person, rather than any other person? The Sufi and journalist Stephen Schwartz writes:

> [N]obody can adequately explain why people fall in love by compelling them to answer neutral enquiries. ... The idiom of human love is poetic and irrational, neither technological nor logical. (Schwartz, 2008, p. 31)

Why should a parent still love (even though not particularly like) a child who has committed some heinous deed? Why can a husband and wife instinctively understand

each other, without either person uttering a word? Why can the same couple

companionably walk, or sit together for a prolonged period of time without feeling the

need to physically engage in dialogue? Why do we exist? Why does the universe bother

to exist? I would suggest that one way of addressing these questions would be to answer

them mystically, that is, non-rationally.

Mathematics and physics are arguably the most empirical and rational of all fields of

human study. Yet even Davies (thesis, pp.85-86) is compelled to ask, "Is there a route to

knowledge— even 'ultimate knowledge'—that lies outside the road of rational

scientific inquiry and logical reasoning" (Davies, 1992, p. 226)? Davies affirms that

when all logical and rational explanations fail us, that the non-rational, the mystical,

becomes necessary to make sense of the seemingly inexplicable (1992, p. 226). Douglas

resorts to the mystical to understand Christian-Muslim theological dichotomies; Davies

resorts to the mystical to understand the scientifically incomprehensible:

> We are barred from ultimate knowledge, from ultimate explanation, by the
> very rules of reasoning that prompt us to seek such an explanation in the
> first place. If we wish to progress beyond, we have to embrace a different
> concept of 'understanding' from that of rational explanation. (p. 231)

Douglas' theological and Davies' scientific understandings come together in the

mystical, "No rational system can be proved both consistent and complete. There will

always remain some openness, some element of mystery, something unexplained" (p.

167).

John D. Barrow FRS writes as a cosmologist and theoretical physicist:

> There is no formula that can deliver all truth, all harmony, all simplicity.
> No Theory of Everything can ever provide total insight. For, to see
> through everything, would leave us seeing nothing at all. (Barrow, 2007, p. 246)

In this author's opinion, Barrow's "seeing nothing" expresses the same thought as those mystics who realise, that apart from God, there is nothing;[44] to see everything, one would be God (see thesis, p. 88). Barrow further asserts that it is impossible to completely describe reality without recourse to the poetic, and that attributes such as "[b]eauty, simplicity [and] truth" can be neither empirically qualified nor quantified (2007, p. 245)

Chapter 2 considered Christian-Muslim dialogue from a principally exoteric perspective. Some of these issues can now be revisited from a more esoteric viewpoint. Heft (thesis, p.28) considers that, arguably, friendship in interfaith relations is even more important than dialogue. From an Islamic viewpoint, Rumee Ahmed would perhaps not go quite so far, but nevertheless maintains that in Muslim-Christian "scriptural reasoning" the shared fellowship generated can make "the academic gains seem almost marginal" (R. Ahmed, 2013, pp. 177-178).[45] In 2003 Heft and three others, a Christian, a Muslim and a Jew were involved in organising a conference, "Beyond Violence: Religious Sources for Social Transformation" at the University of Southern California (Heft, 2004a, p. v). Heft writes (2004b, pp. 13-14):

> The four individuals who spent the better part of a year organizing this conference experienced this simple but profound truth of the important relationship between friendship and dialogue, love and truth. ... Perhaps our own interreligious dialogue has moved beyond its infancy.

Williams expresses similar sentiments, stating that "there can *be* no love without truth. ... Truth makes love possible; love makes truth bearable" (italics in original, Williams, 2014, p. 230). Heft maintains that friendship in dialogue allows discussion of those topics which modern politeness would normally dictate should be avoided; friendship promotes respect and thus contentious issues do not lead to confrontation (2004b, p.

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[44] See thesis pp. 86 for Özalp and Sirhindi's dissenting opinions.
[45] Scriptural reasoning involves Christians and Muslims mutually discussing a selected sacred text (R. Ahmed, 2013, p. 166).

