The conditions of the possibility of philosophical interfaith dialogue:

A theoretical and empirical exploration

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Acknowledgments

Abstract

Religious truth in the context of interfaith dialogue is a notoriously contentious issue. The notion of religious truth is usually taken to depend on a system of theological doctrines, the presence of which is not a general trait of all religious traditions. Furthermore, discourse on the truths of theological doctrines requires knowledge and skills that are not easily available to non-specialist lay believers, and it is uncertain how far such theological truth discourse impacts on how regular people of faith interpret and perform their religion on a day-to-day basis. Interfaith dialogue, particularly on the local and community level, has therefore come to be seen as an unsuitable setting for discussing issues of religious truth. It is in this context that this thesis explores both theoretically and practically how interfaith dialogue about religious truth, i.e. philosophical interfaith dialogue, is possible between non-specialist believers.

The theoretical part of the thesis examines the history of the interfaith movement and discusses in which ways the inherent truth discourse is flawed. It then proceeds to analyse the nature of religious truth discourse by explicating the epistemological situation of religions vis-à-vis each other. Finally it discusses different ways to conceptualise what a religion is in order to extend the notion of truth discourse to practical reasoning which is accessible and relevant for non-specialist lay believers. The second part of the thesis has a practical focus. From the theoretical conclusions reached, a practical programme for philosophical interfaith dialogue is developed and the results of a test run are presented in the form of a discussion and interpretation of empirical data collected through field work research.

The theoretical conclusion of this thesis is that reasoning about religious truth across the boundaries of religious traditions is generally not possible. However participants can understand each other and can even participate in the reasoning about truth within the framework of the respective other's religion. The field work research suggests that doing so is a positive and valuable experience from the perspective of the dialogue participants.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction: methodological considerations and outline of the thesis

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a religiously respectful and philosophically sound programme for students in higher education to engage in interfaith dialogue and to empirically determine what results such dialogue could yield. 'Religiously respectful' means not to patronize participants into accepting a viewpoint that could compromise their religious identity and personal integrity. 'Philosophically sound' means to ensure that the dialogue encounter is not based on conceptual confusions. From these premises it follows that priority be given to proper *performance* of interfaith dialogue rather than achieving desired results. (A reverse emphasis would start from desirable results and investigate how they could be achieved.)

Furthermore, the interfaith dialogue which is the subject of this thesis should be *philosophical*, as the title indicates. The in-depth discussion of what this precisely means makes up chapter 4, but the basic trait setting it apart from other forms of interfaith dialogue is that it will be about the *truth and validity of religious teachings*.

Although the thesis contains a clear prescriptive element in that it suggests how philosophical interfaith dialogue should be conducted, it does so from a *non-denominational* perspective. Thus the thesis does not engage with interfaith scholarship that is situated within a particular religious tradition. It does furthermore not engage with particular pluralist approaches to interfaith dialogue, because they, too, are denominational in that they form their own 'school of theology' as it were, although they claim to rise above denominational boundaries. However, a critique of pluralism in general, as the attempt to rise above denominational boundaries and to comprise within itself a multitude of religious traditions, will be offered and is indeed a central part of the overall argument. By avoiding a denominational approach to interfaith dialogue, the thesis seeks to determine the principles that underlie the situation of interfaith dialogue about religious truth. Its primary perspective is thus an epistemological one.

Yet, the thesis also provides a fairly extensive account and analysis of the history of the interfaith movement. This is because the thesis is located *within the tradition of the interfaith movement* in two respects: Firstly, it deals with dialogue

about religious truth, and that is true at least of the early interfaith movement as well. Secondly, the thesis seeks to implement such truth dialogue practically, which the interfaith movement also has been doing (with varying degrees of success).

The intention to both study interfaith dialogue and to contribute to the praxis of it raises significant questions regarding the methodology of the thesis. Morgan, for instance, writes: '*Does participation [in interfaith dialogue] in any way tinge the academic agenda with a kind of para-theology? Does the agenda of interfaith work potentially cast a shadow over the shape of the study of religions in the same way that the concerns of an individual religion might?*' (Morgan 1995:157) and she concludes: '*The confusion of the academic and the confessional is a perennial problem [...].*' (Morgan 1995:166) In light of these concerns, how does this thesis negotiate its methodological approach? I suggest that there are three different fields at work: theology, philosophy, and religious studies.

The principal approach the thesis takes is a philosophical one. This is because of my background in philosophy and because of the subject of the thesis. But as the thesis is written within the context of a theology and religious studies department; and as the thesis uses, when relating theoretical insights to empirical realities and vice versa, methods that are not typically philosophical I will in the following address the issue of the methodological location of the thesis in regard to the theology/religious studies distinction, as both disciplines count philosophy among their tools. I will go about this in a rather philosophical fashion by not discussing in detail the various historical stances taken by different scholars, but by first suggesting a systematic distinction: Theology, philosophy and religious studies are, I argue, distinguishable from each other by their *epistemological perspective* on religion or religions, i.e. by how they relate to the truth claims inherent in them. In the following, I will offer a characterisation of the three disciplines drawing on this distinction and then discuss how they relate to interfaith dialogue. Finally, I will argue for a specific approach to interfaith dialogue that orders these approaches, as it were, into a certain constellation and conclude that the approach this thesis takes falls epistemologically into the discipline of religious studies, and not theology.

1.2 Theology, philosophy and religious studies

The notion of theology has developed within a Christian context, but can be extended to other, although not necessarily all, religious traditions. It is characterised by the following traits: a) It is concerned with the aspect of 'teachings' or the rational and thus systematic treatment of religious beliefs and practices; b) Some teachings are held to be axiomatically true and are thus not open to questioning. Rather, they serve as a foundation from which rational treatment starts; c) Such fundamental teachings are axiomatic, because their truth is not falsifiable by empirical observation. Instead, they form the basis for the religious interpretation of all experiences in the world. Thus I will argue in chapter 3 that religions are epistemologically (i.e. in regard to their mechanisms of reasoning) best understood as being more or less closed frames of reference. (Cf. esp. 3.6) Thus I understand theology to be not only abstractly confessional, i.e. committed to a belief in God or the transcendent realm, but always denominational, i.e. committed to a specific religious tradition and its axiomatic beliefs; where theology is not denominational in this sense, it falls into the category of philosophy of religion.

Like theology, philosophy as a subject deals with the fundamental questions of human existence concerning the nature of reality, the possibility of knowledge, the quality of consciousness, moral values, and the meaning of life. Unlike theology, philosophy is not constrained by axiomatic beliefs, but wields the method of systematic, rational reasoning without restriction. This leads to, on the one hand, a general competence to deal with all religions rather than just one; on the other hand it yields a tentativeness in its results, which are always open to revision and reversal, because they lack the firm ground provided by axiomatic beliefs. Philosophy can thus also be considered not a 'system of reasoning', but rather the activity of reasoning itself. This somewhat ambiguous status between a field of inquiry and a method of inquiry led to the prominent view that philosophy's task is not to yield knowledge in the usual sense, but to clear up conceptual misunderstandings. Wittgenstein, to whose thought I will refer in the theoretical part of the thesis, said about philosophy in this regard: *It leaves everything as it is.*' (Wittgenstein 1953: PI §124), i.e. it does not partake in the situation. In light of the systematic distinction suggested above, the question that presents itself is whether philosophy when applied to religion is simply the method of reasoning as a discussion of concepts, or whether it presumes or argues for the existence of traditionally religious 'things' like god, life

after death, etc. Both are possible and both are practiced. If philosophy becomes a discipline (i.e. philosophy of religion) it could be called 'confessional', i.e. abstractly committed to truth claims that transcend the boundaries of specific religious traditions, but deal with religious 'things'. If philosophy is applied to the subject of religion as the method of reasoning or conceptual discussion only, it does not carry with it any commitment to religious truth claims and there is thus no confessional import. To distinguish both ways of bringing philosophy to bear in a given case is, I would argue, not an easy matter. Flood's distinction of first order, second order and third order discourse on religion is an example of negotiating this boundary between philosophy of religion as a confessional discipline and philosophy as a method with no confessional import. (Flood 2006:54–56)

Religious studies is a second order discipline in that it studies particular religions, including their theologies, the practitioners and their practices in a broad context of society without committing to the epistemological foundations of theology. In other words it deals with the fact of people believing and performing beliefs without making assumptions about the truth and validity of the beliefs themselves. As such it is neither denominational nor vaguely confessional. Religious studies employs a variety of methods which are not unique to its discipline, but which it rather shares with subjects areas such as sociology, anthropology, history, psychology and philosophy.

As an academic subject area religious studies has been under discussion in two related respects. Firstly, since it is not defined by a distinct methodology, it has been questioned whether there really is a subject of religion which would justify its institutionalisation within universities. The allegation is that the particular focus creates the concept of 'religion' and with it the phenomenon, thus distorting the perception of empirical realities rather than studying them impartially. This is the position Fitzgerald takes. He argues that the category of 'religion' is an ideological concept of Christian origin, which reflects and perpetuates processes of colonialism. (Fitzgerald 2000:5)[1] Fitzgerald therefore suggests 'religion' is not a viable category for academic research. So called 'religious' phenomena should be subsumed, in his view, under the broader category of 'culture'. The proposal to do away with the concept of religion is not new. Wilfred Cantwell Smith wrote in his seminal *The Meaning and End of Religion* in 1963: '*Neither religion in general nor any one of the*

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[1] Unsurprisingly, others have disagreed. See, for instance, Korom (2001), Benavides (2001), Saler (2001), Stone (2001), Tweed (2005b)

religions, I will contend, is in itself an intelligible entity, a valid object of inquiry, or of concern whether for the scholar or the man of faith.' (Smith 1991:12) Smith also offers a de-construction of the concept of religion: '[*W*]*hat men have tended to conceive of as religion and especially as a religion, can more rewardingly, more truly, be conceived of in terms of two factors, different in kind, both dynamic: a historical 'cumulative tradition', and the personal faith of men and women.'* (Smith 1991:194) The cumulative tradition could come under the category of 'culture', as Fitzgerald proposed. But whereas Fitzgerald would also subsume 'faith' under culture, Smith retains it as a separate element, an epistemological attitude unique to the context of religions, which would thus justify a separate field of study. Nye, on the other hand, argues religion is best understood as an embedded activity, or 'religioning':

> Religioning is a form of practice, like other cultural practices, that is done and performed by actors with their own agency (rather than being subsumed by their religions), who have their own particular ways and experiences of making their religiosities manifest. A discourse of religioning also moves away from looking at 'religion' in terms of 'religions' (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.), but instead looks at religious influences and religious creativities, and the political dynamics through which certain conceptualization of religious authenticity are produced and maintained. (Nye 2000b:467)

Nye's definition of religion as cultural practice would thus be at ease with Fitzgerald's proposal to eliminate the category of 'religion' in favour for the broader concept of 'culture'.

The second allegation is that religious studies, by according 'religion' a special status apart from cultural practices, is not clearly distinguishable from theology. Fitzgerald sees '*no coherent non-theological theoretical basis for the study of religion as an academic discipline.*' (Fitzgerald 2000:3) This aspect of the discussion is also not new. Eric Sharpe's book *Comparative Religion: A History* gives a detailed account of the origins and the history of the academic field of religious studies and its interwovenness with the field of theology. As early as 1975 Sharpe detected '*a subtly new form of confessionalism*' among religious studies scholars and, in a way, anticipated current discussions. (Sharpe 1986:311) McCutcheon, another prominent voice in the discourse, agrees with Fitzgerald that the dissociation of religious studies from theology is a topical issue, but believes that it is possible to study religions academically without '*presuming that religion necessarily and solely denotes an*

inner world of unseen power and morality expressed in doctrine or ritual.' (McCutcheon 2003:42) This can be done by *'historiciz[ing] this very assumption, seeing 'religion' instead as a discursive technique used in specific rhetorical situations, a type of social classification with significant political import.'* (McCutcheon 2003:42–43) Flood, on the other hand, disputes that a wholly neutral account of religion can be given. *'The inquiry into religions is not ethically neutral. [...] In investigating religious traditions and individual intentions and aspirations, the outside inquirer inevitably draws from and relates to the resources of her own cultural inheritance.'* (Flood 1999:194) He still argues for a separation of religious studies from theology (see above) by distinguishing first, second and third order theological discourse and excluding first order and most of second order discourse from religious studies, which therefore is at least *'not locked in to a particular theological tradition.'* (Flood 2006:49)

I suggest that the discussion about the epistemological location of religious studies between theology and the social sciences can usefully be understood in terms of the abstractly confessional character of the philosophy of religion and the method of philosophy applied to religion. Of course, the distinction between the two is a systematic one and thus it could be argued that the terms 'philosophy of religion' and 'the philosophical method applied to religion' do not explain, but merely designate the difference between carrying confessional import and not doing so. I concede that in reality, the borders between the two are blurred. However, I want to affirm that I think the philosophy of religion often has confessional underpinnings, but that it is very well possible to engage in conceptual clarification in relation to religion or the philosophy of religion without subscribing in any way to the truth and validity of religious teachings, be they bound by the axiomatic beliefs of a particular religion or be they abstractly confessional. This is relevant, because I see this thesis as engaged in conceptual clarification with no confessional import.

1.3 Theology, philosophy, and religious studies in the context of interfaith dialogue from an epistemological perspective

In this section I will look at how theology, philosophy, and religious studies relate to the idea of interfaith dialogue, where this dialogue is concerned with the truth and validity of religious teachings (as is the subject of this thesis).

Under the heading of 'theology of religions' theologians have argued how their respective religious tradition relates to other faiths and how their followers can or cannot be in conversation with those of another. By virtue of the epistemological commitment to the underlying truth of their faith's axiomatic beliefs, theologies of religions are necessarily based within a particular religious tradition and are unlikely to earn unreserved approval from theologians of other religious traditions. To resolve this dilemma of inevitable biases, one could, it appears, abstract from the particulars of religions until one arrived at a meta-perspective where concepts are broad enough to fit any and all. Different religions thus re-cast in abstract categories can then be related to each other revealing overlaps and differences that can be interpreted as sameness and complementarity. At a certain point in the process of abstracting one is bound to cross the point where the axiomatic truths are rationalised, i.e. where they lose their absolute validity. This is the point at which philosophy has taken priority over theology.

The best known person in the UK to have traversed the entire trajectory from theology to philosophy is John Hick (1922-2012), who started out as a Christian theologian and ended up as a philosopher of religions and ardent advocate of a pluralist ideology. A similar intellectual path has been taken by Don Cupitt. Mirroring the move from theology to philosophy, pluralist ideology rationalises the axiomatic truths of religions. It does indeed interpret much of the plurality of religions in terms of overlap and complementarities. However, there are serious problems with such an abstract confessional position when it is contrasted with denominational theologies of concrete religions, as is the case in the practical situation of interfaith dialogue. There, such a pluralist, or predominantly philosophical, position does not transcend the multitude of religions, but rather adds to it. The abstractly confessional character of philosophy of religion as a discipline, turns into a solidly denominational one. Conceptually, a religious point of view as manifest in a theology is so fundamental that it does not allow for a meta-theoretical level and any attempt to create such a meta-level inevitably ends up creating a same-

level alternative.[2] I will argue this point in chapter 2 (cf. 2.4.5) and especially chapter 3 (cf.3.5). In this way, if philosophy is to offer an alternative narrative of religious truth and is not just a method of clarifying concepts and examining the soundness of reasoning, it inevitably becomes denominational in its own way.

Religious studies deals more broadly with the entire spectrum of religions and religious practices and as such has in the past been seen as a tool for facilitating a coming-together of various religious traditions. Many academics have played a role in the history of interfaith dialogue and the interfaith movement. (Cf. 2.3.3 and 2.4.3). However, to the degree religious studies employs philosophy not as method, but as a discipline with its abstractly confessional commitment (turned denominational in the interfaith situation), it falls into the same trap as philosophy does when trying to transcend the epistemological boundaries of a particular religious tradition by rationalising its axiomatic truths: rather than being able to create a comprehensive frame in which the teachings of more than one religious tradition could be negotiated, it creates a theology of its own. Where religious studies is methodologically a second order activity which thus commits neither to the epistemological restrictions of theology nor to the abstract confessionalism of a philosophy of religion, it can only deal with the fact of those teachings and not with their truth or falseness. In this capacity, religious studies can contribute to the facilitation of philosophical interfaith dialogue about the truth and validity of religious teachings through contributing expert knowledge, but it cannot be party to it.

1.4 Location of the thesis

Where, then, is this thesis located? I have already stated that the thesis' aims at developing a religiously respectful interfaith dialogue programme and that this implies not patronizing participants into accepting a viewpoint that could compromise their religious identity and personal integrity.[3] Taking this as my

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[2] The threefold taxonomy of pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism (Race 1983) is therefore entirely internal to a pluralist point of view. From the perspective of a believer of a religion who is committed to the axiomatic truths of his beliefs and practices, the pluralist is as exclusive as the religious believer is to the pluralist.

[3] Of course such respect is motivated by a moral concern for the integrity of the other; but there is also the additional consideration that the interfaith programme to be developed as part of the thesis will

premise, I accept the axiomatic character of the beliefs of a religion and will not subject them to rationalisations so as to transcend them into a meta-narrative of some sort (whether in terms of philosophy or religious studies). In that sense theology is the ultimate arbiter of this thesis' methodological approach.

To respect the theologies of potential participants in interfaith dialogue also requires that I do not have a bias towards any of them. I will therefore not take a particular theology as the ultimate reference point, but the *form* of theology. By *form* I mean the epistemological structure as explained above: theologies as systems of teachings, each based on a set of fundamental beliefs that are themselves not subject to reasoning.[4]

Respecting the form of theology is an *acceptance of structure, not one of content*. I simply acknowledge that this is how theologies, or religions from an epistemological perspective, work and I will not try to change this or work my way around it. But I do not make any assumptions as to the truth or falsity of any religion's axiomatic beliefs. The thesis will employ a variety of methods, most prominently that of conceptual clarification. Therefore, this thesis is epistemologically situated within the framework of religious studies (as characterised above), and not theology.

The first part of the thesis, chapter 2, is a historical narration and analysis based on a study of primary and secondary literature. The second part of the thesis, chapters 3 and 4, lays the theoretical groundwork. It proceeds from the analysis of chapter 2 and argues in detail that religions function epistemologically as closed frames of reference. It also examines the concept of religion and the universality of the notion of 'a system of reasoning' as a part of religion. Methodologically, this part employs philosophical discussion in the sense of conceptual clarification. The third and last part of the thesis, chapters 5 and 6, is more practical in focus and deals with the design of the practical programme for philosophical interfaith dialogue and also presents, interprets and evaluates the results of its test run.

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remain ineffective, if it is not accepted by people of faiths who naturally demand that their theologies be respected. Thus such respect is also a condition for the success of the projected programme.

[4] Of course the restriction not to rationalise theologically axiomatic beliefs does not just hold for me in writing the thesis and drafting the practical interfaith dialogue programme, but also the programme itself does in its design reflect this restriction and does not lead, much less expect, participants to rationalise the axiomatically true beliefs of the theology of their respective religious traditions. Thus, I could have used the term 'theological interfaith dialogue' in the title of this thesis instead of 'philosophical interfaith dialogue' to indicate that there is no intention to transcend the limits of theology as philosophy is prone to do. However, I have chosen 'philosophical' over 'theological' in order to avoid the impression that it would be a specific theology of a particular religious community that forms the frame of this programme.

By adopting a religious studies approach to this thesis' project, I hope to present as its result a programme for philosophical interfaith dialogue that is both attractive for people of faith and suitable for facilitation by a secular institution.

1.5   Reflexivity

In accordance with Flood's demand that a researcher lays open '*the resources of her own cultural inheritance*' (Flood 1999:194)[5] I offer in this section an account of my own personal situatedness as a researcher who also happens to be a person of faith. This is meant to enable the reader to understand my intentions, but also to detect potential fallacies resulting from them.

There is an implicit value judgement in the approach I take: interfaith dialogue about religious truth is a valuable exercise that is worth engaging lay people in. This conviction is based in my academic and personal interest in philosophy and religion and my own experience of belonging to a minority faith group, a fact that continuously puts me in situations where I have to make myself intelligible to others who do not share my position.

The Hare Krishna movement, of which I have been a member to varying degrees for the past 20 years, is a fairly conservative religious community, both in regard to the strictness of its moral commandments and the importance that is placed on a faithful acceptance of its teachings. Also, proselytising and converting people are considered highly spiritual and salvific activities. This has been particularly true in Germany where I come from. I am a rather liberal member of my community; some would even see me outside the camp (even I sometimes do). (As such I am quite a typical representative of an academic dealing with interfaith dialogue.) As a liberal, the concept of proselytising causes discomfort to me. On the one hand there is the urgency that comes with a concern for salvation; on the other there is the desire to respect the other and the integrity of their point of view. The negotiation of these conflicting demands (in so far that they are projected onto me by others) or desires (in so far as I have internalised them) is a matter of personal integrity and ethical authenticity that I continuously find myself engaged in.

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[5] Cf. also Bryman (2012:39) and Tripp (1998:39–40).

As an academic I received my education primarily in philosophy and wrote my Master's thesis on the relationship between mysticism and language criticism in the thought of Mauthner and the early Wittgenstein. I moved into the field of religious studies for PhD research when I was awarded a scholarship from the Higher Education Academy's Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies. The Subject Centre's mission was[6] to promote and support excellence in teaching and learning in higher education institutions and they sponsored my research because of its aim to develop a practical interfaith dialogue programme, with students in higher education institutions being the target audience. The rationale I presented to them was that university courses are being more and more geared toward marketable skills so that character formation as an original element of education is receding in the practice of everyday university life. A programme of interfaith dialogue that would engage with the religious identity of the participants could, so I argued, offer a valuable means to address that imbalance.

1.6   Outline of the thesis

a.   *Chapter 2: Historical narration and analysis*

'Interfaith dialogue' is not a neutral term that simply denotes what the constituent words convey. Rather, it has a history and is laden with certain connotations that relate to that history. Writing a thesis in the context of interfaith dialogue, I need to address these notions and the history to which they are connected in order to situate myself in relation to them. However, there is no comprehensive history of interfaith dialogue available in writing that would trace the problematic notions to its historical roots at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. For this reason I researched and wrote a history of interfaith dialogue myself and hope that this can be one original contribution the thesis offers. The account is subdivided into three parts: the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, the interfaith movement in the 20th century, and recent developments in the UK. In collating and analysing the information I draw on primary sources (such as the speeches held at the Parliament or Braybrooke's account of the interfaith movement) and secondary

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[6] The Subject Centre was closed in 2011 due to cuts in funding. Cf.
http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsnews/135 (Retrieved 17/11/2012) Hence the use of the past tense.

literature. For the last part on recent developments in the UK, I draw in some places on my own field research.

The account I deliver includes, and indeed is structured by, an analysis of the problematic aspects of the interfaith movement, whose manifestation and transformation are traced through the course of the last 120 years. Five key aspects are: the issue of representation; the presence of a bias; the role of academic discourse; diverging motives of the participants; and a leaning toward a pluralist ideology. These five categories of analysis were mainly drawn from a study of the World Parliament of Religions of 1893 and confirmed through an examination of the interfaith movement in the 20th century, for which Braybrooke's emic account served as the main resource. These five categories now form parameters of a taxonomy or an analytical grid, which is applied to the entire narrative of the history of the interfaith movement including recent developments in the UK, thus revealing the changes and transformations that have taken place.

b. Chapter 3: Philosophy subordinated to the form of theology

Chapters 3 and 4 form the theoretical part of the thesis. Here, the primary method employed is that of conceptual discussion and clarification.

Starting from the results of chapter 2, I argue that the five problematic aspects of the interfaith movement arise due to a confusion of mainly three different discourses, which are distinguished from each other by their different objectives, their criteria of success and the respective instruments acceptable in achieving that success. The three discourses are political discourse, theological discourse, and academic discourse. If one attempts to achieve the success of one discourse by using the instruments of another, or if one introduces a notion of success that is alien to the discourse at hand, confusion is inevitable. The thesis is concerned with philosophical interfaith dialogue and I have defined this above as dialogue that is concerned with the truth and validity of religious teachings. Therefore it is theological or truth discourse that this thesis needs to disentangle from the confusion and examine in detail as to how it functions within the interfaith dialogue situation.