13). Douglas tentatively goes further, hypothesising that not only do human friendships contain an element of the mystical, but that human friendship with God is also mystical. Thus, if a Christian is in mystical friendship with God, and likewise a Muslim is in similar Divine mystical friendship, then it would follow that the Christian and Muslim would automatically have the potential to be in mystical friendship with each other (personal communication, 15 August 2014). Shah-Kazemi speaks of this kind of love as being "love mysticism," "love is at the very heart of being; the whole cosmos vibrates and pulsates with that love which eternally flows from the very heart of God" (Shah-Kazemi, 2010, pp. 96-97). Nasr is of the same opinion, love pervades everything, even to the extent of, "[M]etaphysically speaking, the gravitational attraction of physical bodies for each other is a particular instance of the universal principle of love operating on the level of physical reality" (Nasr, 2004, p. 211). Nasr avows that Sufism is responsible for "some of the greatest literary works about mystical love ever written" (2004, p. 212). He suggests that Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross were influenced in their mystical writings by the Sufic understandings of the love of God (p. 214). In 1921 John Wright Buckham, Christian theologian, wrote:

> There is something mystical in all real and intimate personal intercourse when it rises above the merely physical and gregarious level. Companionship is mystical, friendship is mystical, love is mystical, community life is mystical. ... He who enters into any genuine, heart-felt relation with another ... is aware, more or less consciously, that in that mutual trust and confidence he comes in touch with a spiritual realm, immortal, invisible, eternal. (Buckham, 1921, pp. 610-611)

Davies, a Templeton Prize Laureate,[46] in a 2007 interview with radio journalist Steve Paulson, opined that not only was the universe bio-friendly but was "deeply imbued with meaning and purpose" (Paulson, 2007). Physicists by occupation and training must

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[46] The Templeton Prize is an annual £1,100,000 award given to an individual for an exceptional contribution to the spiritual dimension of life. Other laureates have included Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, John Polkinghorne, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Mother Teresa (The Templeton Prize, 2014)

be rational and accept only empirical evidence; therefore it is highly significant that

Davies offers:

> The fact that I take the human mind and our extraordinary ability to
> understand the world through science and mathematics as a fact of
> fundamental significance betrays ... a nostalgia for a theistic worldview
> in which humankind occupies a special place. ... I do believe that life and
> mind are etched deeply into the fabric of the cosmos, perhaps through a
> shadowy, half-glimpsed life principle, and if I am to be honest I have to
> concede that this starting point is something I feel more in my heart
> than in my head. (Davies, 2007, p. 268)

Davies affirms that when contemplating the immensity of the universe, even atheistic

scientists are forced to profess what Albert Einstein termed "a cosmic religious feeling"

(Davies, 2003, p. 118). This author would offer Davies' insights as examples of what

could be called "scientific mysticism." The cynic would argue that Davies speaks

neither as a Christian nor a Muslim and thus his opinions are irrelevant to this thesis. On

the contrary, this thesis is suggesting that this "scientific mysticism" is in the same

category as Shah-Reza's "love mysticism." Shah-Reza chooses to invoke God;

essentially Davies is saying the same thing, but as a professional scientist avoids

naming the Divinity as such. Christian de Duve, a biochemist and Nobel Laureate

would share Davies' "scientific mysticism:"

> I view this universe not as a "cosmic joke," but as a meaningful entity – made
> in such a way as to generate life and mind, bound to give birth to thinking
> beings able to discern truth, apprehend beauty, feel love, yearn after goodness
> define evil, experience mystery. I make no explicit mention of God because
> this term is loaded with multiple interpretations linked to a variety of
> creeds. (de Duve, 1995, p. xviii)

Sufic understandings would coalesce with Davies and de Duve; Sufis claiming that "the

very substance of cosmic existence is the 'Breath of the Compassionate'"(Nasr, 2004, p.

204).

I am suggesting that Douglas, Davies and de Duve share a commonality in that they all exhibit a degree of the mystical in their approaches to their chosen specialities, namely the Christian Eucharist (Douglas, 2006), astrophysics and biochemistry respectively. Because of their intuitive insights they are able to see beyond the exoteric boundaries of their particular fields and are thus able to offer answers that are not available to those who are confined by strict exoteric rationality. This is not to suggest that Douglas, Davies and de Duve are in any way lax in their own particular understandings and methodologies; rather, because they are so well-grounded in the orthodoxies of their professions, they are able to transcend the rational exoteric dimension. In like manner, this thesis is suggesting that those Christians and Muslims, who are au fait with their own creeds and confessions, may transcend the strict rationality of exoteric orthodoxy, and in the mystical dialogue of silence, love and friendship, intuitively understand that the other has also achieved this degree of esoteric awareness. This thesis therefore offers the hypothesis that, if Christian and Muslim are able to dialogue with the esoteric doorway open, then mutually respectful relations will ensue.