The form of theology, as explained above, is the central point from which the theoretical deduction in chapter 3 starts. From the epistemological structure of theology it follows that religions function each more or less as closed frames of reference. Meaning is created primarily through reference to some constituent within

them and truth and validity are thus generated internally. Hence even if different religious traditions were to apparently agree on points of doctrine, justification processes would draw on different assumptions and take place in different contexts. To argue this point I will use Wittgenstein's notion of language games and draw on what he said about religion in his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* and remarks he made on the subject elsewhere. I believe that the examples he uses illustrate well the epistemological insularity of religious teachings. The discussion, however, is at times dialectical, i.e. it moves in both directions: not only from Wittgenstein to my proposal to consider religions closed frames of reference, but also back from the notion of religions as closed frames of reference to Wittgenstein's remarks on religion. Although the thesis cannot hope to contribute to Wittgenstein exegesis in any substantial way, because that is such a vast and notoriously contentious field, I do hope that my reading of religions as closed frames of reference can help to illuminate Wittgenstein's remarks on religious belief.

Having established the concept of religions as closed frames of reference, I then discuss the implications of this view for the interfaith situation. I conclude that understanding is possible through emphatic self-projection into the respective alien frame of reference, but that it is on principle not possible to reason across the boundaries of the teachings of religious traditions, much less to come to a shared agreement. In order to illustrate these implications I discuss at some length two historical examples of interfaith dialogue. Both predate the World Parliament of Religions. They are: the exchange between Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther on the issue of the freedom of the will between 1524 and 1527 and Jean Bodin's *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime (Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Rerum Sublimium Arcanis Abditis)*, which he wrote in 1593. I chose these two examples, because firstly, they allowed me to extend the breadth with which this thesis covers the history of interfaith dialogue; and secondly, because unlike the discourse within the interfaith movement after 1893, they are located more or less purely within the theological discourse of religious truth, which is the discourse under consideration in this thesis and this chapter particularly. Another reason for choosing these specific examples is that both are well covered in the secondary literature, on which I can thus draw in the discussion.

c. *Chapter 4: From systems of doctrines to tradition-to-life reasoning*

After chapter 3 has discussed in detail how religions function epistemologically in regard to their teachings or doctrines, the question presents itself whether really all religions provide within themselves for a system of reasoning in this way. To answer this question, I will consider various definitions of religion. While chapter 3 relied on a purely epistemological perspective, the discussion now moves to consider possible definitions of religion that are based on the historical, empirical study of religions. However, to narrow down the scope of possible definitions I use the systematic distinction between explanatory, or reductionist, and interpretative approaches to religion and argue that interpretative approaches will yield definitions of religion more useful to the purposes of this thesis, because they share the same commitment to respect the perspective of the believer and to take a given religion on its own terms. Having determined that interpretative accounts of religion are appropriate for the purpose at hand, I draw a further systematic distinction between essentialist and non-essentialist definitions and discuss an example of each with a view to locating an element of doctrines or systematic reasoning. The definition of religion offered by Ninian Smart is a non-essentialist one, which distinguishes itself by the ability to account for different kinds of religions that do not have to share a common core. Smart detects seven dimensions in which religions can be manifest. One of them is what he calls the doctrinal and philosophical dimension, which clearly represents the idea of systematic reasoning or theology, but is not manifest in all religions to the same degree. I will argue that there is furthermore a second kind of systematic reasoning present, namely hermeneutical reasoning that relates other dimensions such as ethics or ritual to each other or to the doctrinal dimension should it be present. This second order philosophising is much more universal than the narrow category of 'doctrines'.

As an example of a more essentialist definition of religion I discuss Wilfred Cantwell Smith's conception of religion as a combination of cumulative tradition and personal faith. The location for a set of doctrines or a theology would be the cumulative tradition, but Smith's historical deconstruction of the term 'religion', of which I give an account, makes clear that doctrines have not originally been a central part of even Christianity and there is therefore no reason to assume that it should be a universal component in all possible cumulative traditions. However, as with Smart, I argue there is a universal element of second order philosophising: making sense of

the cumulative tradition, whatever its ingredients are. Smith's conception presents, as it were, a structural account of the situation of the believer in which such second-order philosophising takes place. This is a situation that obtains for all religions and it is relevant and accessible to lay believers, for they too have to engage in it on a day-to-day basis to derive meaning from their cumulative tradition for their life and faith. Every believer has to relate their cumulative tradition to their experiences in life. Vice versa, the cumulative tradition is made sense of in light of those real-life experiences as well. This dialectical negotiation from tradition to life and back has all the structural elements of a set of doctrines, or a frame of reference: there is systematic reasoning, which is given shape by axiomatic, unchangeable, elements. Because of this sameness in structure, all the conclusions of chapter 3, drawn for the situation of interfaith dialogue on doctrinal truths, also hold for interfaith dialogue on tradition-to-life negotiation. For the programme of philosophical interfaith dialogue to be developed as part of this thesis, I will therefore use this universal and demotic notion of philosophy and understand *philosophical* interfaith dialogue to be not about doctrine, but about making sense of the cumulative tradition in the light of one's experiences in the world.

d. Chapter 5: From theoretical conclusions to a practical programme design

This chapter argues for a specific design of a practical philosophical interfaith programme. In doing so it draws on both, the historical analysis conducted in chapter 2, and the theoretical conclusions reached in chapters 3 and 4. From the problematic aspects singled out in the analysis of the history of the interfaith movement I derive five principles of philosophical interfaith dialogue that, if adhered to, should ensure that those aspects do not manifest in the programme I design. The five principles thus serve as a basis for designing the programme on the one hand, and evaluating the design and the results discussed in chapter 6 on the other.

The drafting work took place in two stages, the first being the Interfaith Tandem Learning[7] programme of the Chaplaincy Service at the University of Sheffield (01-05/2008), the second the Walk in my Shoes programme executed at the University of Leeds (01-03/2009). The basic format of the programme consisted in one-on-one conversations, semi-structured by a theme sheet that presented a topic and suggested

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[7] The Interfaith Tandem Learning project sought to appropriate tandem learning to the context of interfaith dialogue. Tandem learning is an unsupervised method to learn a foreign language where two students of different native tongues teach each other their languages.

questions to consider. The conclusions of chapter 3 and 4 came to bear most prominently on the decision regarding which topics to select for the topic sheets and on the formulation of the questions, because both of these things, foremost of all, ensured the focus on tradition-to-life negotiation and the observance of the restriction not to reason across the boundaries of different religions.

The chapter takes the form of a narrative of the drafting process in order to lay open the material circumstances under which it took place and which influenced it. This also serves to acknowledge the contributions others have made at the various stages of the programme. Embedded in the narrative, I will systematically refer back to the previous chapters and explain how the theoretical conclusions were realised in the programme set-up and the design of the programme material.

e. *Chapter 6: Evaluating underlying principles and programme design*

The programme, as described in chapter 5, saw a trial run at Leeds University between January and March 2009. Here, in chapter 6, the thesis proceeds to present and evaluate the results of that trial run. To this end it draws on both quantitative and qualitative data. This data consists mainly of ca. 160 blog entries the 40 participants wrote (one per tandem meeting) and the transcripts of the four focus group meetings, which were conducted after the programme had ended; but there is also one personal research diary and statistical data gathered from 35 feedback questionnaires of which I make use.

Thus the chapter reports on the profile of the participants, their response to the topic sheets, and the assessment of the programme set-up. Next, there is evidence presented for the presence of the theoretical principles (as arrived at in chapters 3 and 4) in the practical situations engendered by the programme. This evidence is in the form of quotations from the focus group transcripts and the blog entries. Finally, the chapter details the benefits of taking part in the programme as reported by the participants, again quoting them extensively based on a qualitative analysis of the data sets. Because the focus of the programme design (and the theoretical approach to the entire project) was on sound performance, rather than the achievement of desired results, there were few systemic expectations in this regard. Thus one would have assumed participants to emerge from the programme with a better understanding of their own tradition and that of their conversation partner, which indeed was the case. But beyond that, the parallel-ness and structural similarity of the

epistemological situation of each of the conversation partners created benefits that would not have been there, if they had also shared the same content, or the same religious tradition.

2 An account and analysis of the history of interfaith dialogue and the interfaith movement

2.1 Introduction

This thesis stands in the tradition of the interfaith movement in that it seeks to implement dialogue about religious truth on a practical level. It is only natural, therefore, that the history of the interfaith movement forms to a certain degree the context of the thesis, and that the thesis needs to acknowledge that context and situate itself in relation to it. Even the more general term 'interfaith dialogue' is not neutral in that it would simply denote what the constituent words convey. Rather, the connotations it comes with also relate to the history of the interfaith movement. As there is no comprehensive, critical history of interfaith dialogue available to which I could refer, I undertake in this chapter to present such an account from my own research and offer this as a part of the original contribution that this thesis aims to make.

There are three different phases of the interfaith movement usefully to be distinguished: The World Parliament of Religions in Chicago of 1893 as its starting point; the 20th century as the time of its most pronounced formation; and recent developments and transformation. Part of that transformation is a development from the global towards the local. For these smaller scale developments I limit myself to the UK because this is the context within which the practical interfaith dialogue programme developed in this thesis is to take place. The World Parliament of Religions itself has been critically covered in the academic literature, most notably in the two books *Das Weltparlament Der Religionen von 1893: Strukturen Interreligiöser Begegnung im 19. Jahrhundert by* Dorothea Lüddeckens and *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* by Judith Snodgrass, published in 2002 and 2003 respectively. There is also a selection of the speeches given at the Parliament available in a book edited by Richard Hughes Seager in 1993 with the title *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: World's Parliament of Religions: Selected Papers*.

The history of the interfaith movement in the 20th century is covered in some detail in Marcus Braybrooke's *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* of 1992. Although critical in some respects, Braybrooke presents an emic perspective as Braybrooke himself has been a leading member of the

interfaith movement in the UK. His account can be usefully analysed from an etic position, but it does not represent an academic account itself to which a researcher in religious studies could simply refer without further evaluation and analysis.

Recent developments in interfaith dialogue in the UK are again covered in a way that I could just refer to rather than having to recount them, particularly in the publications of the Inter Faith Network of the UK and the writings of Paul Weller. (Cf. for instance The Inter Faith Network for the UK 2012; Weller 2009, 2007, 2008; Weller, P. and Beal, D. 2004) However, there is no account that would span the entire period from the World Parliaments of Religions up to the present time.

The interfaith movement as such is not monolithic in regard to the people who participate in it and the specific aims they pursue. Yet there are certain traits that in one form or another have persisted and the narration I present is structured by an analysis of what I perceive to be the five problematic aspects of the interfaith movement: the issue of representation, the presence of a bias, the role of academic discourse, diverging motives of the participants, and a leaning toward a pluralist ideology. Originally derived from a study of the literature on the World Parliament of Religions, I will follow these problematic traits and discuss how they have manifested and transformed in the past 120 years since the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.

The development of the five categories of analysis during the study of the primary and secondary literature on the World Parliament of Religions, their substantiation through the analysis of the data on the 20th century interfaith movement and recent UK-based developments, and finally their theoretical interpretation in the beginning of the next chapter in terms of a confusion of discourses (cf. 3.1) follows the course of what Silverman calls a simplified model of grounded theory, which involves three states: '*an initial attempt to develop categories which illuminate the data; an attempt to 'saturate' these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance; developing these categories into more general analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting.*' (Silverman 2005:179)

A 'history of interfaith dialogue' can be attempted in two principle ways: Firstly, as a history of the term. Such a history would look at when the term was first used and how the meaning attached to it has possibly changed and developed over time.

Secondly, such a history could take the form of a history of a phenomenon rather than a term. One would start by determining what is understood by 'interfaith dialogue' today and then trace the phenomenon, regardless of what it has been called, back in time and reveal how it has manifested in various circumstances. The history of the term *interfaith dialogue* is relatively short. Forward records that the word *dialogue* began to appear in conjunction with *interfaith* in the 1960s in Britain, '*as local interfaith groups grew up in cities and towns across the United Kingdom*' and he mentions, among others, the Leeds Concord Initiative.[8] (Forward 2002:31) Focusing on the history of the term is therefore unlikely to reveal its philosophical roots; but it is those philosophical roots that are of interest here, as it is a philosophical approach to interfaith dialogue I intend to facilitate. Thus a 'history of interfaith dialogue' will, in the following, be attempted in terms of the phenomenon, not the term. Although the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue is very diverse today, there is still an event in history from which a continuous narration to today's manifestations is possible to a considerable degree: this starting event of modern interfaith dialogue was the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. (Forward 2002:28) (Braybrooke 1992:7ff.)[9]

2.2   Interfaith dialogue prior to the World Parliament of Religions

As a minimal definition, I take 'interfaith dialogue' to refer to exchanges between people belonging to different religious traditions about the truth and validity of faith and religions. This is justified, because on the one hand this thesis pursues a philosophical point of view to which questions of truth are central; on the other hand I will argue that the interfaith movement, which heavily influenced the notion of what is understood today by 'interfaith dialogue,' has been predisposed from the

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[8] Sometimes, instead of *interfaith*, the term *interreligious* is used. *Interreligious* appears to suggest interaction between religious traditions, often represented by institutions, whereas *interfaith* carries the notion of more personal exchanges between people of different faiths. (Cf. M. Barnes 2002:3) This is a tentative distinction peculiar to the English language and even there it is not consistently adhered to. In the following, the term *interfaith* will be used for both kinds of interactions and where a distinction is necessary, it will be made explicit within the text. Also, in the literature, *interfaith* as well as *interreligious* are also spelled *inter faith, inter-faith*, and *inter religious* and *inter-religious*, respectively. (Cf. Weller 2001:80) Avoiding elusive insinuations as to how far apart faiths and religions are or need to be in order not to lose their integrity, the spelling *interfaith* will be used in this thesis analogous to international, interpersonal, etc. with no subtle suggestions intended. The issue of whether the gap (the 'inter') between religions can or cannot be bridged and what this implies for their integrity will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

[9] Cf. also the history page of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions at http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=1&sn=4 .(Retrieved 25/05/12)

beginning to questions of religious truth, as is evident in its own narration of origin.[10] This is perhaps not surprising, as the absoluteness of the subject of religion seems to necessarily entail the demand of universal consent.[11]

It is likely that wherever and whenever people of different faiths have been interacting in some way with each other, there has been an element of interfaith dialogue, too. Because such exchanges are transient, we simply do not know about them today unless they made it into the written record and unless that written record has survived. It is certainly no accident that the perhaps earliest example of an authentic interfaith debate of sorts we can follow is the exchange between Luther and Erasmus from 1524 to 1527 which falls into a time where the invention of the printing press made it possible for a large audience to follow a theological debate in writing.[12] Prior to the invention of the printing press handwritten manuscripts circulated naturally in small numbers of copies, which therefore are less likely to have survived through time. Writing as such is also less likely to preserve authentic examples of interfaith dialogue which would for the most part will be spontaneous and oral, arising from concrete encounters between human beings. However, from around the time the notion of 'religions' (in the plural) arose, there are a number of 'constructed' philosophical interfaith exchanges in evidence in the forms of fictional discussions in the fashion of Plato's dialogues.[13] There is Ramon Lull, who lived in Mallorca at a time when the population of the island was equally distributed between Catholic Christians, Muslims, and Jews. His *Book of the Gentile and the three Wise Men* of 1276 is a fictional account of a Christian, Jewish and Muslim sage presenting their case to a gentile who is seeking true religion. The next example is Nicolas of Cusa's *On the Peace of Faith* of 1453 in which he stages a fictional summit meeting in Heaven where mainly Islam is discussed vis-à-vis Christianity. And finally, there is Bodin's *Colloquium of the Seven about the Secrets of the Sublime* from around 1588, which will be dealt with in some detail in chapter 3 (cf. 3.8.2).

The concept of 'religion' in its modern sense as a system of teachings and related practices (thus allowing for the first time the plural 'religions') emerges during the renaissance. (Smith 1991:15–79) In Europe, the time of the renaissance

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[10] This narration is presented in Braybrooke's *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue*. (Braybrooke 1992)

[11] It is perhaps a unique feature of our postmodern times that it now seems possible to separate issues of (religious) truth from political or social issues.

[12] Cf. 3.8.1

[13] The examples discussed in the following are not an exhaustive list of instances. For more examples cf. Waardenburg (1997; 2003:110–129) and Schenkheld (1930).

and the onset of modernity was characterised firstly by the 'discovery' of America and its indigenous people by Europeans. This posed serious questions to the concept of an all-loving God who provides everyone equally with the chance to attain salvation and the simultaneous belief in the then just formulated doctrine of '*extra ecclesian nulla salus,*'[14]- no salvation outside the church - for how could those people across the ocean have heard about Jesus Christ or professed the Catholic Christian faith prior to the arrival of Europeans on their continent? (Strenski 2006:14–15) The second momentous event of the time was the reformation and the subsequent plurality of Christian denominations in Europe. (Strenski 2006:13) (Harrison 1990:3) It is easy to see how, in this context, the question arose of which religion was the 'true religion.' The idea of a 'Natural Religion' began to assert itself, meaning either 'original religion' (i.e. the oldest religion was thought to be the closest to what God had intended for humankind), or 'content shared by all religions', or, on yet another reading, 'essential nature of all religions.' (Strenski 2006:9) Natural religion was thought to be innate in human beings, and thus could be known, believed in, and adhered to simply on the basis of what humans found in themselves, a kind of instinct for or a being-drawn toward the divine. Although the issue was clearly the truth *of* religions (not yet *about* religions) Strenski sees in the quest for Natural Religion the beginning of a 'scientific' approach and thus the roots of what has today become the academic study of religions. (Strenski 2006:10) He convincingly traces this development through time from Bodin, to Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury, on to the Deists, who, in his view, have '*established the intellectual bases of a comparative, naturalistic, academic study of religions*' (Strenski 2006:29) by combining the instrument of reason no longer with revelation, but with the empiricism of Locke. However, in their quest, they, too, were still concerned with what the true religion was. Thus it can be argued that the contemporary academic discipline of religious studies shares at least one strand of its historical roots with interfaith dialogue, as it was to appear on the world stage with the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. This is even more evident with Max Müller, whom Strenski calls '*a latter-day deist of his own kind.*' (Strenski 2006:28) Although Müller considered himself a scholar who impartially subjected religious texts to his (historically informed) rational scrutiny, he saw '*his critical studies of sacred texts as leading to a deeper and truer religiosity.*' (Stone 2002:167-

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[14] This doctrine was formulated by the Catholic Church at the Council of Florence, which took place from 1438 to 1445. Columbus 'discovered' America in 1492.

168 quoted in Strenski 2006:67)[15] With Müller, an enthusiastic supporter of the World Parliament of Religions of 1893 (Müller 1895), the interrelation between early forms of an academic study of religions and the emerging interfaith movement is particularly evident. This will be discussed below in the section on the academic inclination, if not bias, of early interfaith dialogue. For now it suffices to summarise that there have been precursors to the interfaith movement, even though its emergence on the stage of history in Chicago in 1893 was sudden and unexpected.

2.3   The World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893

Extensive publications on the World Parliament of 1893 are few. The first source to draw on in examining the Parliament is Barrows' *The World's Parliament of Religions: an illustrated and popular story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*. (Barrows 1893) Barrows was the chief organiser and chair of the Parliament and his book in two volumes contains the speeches given at the Convention. As such the book is not a study but a record of the Parliament. One hundred years later, Seager published a smaller collection of selected speeches under the title *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: World's Parliament of Religions: Selected Papers*. (Seager 1993) The foreword by Diana L. Eck and the general introduction to the book as well as the introductions to each set of papers grouped together under various headings by Seager add scholarly remarks and provide historical context helpful in evaluating the Parliament and the speeches included in the book. Overall, Seager's book breathes a commitment to the ideals of the Parliament. An extensive historical analysis of the Parliament from a more distanced religious-studies point of view is provided by Lüddeckens' '*Das Weltparlament Der Religionen Von 1893: Strukturen Interreligiöser Begegnung Im 19. Jahrhundert*,' only available in German at this

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[15] Müller himself writes: *'I cannot be grateful enough to have had the pleasure to have started and completed this project and with the help of the best experts of the oriental languages. Thus I have been able to deliver the basis upon which in the coming years or centuries the religion of the future will be able to build its temple [...]'* (Müller 1895:421) The translation is mine; the German original reads: '*Ich kann nicht dankbar genug sein, daß es mir vergönnt gewesen, mit Hülfe der besten Kenner der orientalischen Sprachen dieses Unternehmen zu beginnen und zu Ende zu führen, und so den Unterbau zu liefern, auf welchem einmal in kommenden Jahren oder Jahrhunderten die Religion der Zukunft ihren Tempel erbauen kann [...].*'

point. (Lüddeckens 2002)[16] Judy Snodgrass' *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition*' manages to deliver a revealing examination of the Parliament as a whole by focusing on a specific group of participants, namely the Japanese Buddhist delegation. (Snodgrass 2003)

The World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 marked the beginning of what today has come to be called, or has come to call itself, 'the interfaith movement.' (Braybrooke 1992:7–8)[17] The Parliament, however, did not take place as an autonomous event. Rather, it was conceived of and took place as part of the World's Columbian Exposition, which lasted from 1 May through 31 October 1893. This exposition was one of the great trade fairs, the tradition of which had started in London in 1851 with the Great Exhibition. Named in celebration of Columbus' 'discovery' of America four hundred years earlier, the Chicago fair in 1893 attracted 27.5 million visitors to its exhibitions of industrial machinery and art, and its ethnographic displays. Not only is the sheer volume of resources employed impressive (construction started three years before the opening of the fair; more than 40,000 skilled labourers and workers were engaged to construct the 14 main buildings and the additional 200 buildings of a smaller size; 28 Million Dollars were spent on the construction), but also the public relations employed to advertise the fair was unprecedented: Handy, head of the Department of Publicity and Promotion, claims that no less than 2,000 to 3,000 mail packages containing information on the fair and watercolour sketches as illustrations were sent out daily all over the world.[18]

The exposition had a highly symbolic meaning for the self-representation of the US as the crowning achievement of progress and civilization.[19] Thus the significance of these World Exhibitions went far beyond the mere function of a trade fair. Rather,

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[16] For ease of reading, whenever I quote from this book, I will translate the quote into English in the running text and provide the German original in a footnote.

[17] Braybrooke's *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* represents the history of the interfaith movement from the perspective of one who considers himself a member of this movement. He starts his narrative with the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and uses the term *interfaith movement* himself. The term *movement* was also employed by Barrows, chief organiser of the Parliament and head of the Congress of Religions under whose umbrella it took place, in his address to the convening assembly. He used it there in reference to the Parliament itself. (Barrows 1993:24)

[18] Cf. Anon. n.d. 'World's Columbian Exposition: The Official Fair--A History'. Retrieved January 5, 2012 (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma96/wce/history.html). The source does not mention for how long this procedure was in progress, but only states that the department was in operation since 1890 – a good three years before the fair opened.

[19] See Snodgrass for a description and analysis of the spatial arrangements of the setup and the buildings at the location of the exposition. These even included numerical measurements corresponding to significant dates in the US' history. (Snodgrass 2003:21–44)

they were displays of industrial progress and a celebration of craftsmanship and confidence. Lüddeckens characterises them aptly as 'Kristallationspunkte ihrer Zeit' – points in time where the defining characteristics of an era converge and become visible. Not only were the fairs intended to impress with grand displays of goods of the latest accomplishment. They also came to include exhibitions of Fine Art (for the first time in Paris in 1855), historical collections (for the first time in London in 1862), a 'street of nations' in which nations presented architecture typical for them (for the first time in Paris in 1878), and finally ethnographical displays (for the first time in Paris in 1889). For Chicago, the city that had just recently invented the word *skyscraper*,[20] G. Brown Good envisioned the exhibition to be an '*illustrated encyclopedia of civilization*` that would showcase '*the steps of progress of civilization and its arts in successive centuries.*' (Lüddeckens 2002:169) Progress was understood not only in terms of technology; rather technological progress was understood to mirror spiritual and cultural progress thus making the Exposition a display of civilizational superiority. This is not only obvious from the symbolism of the fair's physicality, where the White City (as the exhibition grounds were called on account of the white colour of all its buildings) embodies a paradisiacal utopia. One Chicago newspaper, the *Daily Inter Ocean*, an '*upper-class arbiter of cultural tastes*'[21] published in its supplement of 27 September 1893 the following poem about the White City:

The city so holy and clean,

No sorrow can breathe in the air;

No gloom of affliction or sin,

No shadow of evil is there.[22]

But the conviction of cultural superiority manifested also in the exhibitions themselves. The fair's Department of Ethnology organised a display of different cultures akin to the street of nations introduced in Paris in 1878. But not only would there be architectural designs to look at, but people from those cultures would perform in a circus-like stage situation typical dances, music or other culturally stereotypable activities.