This current chapter has endeavoured to advance the hypothesis that mystical considerations could prove to be a useful pathway to interfaith dialogue. Mystical friendship does not mean a syncretism of faiths, but it does imply that the other's faith is as worthy of respect as one's own. A mystical attitude to faith allows the believer to have a meaningful relationship with the Divine, but at the same time allows such a believer to realise that there are others whose theologies, which, although on the surface (exoterically), would seemingly to be in direct contradiction, to also have such meaningful relationships with the Absolute. A mystical attitude abolishes hubris and the sadly all too common notion that there is only one way to relate to God. Such mystical

friendship would be anathema and incomprehensible to Parson Thwackum (thesis, p. 7)

and kindred spirits, but would be intuitive and comprehensible to many others.

This chapter will close with the words of Cutsinger (see also thesis p. 78) advocating

hesychia (the path of "stillness") to Christians. I would suggest that not only are his

words pertinent to such Christians, but are pertinent to all Christians seeking interfaith

dialogue. Likewise, Muslims could relate to analogous Sufic metaphors.

> If we wish to follow the Hesychast path to the heart, it is Jesus who must be approached as the frame – the frame, not of a portrait, but a window. Seekers living in the Christian house must not turn their backs on this window, supposing it to be too narrow to show them the Truth. But neither should they remain at a distance, as if they were admiring a favourite painting from across a gallery. They must take a step forward and lift up the sash, placing their head and shoulders inside its ample opening. What they shall see then, of course, is no longer the frame, but instead the bountiful emptiness of a mountain valley and across its verdant expanse, if they look carefully, the outlines of other houses with other windows not their own.
> (Cutsinger, 2002b, p. 250)

Conclusion:

This thesis does not accept the hypothesis that the majority of the world's population support anarchy, terrorism, and warfare. It has been written on the premise that most people, including the vast majority of Christians and Muslims, would seek to live in peace with their neighbours. This may only be achieved by mutual respect. It is useful to remind the reader that the aim of this thesis has not been to demonstrate that, essentially, Christians and Muslims have either the same basic set of beliefs, or contrariwise to show that Christianity and Islam are diametrically opposed to each other. Rather the aim has been to postulate ways in which respectful Christian-Muslim relations may be fostered. Respect does not mean agreement, but it does imply that those who respect each other acknowledge that the other is entitled to the same rights, freedoms and dignities as one would wish for oneself. The thesis has set out to demonstrate that while an endeavour to understand the other's faith is commendable, that by itself, such a purely academic exercise is insufficient to promote such respectful relations.

From the literature examined, interfaith dialogue would appear to be the most appropriate course of action for these relationships to be improved. The premise of *A Common Word* offers a wonderful window of opportunity towards the betterment of Christian-Muslim relations. Interfaith dialogue may be person on person, or group on group. In an ideal situation such dialogue could lead to mutual understanding and acceptance: in a more negatively mundane and sociological context, if potential enemies are in dialogue, then at least they are not in physical conflict. Recent (2014-2015) events, including civil war in Iraq and Syria, and acts of Islamist terrorism and reciprocal expressions of Islamophobia in Western countries, foster despondency and

despair. If dialogue cannot promote respectful relations then this author would also despair as to whether there remains *any* method whereby relations may be improved. Within the parameter of interfaith dialogue, this thesis suggests that the mystical pathway is a viable approach for a sizable minority of Christians and Muslims. If such Christians and Muslims can view each other through the eyes of mystical friendship then external impediments to mutual understanding fade into insignificance.

This thesis, by definition, has been confined specifically to a consideration of Christian-Muslim relations. Nevertheless, the argument that mystical or metaphysical concepts might be used as a pathway to such bilateral dialogue, may of course be extended to include such an approach as an avenue for dialogue between and among *all* of the major world religions.

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