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[20] A fire devastated the city centre of Chicago in 1871. In rebuilding it, many tall buildings were erected and the term skyscraper came into use to refer to them. *Cf. Anon. n.d. 'Online Etymology Dictionary'. Retrieved February 15, 2012 (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=skyscraper).*
[21] Cf. Anon. n.d. 'Newspapers'. Retrieved February 15, 2012 Anon. n.d. 'Newspapers'. Retrieved February 15, 2012 (http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/889.html).
[22] Quoted in Lüddeckens (2002:170)

Attached to the Exposition, the World's Congress Auxiliary was set up to complement the '*material triumphs and technological marvels that formed the substance of the Exposition's displays.*' (Seager 1993:4) The Auxiliary organised a total of 200 congresses under the official motto '*Not Things but Men; Not Matter but Mind*' (Cf. Snodgrass 2003:21), covering diverse subjects such as women's progress, medicine, temperance, social reform, commerce, education, literature, engineering, art, public health, philosophy. The Department of Religion of the Auxiliary alone organised 41 denominational and interdenominational congresses. Within this framework, the World Parliament of Religions took place from 11 to 27 September. Each day was dedicated to a specific theme, such as *What the Various Faiths had to say of Religion in its Relation to Morals* or *The Account of Religion and Modern Social Problems*. (Lüddeckens 2002:181) The programme of the Parliament consisted of papers and speeches given by the various participants following a fixed schedule. There was no forum for debates among the speakers and references to preceding presentations, although occasionally made, were rare and offered no substitute for discussion. In total there were 216 papers delivered, out of which just over 50% were delivered by Protestants who were not part of the religious mainstream like Swedenborgians and Unitarians. Mainstream Protestantism had a presence as well, if proportionately less strong, as did Catholics, and Jews. 41 papers were given by Asian participants who received the best press and left the biggest impression in the mind of the public. (Seager 1989:316–317) Particularly the three presenters from Asia, Soyen Shak, Anagarika Dharmapala, and Vivekananda Swami drew a lot of positive attention from the public and the media. Among them, Vivekananda Swami was perhaps the single most influential person at the Parliament.[23] As part of the World's Congress Auxiliary programme, the Parliament turned out to be the most spectacular of the events. As such it fulfilled the organiser's expectations who had conceived of it as the '*capstone of the entire proceedings.*' (Seager 1993:4)[24] More than four thousand people attended the opening ceremony alone. Although the Hall of Columbus in which the Parliament took place offered seats for 3000 people and standing capacity for another 1000, the crowd was so large that the adjacent Hall of Washington of a similar size had to be utilised for the most

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[23] See, for instances, the extracts of the Chicago newspaper *Daily Inter Ocean* in Seager (1993:338).

[24] Barrows, the organiser of the Parliament within the Auxilliary, expressed it thus at the opening ceremony: '*Our meeting this morning has become a new, great fact in the historic evolution of the race which will not be obliterated.*' (Barrows 1993 [1893]:24)

heavily attended speeches to be held there for a second time. (Lüddeckens 2002:178–179) Interest in the Parliament increased over its duration and at the closing session on the seventeenth day 7000 people were present.

Despite its peculiar setting and certain problematic issues that originate from it, the Parliament was not only a remarkable ecumenical gathering, but also the first formal meeting between religious people of Eastern and Western religious traditions. The Parliament was the first instance of '*what we call today the 'dialogue among various religions,' in which each religious claim for ultimacy is acknowledged*' (Kitagawa 1987:367) This was perhaps different from what the original intention of the organisers had been (see section 'Christian bias' below) or what the general public had expected. But the impact of the Parliament on America and the public was such that afterwards

> there were many new ways to be religious. One could be saved or self-realized or grow in God consciousness or be self-emptied. And as America itself continued to pursue its messianic mission, it was a nation under a changed God ... other deities had been tucked up in the nation's sacred canopy ... America had gone into the Parliament claiming to be a cosmopolitan nation and had come out having to live up to the claim. There was no going back. (Seager 1986: 277; cited in Michaud 2004)[25]

There are many questions that suggest themselves in regard to the Parliament. The most pertinent in relation to the topic of this thesis is: In what way can the Parliament serve as a model of interfaith dialogue? The concept of 'interfaith dialogue' is fundamentally subject to value definitions, i.e. no objective criteria will be agreed on, but different interests will produce different definitions. (Gabriel 1972) Hence, given the interests that motivate the enquiry of this thesis, what kind of interfaith dialogue should it pursue? This question requires a philosophical discussion of categories rather than a historical analysis and will be addressed in chapter 3.1. Questions that are suited to a historical analysis are: How did the idea of a *parliament* shape what took place in Chicago? In what way did the Parliament shape the interfaith movement? How did the emerging, academic study of religions influence the Parliament and thus the perception of what interfaith dialogue is; and, conversely, how has it been influenced by the Parliament? The philosophy of pluralism has risen to dominance in interfaith dialogue following the Parliament.

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[25] This is echoed by Burris: *'The Parliament became noteworthy historically not primarily because of the vision of its organizers, but because of the remarkable performance of the people it invited.'* (Burris 2001:123)

How did this pluralism as an ideology manifest at or follow from the Parliament? From a reading of the primary and secondary literature on the interfaith movement a set of categories arise which may serve as a matrix for analysis, an analysis which will go some way to answering these questions. The categories are: representation, bias, the role of academic discourse, ulterior motives and modern traits. Using this matrix, the Parliament will be examined in some detail in the following, and in subsequent sections likewise the developments of the interfaith movement in the 20th and 21st century.

2.3.1 Representation

The very notion of 'parliament' presupposes that representatives of a constituency of some sort are present to negotiate their interests vis-à-vis the interests of others represented by their respective spokespeople. This is problematic in two respects: Firstly, there is the practical difficulty in achieving such representation. The question to discuss is how the Parliament did in this respect. And secondly there is the issue of whether the idea of representation as such is appropriate in matters of religion. Is a parliament – where interests are negotiated – a viable metaphor, or model, for cases, where truth is concerned, particularly when truth is conceived of as fundamental to reality, being itself, and the purpose of human life? This line of enquiry not only goes beyond mere historical analysis but it is too complex for an exhaustive discussion to be attempted here and even within the bounds of this thesis. For the purpose of this thesis – how to best facilitate philosophical interfaith dialogue – I will therefore limit my focus and ask what religion is from a *philosophical* perspective and how religions can be related to each other in a philosophically sound way. This discussion makes up chapter 3. In the following I will discuss to what degree practical representation was realised at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and what difficulties surfaced, even if the notion of a Parliament is accepted as valid.

A 'world' parliament naturally implies a world constituency and the outreach of the organisers of the Parliament was indeed global. The task they were faced with was to find people of religious authority who could act as representatives of their tradition and then to convince them to come to Chicago and participate in the Parliament. The first was comparatively easy as far as Christian denominations were

concerned. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches are institutions with hierarchies of authority and many Protestant Churches also are organised in Associations that allows identifying people to represent them. The task of convincing the appropriate bodies to participate in the Parliament proved more difficult. The Presbyterian Church in the United States, for instance, passed a resolution against the convention. There is an element of irony in this, as Barrows, chief organiser and chairman of the Parliament, was himself a Presbyterian clergyman. Likewise, the Archbishop of Canterbury refused involvement in the Parliament, stating that his reason for doing so was '*the fact that the Christian religion is the one religion. I do not understand how that religion can be regarded as a member of a Parliament of Religions without assuming the equality of the other intended members and the parity of their position and claims.*' (Barrows 1893: 20-22; cited in Michaud 2004) This statement indicates the problem with the notion of a parliament as such, as mentioned above. Similarly, although some Catholic clergy took part, the European Roman Catholic hierarchy and the pope as its head opposed the idea of the Parliament as did many Evangelical leaders in the US, such as the influential, Chicago-based missionary D.L. Moody. (Michaud 2004)

Although Islam and Judaism share religious heritage with Christianity, they largely lack an over-arching institutional structure to refer to. The organisers invited the Emir of Turkey Sultan Abdul Hamid II, as a prominent figure of Islam and authority to a portion of Muslims, but he declined. Although Muslims did take part in the Parliament, they were proportionately under-represented. An exception in this regard, besides Christianity, was Judaism. There were a number of members of the Reform movement, then dominant in the US, but also representatives of the Conservative movement which was just gaining momentum at the time. (Seager 1993:6)

The case of traditionally Asian religions like Hinduism or Buddhism is even more problematic. Hinduism, for instance, not only lacks institutional structure, but, despite being referred to commonly as a religion, is a completely different kind of entity than, for instance, Christianity. Lüddeckens is right in pointing out that '*one cannot speak in the same manner of a 'representative' of the Roman Catholic Church as of a 'representative' of Confucianism. Not only do the individual participants represent in completely different ways, but also* what *they represent is*

structurally completely different.' (Lüddeckens 2002:6; emphasis in the orignial)[26] Furthermore, for prospective representatives from religions that had no presence in the United States or indeed in the West generally (as was the case with Hinduism and Buddhism) there was the additional difficulty of finding someone who was able to participate in the discourse at the Parliament, which included both familiarity with cultural norms of discourse and language skills, namely the ability to communicate in English.[27] As a result, it was people from religious reform movements which had come into being through the encounter with Western modernity that took part in the Parliament, rather than representatives of traditionally religious communities. Thus Shaku Soen and Anagarika Dharmapala from the Maha Bodhi Society and Protab Chunder Mazumdar from the Brahmo Samaj and Vivekananda, who was later to found the Ramakrishna Mission ended up representing Buddhism and Hinduism respectively. In their home countries and cultures these reform groups had been at the margins of the broader religious tradition. Thus their ability to represent in the way the Parliament suggested was compromised if not entirely absent.

As far as the religions represented at the Parliament, Lüddeckens states that although there certainly is a relation between the individuals present and their stated religious affiliation, the idea of representation at the Parliament is problematic, because many of the individuals were neither representing mainstream religious convictions nor were they officially empowered by religious bodies or communities. Rather, many of them were '*outsiders who either belonged to smaller religious groups or who held convictions controversial within their community.*' (Lüddeckens 2002:6) [28]

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[26] The English is the author's translation. The German original reads: '*Man kann nicht in gleicher Weise von einem "Repräsentanten" der römisch-katholischen Kirche sprechen, wie von einem "Repräsentanten" des Konfuzianismus. So repräsentieren die einzelnen Teilnehmer nicht nur in völlig verschiedener Weise, auch das,* was *sie repräsentieren, ist strukturell völlig unterschiedlich.*'

[27] Barrows mentions two interpreters at work in the Parliament: A Mr Kwai '*for the Chinese Legation*' (Barrows 1893:159) and Z. Noguchi as the interpreter for the Buddhist priests from Japan (Barrows 1893:92). Lüddeckens mentions that there was another interpreter working besides Mr Noguchi. (Lüddeckens 2002:187) Hence there are instances where interpreters helped to bridge the linguistic gap for participants who were not able to speak English. These interpreters were brought along by those who needed them, and thus 'to bridge the linguistic gap' was, in these cases too, the responsibility of the participants. Also, the most successful of the foreign speakers, if not of all speakers, at the Parliament was Vivekananda Swami, who was educated in an English-speaking college in India, then crown colony of the United Kingdom. There he received a thoroughly Western education and, as a result, spoke excellent English. He was thus also able to deepen his impact on the American audience by a lecture tour of two years through the U.S. following the Parliament. In the years following he also lectured in the UK.

[28] The English is the author's translation. The German original reads: '*Vielmehr handelte es sich bei vielen von ihnen eher um Außenseiter, die entweder kleineren religiösen Gruppen angehörten, oder aber innerhalb ihrer Gruppe eine unstrittene Position einnahmen*'.

In assessing the realisation of representation it is also revealing to consider who was not invited to the Parliament. Although there was a sizable Mormon community in the US at the time of the Parliament, no representatives were invited. (Seager 1993:6) Thus a decision had been made beforehand about what was an acceptable variant of Christianity and could count as a denomination, and what was an inacceptable aberration. African Americans were also largely absent from the Parliament except for two persons that were Christian (Seager 1993:7) and thus 'integrated' into American culture. Native Americans were not present, although they were 'represented' in an extremely mediated fashion '*by one, brief, highly general paper presented by an academic anthropologist in the Parliament's scientific section.*' (Seager 1993:6–7) Also, there were no Sikhs at the Parliament and no Bahá'ís[29].

Considering the obstacles to achieve true representation in any meaningful way, Lüddeckens proposes to abandon the idea of representation in relation to the Parliament altogether. While this might be a sensible lesson to draw from the Parliament when attempting to facilitate interfaith dialogue (as this thesis ultimately does), this does not seem to be an option in relation to the Parliament, however spectacularly it might have failed to realise representation. Not only is the notion of a parliament constituted in no small part through the idea of representation, but the dominating discourse of universalism and a universal religion at the Parliament (cf. 2.3.5) implies such representation as well. To move toward a universal religion for the entire world (from today's perspective an implausibly bold aspiration that perhaps says more about modern confidence at work than about religious needs) requires that people participating in the discussion can speak on behalf of their tradition. Not only that, it even implies that they can go back to their religious communities and implement the resolutions negotiated at the Parliament.

2.3.2   Christian bias

The failure of representation is due in no small part to a Christian bias at the Parliament. Eck calculated that 78% of the speakers at the Parliament were Christians of various denominations, including Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic.

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[29] The Bahá'í faith was still relatively young at the time. At the Parliament Henry Harris Jessup mentions the Bahá'í faith's founder Bahá'u'lláh, who had died just the year before, in his paper '*The Religious Mission of the English-Speaking Nations*' as Seager points out. (Seager 1993:37)

(Eck 1993:xv) Sheer numbers may be attributed to the fact that the US, where the Parliament took place, was a predominantly Christian country and participants were much easier to recruit 'at home' then from abroad. However, the Christian mould that formed the Parliament was apparent even at the opening ceremony. There, Cardinal Gibbons led the assembly in the Lord's Prayer; this became part of the opening of every day during the seventeen days of the Parliament (although different people led the crowd). Barrows, the chairman of the Parliament called it the 'universal prayer.' (Barrows 1893:112; Michaud 2004) Barrows is also on record to have viewed the Parliament as an opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity to the world:

> The Parliament has shown that Christianity is still the great quickener of humanity, that it is now educating those who do not accept its doctrines, that there is no teacher to be compared with Christ, and no Saviour excepting Christ. [...] The non-Christian world may give us valuable criticism and confirm scriptural truths and make excellent suggestion as to Christian improvement, but it has nothing to add to the Christian creed. (Barrows 1893:1581)[30]

Seager confirms this: '[...] for all that had been said and done over the course of the Parliament's seventeen days, there is little question that in the minds of its main promoters the assembly was meant to mark a global triumph for Christianity.' (Seager 1993:453)

Burris points out that at the Columbian Exposition more than at any previous World Exhibitions, 'religion was perceived as the center of any given society and the most obvious aspect of culture through which the essence of a given people's cultural orientation might be understood' (Burris 2001:123–124) (Burris 2001:123–124). Thus not only was the Columbian Exposition intended to demonstrate the cultural superiority of the United States through displays of technological advancement, but along with it, this was seen to also prove Christianity's superiority vis-à-vis other religions in the world. (Cf. also 2.3.4 for a discussion on subverted Orientalism.)

The upside of the Christian bias was that the Parliament was quite an ecumenical gathering. Although one could investigate whether the Parliament, under Barrows' chairmanship held an Episcopalian bias within the greater ecumenical discourse, it is

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[30] Due to organisational problems I have been unable to obtain an actual paper copy of the second volume of Barrow's book. The quotation is verified through the website *http://books.google.de/*, which allows string searches in books within the database, in which said book is included. The same passage is referenced in Braybrooke (1992:40) and in Michaud (Michaud 2004) where I originally encountered it.

undoubtedly the case that he and others at the Parliament held out great hopes for the furtherance of a Christian unity. Eck remarks that the Parliament 'might be seen as one of the first events of ecumenical movement, and for many the hopes of Christian unity were the overarching concern of the Parliament.' (Eck 1993:xv).

2.3.3   The role of academic discourse

The Parliament was not an academic event as such. It is justified, however, to speak of an academic discourse at the Parliament. Sharpe points out that the Parliament took place in the context of '*that most Western of Western phenomena, the tradition of scientific congresses.*' (Sharpe 1986:138) I prefer the term 'academic' here a) to indicate that the Parliament was not concerned with the natural sciences[31], but with the social sciences and humanities; and b) to hint at the academic, i.e. university related involvement, both in that university professionals influenced the Parliament, and that vice versa the Parliament influenced what happened at universities afterwards.

This quasi-academic nature of the Parliament was problematic for two related reasons. Firstly, it created restrictions on who could participate and what could be said or dealt with within the discourse; and secondly, it also was problematic in the kind of discourse it generated, which was mixed in nature, neither purely religious or confessional nor properly academic. In regard to the restrictions that the quasi-academic nature of the Parliament created, it is undoubtedly the case that a certain expertise in matters of religion was a prerequisite for participating. This expertise went beyond the rather political aspect of being able to represent, or stand for, a religious community of some sort. It also went beyond merely being a faithful believer of one's tradition. Rather, a certain demand for (Western) education was there that had to do with not only being able to speak in front of an audience, but also with speaking on a level of abstraction characteristic for (Christian) theology and philosophy of religion and also with what today would count as religious studies. As a result (and as mentioned above), the delegates from Asia belonged not to traditionally religious communities, but to religious reform movements which had

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[31] There was some reference to science, though, for instance in regard to Darwinian evolution. Also, the academic discourse at the Parliament is modelled on the scientific methodology, which has to do with modernity (cf. section 'modern character' below).

come into being through the encounter with Western modernity.[32] As far as topics goes, the discourse gives preference to rather theoretical questions, or a theoretical treatment of questions, being less concerned with particular, concrete and practical situations. Another feature of academic discourse is that it favours texts and thought systems, which was the case at the Parliament as a glance at the titles of the presentations reveals. (Barrows 1893) 'The East' had come into consciousness of the West not through the contact with practicing religious peoples from Asia, but through scholarly research into religious texts, that were termed, analogously to the Bible in the West, 'sacred scriptures,' Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East*, which he published in 50 volumes between 1879 and 1910, being a case in point. Each day the Parliament took place under a specific theme, such as '*The Study of the World's Religions,*' '*What Scholarship had to say on the Various Systems of Religion,*' '*Report on the Connection of Religion with the Arts and Sciences*' and '*The History of Religion and Civil Society*' to name but the ones with the most obvious link to religious studies scholarship. (Lüddeckens 2002:181) In his welcome address at the opening ceremony of the Parliament, Barrows called the Parliament '*the first school of comparative religions*' (Barrows 1993:24) and mentioned Max Müller as a 'friend of our movement.' (Barrows 1993:26) A number of leading religious scholars of the time participated in the Parliament,[33] although due to lack of air travel and the great demands of sea journeys on time and energy, Europeans sent their addresses rather than travelled to Chicago themselves and their papers were then read to the audience.

To sum up, in regard to interfaith dialogue the main problem with this academic tendency at the Parliament and the restrictions it created was that it does not represent the reality of religious life within the respective religious communities. The Parliament favoured an educational elite over regular lay believers, which was true for the predominantly Christian West as well as for the participants from non-Western countries. There may be some justification possible for such favouritism by arguing that expert knowledge is required to negotiate the extraordinary situation of an encounter of religious believers on the brink, as it were, of their respective epistemologically founded conceptual systems. However, the Parliament favoured not only an educational elite, but a *Western* educational elite to the disadvantage (in

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[32] For instance, Anagarika Dharmapala (Don David Hevavitarana), a Sri Lakan Buddhist, was invited, because he was the editor of the *Maha Bodhi Journal*. (McRae 1991:22)

[33] Besides Max Müller, Eck mentions the following European scholars: J. Estlin Carpenter, Albert and Jean Réville, C. P. Tiele, and Charles D'Harlez. (Eck 1993:xiv)

terms of representation at the Parliament) of people, educated or not, of other cultures.

But the Parliament also had an influence, back, as it were, on the academic study of religion, and by doing so, so some degree also on religious communities. One direct material outcome of the convention was an endowed lectureship on the History of Religions established in America, which Eck says later became the American Council of Learned Society, which still exists today.[34] (Eck 1993:xv) Another example is Paul Carus, an academic of German origin who held a doctorate from Tübingen University, and who worked as the main publisher for Open Court Publishing after he had moved to the United States. Carus presented at the Parliament,[35] where he met Shaku Soen, a Zen Buddhist from Japan. Soen, upon Carus' request, sent his student D.T. Suzuki, who was proficient in English, to the US to help Carus in publishing works on Buddhism and translating Buddhists texts into English. (Lüddeckens 2002:264) Suzuki was also influenced by western esotericism and even became a member of the Theosophical Society. As a consequence, as Tweed points out, Suzuki presented a version of Zen that can be characterised as detraditionalised and essentialised. (Tweed 2005a:264–267) According to Snodgrass in his '*early writings promoting Buddhism to American audiences, Suzuki took considerable license with central Buddhist concepts some that Verhoeven traces directly to Carus's writings, which make Buddhism appear 'eminently compatible with approved values.*'' (Snodgrass 2003:261) Suzuki's influence on religious communities was considerable. Not only is he credited with introducing Zen Buddhism to the US, but he is thought to be directly responsible for '*the Zen boom of the 1960s and [...] the present strength and variety of Zen in America and overseas.*' (Snodgrass 2003:12) He thus exerted considerable influence in establishing a 'standard' version of Buddhism for the US, which in turn was influenced by Carus' thought, an academic and liberal Christian and a main actor in the Parliament of 1893. But Suzuki's, and by implication Carus', influence was not limited to the US. His Japanese translation of Carus' *Gospel of Buddha* was used in Buddhist

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[34] Interestingly, the Council does not acknowledge this relationship to the endowed lectureship nor to the World's Parliament of Religions. (Cf. Anon. n.d. "On Our History." http://www.acls.org/about/history/ (Retrieved 24/03/2012) Regarding the uneasy relationship between interfaith dialogue and the academic study of religion, cf. the next paragraph in the running text.

[35] Carus' paper is included in: Seager, Richard Hughes. 1993. *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: World's Parliament of Religions: Selected Papers*. La Salle, IL: Open Court. p.297ff.

seminaries in Japan.[36] After having lived in the United States and worked with Carus for 11 years,[37] Suzuki travelled through Europe before going back to Japan to embark on a successful academic career subsequently holding a number of professorships at different universities.

In more general terms, the Parliament created moral support for the academic study of religion, or, as Sharpe puts it: 'The parliament was an encouragement [...] to the emerging science of religion [...] because it showed the extent to which earlier impatience and intolerance was being overcome.' (Sharpe 1986:139) The hopes placed in the academic 'science of religion' is exemplified clearly in the following announcement of a presentation from the fifth day of the Parliament:

> FRIDAY, SEPTEMPER 15, 10A.M.
>
> The Practical Service of the Science of Religions to the Cause of Religious Unity and to Missionary Enterprise; by the Chair-man, Mr. MERWIN-MARIE SNELL. (Barrows 1893:152)[38]

The relationship between today's academic study of religions and what could be termed early attempts at interfaith dialogue (cf. section 2.2. above) has already been pointed out and the Parliament is, in many respects, a continuation and manifestation of that tradition. In Eck's words: '*[T]he study of world religions as an academic field today can be traced through numerous threads that lead back to the Parliament.*' (Eck 1993:xv)

Thus, besides the restriction that an academic orientation placed on the membership and the topics of the Parliament, the academic discourse at the Parliament was also problematic in that there was no clear distinction between the *practice* of religion and the *study* of religion. The resultant mixed academic/religious discourse is problematic, of course, first of all to the academic study of religion as we tend to understand it today: a non-confessional, judgement-suspending examination of objective phenomena to do with religion and their causal relationships. Sharpe says, the Parliament was a '*danger*' to the emerging science of religion, '*because it tended to associate at least some comparative religionists [...] with an idealistic*

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[36] Anon. n.d. "Religion: History: Hegeler Carus Foundation."
http://www.hegelercarus.org/history/religion.html (Retrieved 24/03/ 2012)
[37] The figure of 11 years comes from the history webpage of the Hegeler Carus Foundation. Cf. Anon. n.d. "Religion: History: Hegeler Carus Foundation."
http://www.hegelercarus.org/history/religion.html (Retrieved 24/03/ 2012).
[38] Mr Merwin-Marie Snell appears 5 times in the programme and hence must have been a prominent person at the Parliament.

programme of world peace and understanding.' (Sharpe 1986:139) He goes on to remark on the scepticism with which the Parliament was received among European religious studies scholars. This seems to indicate that there was already a sensibility to the problematic nature of such mixed academic/religious discourse. Not everyone seemed to consider it a problem though, as the list of names Eck provides demonstrates.[39] Max Müller was mentioned above as someone who saw himself as a seeker of the truth not just in the academic sense, but also in the religious one. He was motivated by a religious quest of sorts (Strenski 2006:28) and for him, there was no clear distinction between the two kinds of discourses with the result that his scholarship had a rather theological, even missionary, undertone, but one that did not belong to a traditional religious community. Sharpe concedes that Max Müller could afford to associate himself publicly with the Parliament, because '*his reputation could bear it.*' (Sharpe 1986:139) Müller's own post-Parliament assessment is extremely enthusiastic. He very much regretted not to have travelled to Chicago (he sent in his paper, which was read to the audience), because only in hindsight had he realised it to be such a milestone in human history. Had he only anticipated its significance, he would certainly have spared no effort to be there in person. (Müller 1895:412)

If one considers the Parliament to be a genuinely academic event, then Sharp's critique is fully relevant. However, it being considered the birthplace of the modern interfaith movement, it seems its religious elements are more relevant to the topic at hand, as a) today a much clearer distinction is being made between the study of religion and the practice of it; and b) participating in interfaith dialogue is considered to belong to the practice of religion (while studying interfaith dialogue might well be a subject in the study of religions). Thus taking the Parliament to be a religious event rather than an academic one, what is the problem with a mixed academic/religious discourse?

Academic or scientific reasoning makes a claim to objective truth and it pays for it by relinquishing questions of meaning. A mixed discourse is philosophically unsound, as I will argue in some detail using Wittgenstein in chapter 3. Reasoning based on and conclusions reached through such mixed discourse are confused and invalid. On a quasi-moral level it is wrong for a religious line of reasoning to assume an air of scientific objectivity, just as it is, vice versa, wrong for scientific discourse

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[39] Cf. Eck (1993:xiv)

to claim dominion over questions of faith and belief. The first one is patronising to people of other faiths, the second is patronising to people of all faiths.[40]

But interfaith dialogue has also been attractive to religious people precisely because of the added weight of supposed objective authority that, at the time, the Parliament seemed to be able to bestow on its participants. This is the topic of the following section, which thus deals not only with the influence that the Parliament had back onto the religious communities whose representatives were present in Chicago, but the intentional strategic use of this process.

2.3.4   Ulterior motives: Strategic Occidentalism

Speaking of the somewhat unusual term of 'Occidentalism' will immediately evoke the more broadly familiar concept of Orientalism as introduced by Said. (Said 1979) Indeed, whenever 'Occidentalism' is employed in the literature, Orientalism forms the background of the analysis. The first to coin the term *strategic Occidentalism* was Ketelaar in his book on Buddhism in Meji Japan. (Ketelaar 1990:137) He later elaborated on the concept in an article exclusively focused on the World Parliament of Religions. (Ketelaar 1991) The basic idea behind the concept of Orientalism is that a set of categories motivated and defined by certain purposes are imposed by a western point of view onto non-western cultures and religions, who, through the application of the categories, are potentially misrepresented in their own right, but made to fit the purpose of the western perspective. As the above sections on 'Christian bias' and 'academic discourse' have demonstrated, Orientalism was undoubtedly a process at work at the Parliament. McRae remarks that '*the messages presented at Chicago in 1893 were not fair and adequate representations of Asian religions, but propaganda messages stitched together from a combination of traditional doctrine and Western social and philosophical theory, tailored according to Western measurements of the standard ideology of human progress*.' (McRae

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[40] An example of scholarship patronising religious believers is Müller's remarks about Dharamapala who represented Buddhism at the Parliament. In regard to Buddha's life, Müller suspects Dharmapala to only have read the Lalita vistara or the Buddha-charita, which, Müller says '*give us the usual legends in traditional pattern, but tell us very little of the real life and thought of the prince of Kapilavastu [Buddha]*.' (Müller 1895:422) The translation is mine; the German original reads: '[both books] *uns wohl die gewöhnlichen Legenden in althergebrachter Schablone, aber sehr wenig von dem wirklichen Leben und Denken des Prinzen von Kapilavastu erzählen.*'

1991:30)[41] The representatives from Asia, however, were not just victims of western Orientalist discourse. Rather, they used the Parliament for their own purposes.

While Orientalism relied on the supposed connection between material sophistication and cultural, religious, and moral superiority, Occidentalism sees the religious and philosophical traditions as '*the real and vital base of civilization, while the economic and political derive their worth from their proximity to this central core of meaning.*' (Ketelaar 1991:38) *Strategic Occidentalism*, as coined by Ketelaar, is more than a mere reversal of the Orientalist process. Rather it refers to the way that the Japanese delegation appropriated both the Parliament and potentially Orientalist notions of their own native Japan to create a certain historical narrative and overall to serve their specific political purpose. (Ketelaar 1991:39) In the following I am using the term to refer to all the Asian delegates (with the exception of China)[42] and in the somewhat less specific sense of a conscious exploitation of the Parliament as an event and the Orientalist categories (imposed on them through the setting of the Parliament and the kind of discourse prescribed therein) to achieve their own ends.

In the case of the Japanese delegation the purpose they pursued in attending the Parliament was to demonstrate to people at home, in Japan, that their version of Buddhism was an internationally recognised and respected, universal, religion worthy of attention and scholarly study. Through this acknowledgement they hoped to establish Zen-Buddhism as the national religion of Japan, a goal they succeeded in achieving: '*[...] popular interest in and critical scholarship on Buddhism on the part of Europeans and Americans did much to increase the Japanese awareness of Buddhism as an international religion.*' (McRae 1991:27) Snodgrass concludes: '*The representation of Buddhism at Chicago, as the delegates planned it, was a strategic statement in the discourse of Buddhist nationalism and was given shape by the tactics and strategies implicit in this project.*' (Snodgrass 2003:1)

Similarly, Dharmapala's purpose in attending the Parliament was to construct a universal Buddhist movement, something that did not exist prior to the Parliament, but the existence of which was suggested by generalising categories of Orientalist discourse. Although the unified Buddhist movement Dharmapala envisioned was not and could not have been an immediate result of the Parliament, it certainly helped to cement the notion of 'Buddhism' as a religion in such a universalist sense and

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[41] Seager speaks of a '*strong dose of Anglo-Saxon triumphalism.*' (Seager 1993:7)
[42] The Chinese delegation is a special case not only among the Asian participants, but within the entire Parliament. (McRae 1991:27–29)

Dharmapala's fame derived from the Parliament certainly helped him in his subsequent work. Dharmapala's main strategy for achieving success at the Parliament was to identify Buddhism as a scientific religion. (McRae 1991:30) As science was at the centre of the entire Columbian Exposition, and as the Christian-academic or Orientalist bias of the Parliament rested on the assumption that material advancement made through science signalled cultural and religious superiority, this proved to be a very effective trope.

Vivekananda's Occidentalism seems to be not a clever appropriation of Orientalist discourse, but less subtly a straight reversal of it. In a first step, the connection between material progress and spiritual advancement is denied and in a second Hinduism (itself a construction of Orientalist discourse) is presented as possessing the greater spiritual wisdom, which creates the moral duty for the East to instruct the West, a duty Vivekananda is satisfying by his participation in the Parliament. Ruparell identifies two features of Hindu Occidentalist discourse as embodied by Vivekananda: homogenizing inclusivism and eclecticism. By inclusivism he refers to incorporating '*alterior religious traditions into their own highly developed hierarchical tropologies, thus eviscerating them of any threatening power.*' (Ruparell 2000:28) Similarly, eclecticism refers to taking on features from Western religion that would help make Hinduism a modern religion. Ruparell observes: '*These modes of negotiation are cloaked in the rhetoric of religious tolerance and universality, allied to an attitude of almost messianic duty to guide, instruct, and encourage the spiritually moribund West. Surely these are worthy Occidentalist counterparts to their Orientalist modes of manipulation and subjugation.*' (Ruparell 2000:29)[43] Although Vivekananda's purpose in coming to Chicago was at the same time less specific and more ambitious (essentially an *Easternization of the West,*' as Kitagawa calls it (Kitagawa 1987:359), the consequences of his attendance at the Parliament were strikingly similar to those the Strategic Occidentalism of the Japanese delegation had aimed at: an increased reputation, in Vivekananda's case in India, that would allow him to establish his version of his religion as the perceived standard both at home and abroad, a standard McRae says still holds today: '*[H]is attendance at the Congress [the Parliament] has moulded the way Indian religions have been presented ever since.*' (McRae 1991:30)

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[43] Cf. also Morgan, who observes that not only are Vivekananda's statements problematic within his own religious tradition, but '*his words on other traditions are clearly inaccurate and insensitive [...].*' (Morgan 1995:165)

Thus the Parliament turned out to exercise the power to define standards in religious communities that attended its meetings. Ironically then, in hindsight the Parliament was comparatively more justified to treat the delegates as representatives of their religions than it was at the time of the invitation. The Parliament had the power to create realities by assuming them. This is, of course, highly problematic, not only because it gave the deceiving appearance of representing realities, but also because by creating realities it subjugated potentially lively and, for people of a religious community, perhaps more relevant strands within a tradition to the domination of another by investing the power of definition within it.

Although the term 'Strategic Occidentalism' does not work for the Catholic community within the US, they, too, had a political interest in the Parliament. Seager writes: '*The Parliament was an important event for Catholics in America. It represented them with the opportunity both to make a case for the church and to make a bid for their own niche in the American mainstream.*' (Seager 1993:153)

The purpose of this section was to demonstrate not only the influence of the Parliament on religious communities and traditions, but how that influence could be and has been exploited, or manipulated, to achieve certain preconceived ends. Thus the Parliament was by no means a forum for the 'pure' search for religious truth. It not only reflected the Christian, modern setting in which it took place, but also different interests the participants brought to it.

2.3.5   Modern character: the philosophy of universalism

'Modernity' has a variety of related meanings depending, among other things, on to which subject and school of thought the discourse in which it occurs belongs. In the following I will use the term (and the adjective 'modern') as referring to an ideology, or intellectual context, which is defined by the belief in and quest for a grand narrative, i.e. an overarching explanation of the natural world (in the natural sciences), of the social sphere (in the social sciences) and of their meaning and purpose (in art and the humanities including religion).[44] This notion of modernity entails a belief in progress, i.e. the continual discovery and deeper understanding of

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[44] The modern era during which this intellectual context came into being is usually dated to roughly have started in the 16th century (in the field of history) or a little later at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries (in the field of the history of ideas) (Cf. Mittelstraß 1970:104ff.) and is closely related to the emergence of science.

natural laws, the technology created by making use of those insights, and progress in the development of culture and society. This notion of modernity also entails the view that accessible reality is coherent and unified, which leads to a belief in universal validity: natural laws are universally valid, civilizational progress can be measured by universally valid criteria, and approaching transcendence, religion is ultimately true or false and true religion is universally valid.[45]

The late 19th century was a time of declining religious authority. Science, on the other hand, was thriving. With the theory of evolution taking hold in society, there was even an explanation for the origin of men available that made no reference to divine agency. Thus the Parliament took place in a time when science began to pose a serious challenge to the meaningfulness of religion. Although this seems to have been felt in Europe rather more keenly (Kästner 2004:24ff.) than in America, optimism prevailed and the Parliament, rather than being an event in competition with science, was seen as complementing the scientific and technological advances of the time.[46] Thus, not surprisingly, the ubiquitous theme at the Parliament was universalism. Modelled after science, universalism was pervasive in intellectual life at the time.[47]

Because of later developments in the Interfaith movement, the Parliament today is often associated with the ideology, or philosophy, of pluralism. Thus Eck feels compelled to remark in her foreword to Seager's book entitled *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism* [sic!], which contains a selection of speeches held at the Parliament: 'On the whole, one could argue that the predominant vision of the Parliament was not pluralism, but the dawning of a new era of unity and universalism.' (Eck 1993:xiv)[48] She observes that for some, the Parliament 'was but a step on the way to an emerging world religion that would draw the finest essence of each into one, syncretistic impulse', but others saw as implicit 'the gradual

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[45] The reason this definition of modernity fits the Columbian Exposition so perfectly is, of course, due to the fact that it is derived from an analysis of the Exposition. This does not make the following discussion pointless. Firstly, the definition is, even if derived from an analysis of the Exposition, not arbitrary but does relate to commonly accepted notions of modernity. Secondly, it is still revealing to discuss how this modernity, and particularly the concomitant notion of universal validity manifests in the World's Parliament of Religions as a subsection of the Exposition.

[46] The connection between industrial and technological sophistication and cultural (including religious) superiority was, after all, a key ingredient in Orientalism

[47] Although science is the embodiment of that modern universalist spirit, and, as I argue above, the actual role model for the universalism 'in the air' at the Parliament, the theme was echoed in other fields as well. Ziolkowski demonstrates, how universalism is prefigured in literature (itself perhaps the best source for intellectual history) throughout developing modernity up to the Parliament. (Ziolkowski 1993)

[48] See also Eck (1993:8).

universalization of Christianity.' (Eck 1993:xiv) As mentioned above, each day of the Parliament was dedicated to a certain theme. The last three days, forming a kind of conclusion of the Parliament, took place under the following headings: 'The Aspirations for the Religious Reunion of Christendom,' 'Hopes for the Religious Union of the whole Human Family,' 'What were deemed the Elements of a Perfect Religion.' (Lüddeckens 2002:181)

In this regard, the words of president Bonney of the World's Congress Auxiliary, under whose supervision more than 200 congresses were organised in connection with the Exposition, seem relatively unproblematic. He wrote that the mission of the Parliament was 'to unite all Religion against irreligion,' (quoted in Seager 1993:5) and that this could refer to political action, welfare work in society or similar fields. Much more problematic is what was said by Barrows, who was presiding over the Parliament: 'But Religion, like the white light of Heaven, has been broken into many-colored fragments by the prisms of men. One of the objects of the Parliament of Religions has been to change this many-colored radiance back into the white light of heavenly truth.' (Barrows 1893:3) Under his aegis, and shortly before the Parliament convened, the General Committee had sent out a request for Universal Prayer which said: 'For the first time in history a Congress of Universal Religion will be assembled. We recognize with devout thanksgiving the gracious Divine Providence which is [...]' (Barrows 1893:57) Attesting once more to the mixed academic/religious nature of the discourse surrounding the Parliament, the scholar Max Müller is on record as emphasising the theme of universalism when writing that the factum of 'an eternal, universal religion' has been revealed at the Parliament. (Müller 1895:421)

What is problematic about the conception of universalism exemplified by Barrows and Müller is that it fundamentally changes the epistemological basis of religion, i.e. how truth is arrived at, evaluated and agreed upon within religious communities. This issue will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 3 of this thesis. While Barrows, as the quotation in section 2.2.2 demonstrates, has in mind to create a universal religion by bringing everyone under the umbrella of Christianity, Müller based his universalism to a large part on the scholarly study of ancient religious texts. Similarly problematic epistemologically is Vivekananda's inclusivist Hinduism, which attains to the claim of being able to contain within it, i.e. to unify, all religions by taking on elements of other religious traditions. Ruparell acutely observes that

'[t]he decontextualization required for picking and choosing certain religious elements from their proper homes presupposes that such a process does no harm to the element extracted, implying that these elements have an intrinsic, free-floating meaning.' (Ruparell 2000:28)

Whatever the specific epistemological basis is in a given case, from which such universalism is being conceived, it is clear that for the emergence of a religion which is universal not just in terms of claims to validity, but in actual practice by believers, inevitably some fundamental change will have to take place for the larger part of religious believers in the world, if not for all. Philosophically, there are no obvious objective standards according to which one could choose one epistemological frame over another to form the basis of the universal religion, because it is the respective epistemological frame that first of all creates such standards. On the practical side, history has shown that even science has proved resistant to attempts to create an overarching theory of the world; all the more it appears today unlikely that there will ever be a religion everybody in the world will consent to. If the interfaith movement was to bind itself to the goal of creating a universal religion, it would necessarily be on shaky philosophical ground and, at the same time, be very likely doomed to failure practically. As Sharpe caustically remarks: '[...] it is worth noting [...] that the humanitarian unity toward which the parliament strove probably existed only in the minds of its organisers, and in a few of the delegates.' (Sharpe 1986:139)

2.3.6   Summary

Concluding the section on the World's Parliament of Religions, I offer the following assessment: While the Parliament was in many ways a remarkable event in the history of interreligious dialogue, the analysis above has revealed a number of serious issues that cast doubt on the soundness of its character. The conceptually ideal instantiation of a parliament as such, and perhaps the prima facie appearance of the historical Chicago Parliament, is a gathering of peers each representing their respective constituency, all coming together for the purpose of forming a common will and initiating a common course of action decided upon by the careful and fair weighing of rational arguments. It is unlikely that there ever was a person viewing the Chicago Parliament in quite such rose-coloured light. But even much less optimistic perceptions may find themselves corrected by the above analysis, which

found that that representation is a far more difficult matter than just inviting everyone. It has also shown that the influence of the context in which the event takes place, in the case of the Parliament the Christian United States, is not necessarily conducive to the cause and must not be neglected. Further, it demonstrated that the influence an interfaith event has back on communities is not unproblematic and needs to be considered as such influence invites manipulation. Put less dramatically, the participants in the event may not necessarily share the purpose that the organisers attach to it.

The question now presenting itself is whether these problematic aspects of the Parliament continue through the further development of the interfaith movement. They can thus serve as a grid of parameters to evaluate this development. A criterion of success would be the degree to which these problematic features can be overcome.

2.4   The interfaith movement of the 20th century

Even though there was some enthusiasm at the Parliament for continuing the exchange by further meetings or congresses, there was ultimately not enough momentum and no other Parliament was convened until one hundred years later. Seager speaks of the '*discovery* [of the Parliament]*, not its rediscovery, an event in American religious history*' on the occasion of its centennial. (Seager 1993:8) Still, the interfaith movement existed during the 20th century. Just as published research dealing with the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 has only been appearing on the occasion of and after its centennial, there is still less scholarly coverage of the intermittent period. The only comprehensive resource to draw on is Marcus Braybrook's *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* of 1992.[49] Braybrooke delivers an emic narrative being an insider to the interfaith movement.[50] This is not unproblematic, because his presentation might be

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[49] The author wrote another historical account focusing specifically on the World Congress of Faiths, an interfaith organisation whose president he is. This book, entitled *A Wider Vision*, was published in 1997 and updated after 1996 thus giving an account further into the more immediate past, albeit of a narrower focus. The book and the update have been published online and are available for download from the web pages of said World Congress of Faiths. The web address is as follows: *http://www.worldfaiths.org/BookMarcus.php*. (Retrieved 12/04/2012)

[50] There are some passages in the book that are even haliographic in character, as for instance when Braybrooke recounts a talk (complete with turn-taking) in which the name 'Temple of Understanding' for an interfaith organization emerged, or exchanges between one of the organisation's founders and her mailman. (Braybrooke 1992:95) Aside from the fact that it is difficult

subjective and selective in ways an objective academic account would not be. In the following I will nevertheless base my account on Braybrooke's book, not only because doing my own historical research would by far exceed the limits of this thesis. Rather, the purpose of this thesis is to develop a practical programme of philosophical interfaith dialogue, and only in this regard am I interested in the roots of the present situation of the interfaith movement and how they shape general perceptions and practices of interfaith dialogue. As such, a commonly accepted historical narrative of the interfaith movement is at least as relevant, if not more, than the actual historical facts. Braybrooke's account is seen as authoritative, even by theological and academic writers. (Cf., for instance, Gebhardt 2007:18; footnote 1) Thus his account does not only narrate, but also *constitute* the history of the interfaith movement, even if in principle other accounts, and thus other histories, would have been, and perhaps still are, possible. Furthermore, Braybrooke's account is not hermetic and can be critically assessed from its own reading and occasional reference to other sources. I will also balance Braybrooke's presentation by evaluating the presented development in light of the problematic issues identified in regard to the Parliament.

The International Association for Religious Freedom[51]

Chronologically the first organisation to emerge after the Parliament was *The International Association for Religious Freedom* (IAFR). It was founded in a Christian Unitarian context in Boston in 1900 originally as the *International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers*.[52] Some of the founding members and some active contributors in the years to follow had been at the Chicago Parliament. The organisation first took stage with a number of congresses in Boston and big cities in Europe between 1901 and 1913. With the Congress format it was to follow the Chicago Parliament style of set up with presentations, given partly by renowned academics on various topics. The movement gained some momentum and there were plans to take the congress series to Asia as well, but World War 1 thwarted the plans and destroyed the momentum. After

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to see how Braybrooke could have known about the precise wording of the exchanges (and he gives no references as to his sources), the function of these scenes is clearly similar to that of a founding legend. These passages carry a considerable emotional import and lack scholarly distance.

[51] The account of *The International Association for Religious Freedom* is based on Braybrooke (1992:47–62).

[52] The organisation went through a number of name changes, each reflecting a broadened scope of participants, before it finally received its final name in 1969. (Braybrooke 1992:50–51)

further series of congresses between 1922 and 1937 there was another gap due to World War 2. In 1949 the organisation enhanced its profile by establishing four working groups on the topics of social issues, theology, religious education and world religions, with a fifth one on religion and science being added three years later. Another three years on, the theology group was further divided into three subgroups. During the 1960s four commissions were established to carry on the work in between congresses. One was on 'The Christian in the World today', another on 'The Religious Approach to the modern world,' the third on 'The Dialogue of World Religions' and the last one on 'Justice, Peace, and Human Rights.' It was not before 1970 that a gathering was finally held in Asia, in Japan, and three years later one followed in Africa.[53] At a congress in Montreal in 1975 a Manifesto on World Community was adopted that laid down basic principles relating to '*Peace, Economic well-being for all people, Freedom from oppression, Ecological integrity, World Governance. The strong warning about the threats to the environment and the clear support for the UN are noticeable.*' (Braybrooke 1992:58) Sometime after 1979 the Social Service Network was established that was to help with and coordinate support of social welfare and relief projects of member groups. In 1987 the IARF adopted a 'Statement of Purposes' in which it moves markedly into the direction of defending freedom of religion as a civil right as in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (DEIDRB) of 1981, which it expressly supports.[54] This move towards human rights issues was confirmed in Hamburg in 1990. The IARF gained General Consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. In 1993 it co-sponsored the new Chicago World's Parliament of Religions marking the centennial of the original one.[55] Throughout the 1990s the IARF continued with congresses in the established fashion and new organisations joined the Association. A parallel development is what Braybrooke calls 'living dialogue deepened by personal experience' the start of which Braybooke sees at the end-1960s. (1992:56, 61–62) This is a movement away from the parliamentary style of meeting to a more group-

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[53] This is according to Braybrooke (1992:56). The IAFR's website does not list a congress in Asia before 1984 and no congress in Africa to date. Braybrooke also does not speak of congresses in relation to the 1970 and 1973 meetings, but 'gatherings' as I do above as well. It appears that it was a rather small group coming together at these times.
[54] Cf. http://www.iarf.net/2008site/AboutUs/UN.htm. (Retrieved 15/04/2012)
[55] For the history of the IARF past 1992 (when Braybrooke's book was publishedI I consulted the webpages of the IAFR at http://www.iarf.net/2008site/AboutUs/OurPriorities/History/vi-history.htm. (Retrieved 15/04/2012)

internal focus. Today, the IARF's website contains the self-description that it is '*... relational in nature, beyond arms-length dialogue to inner openness to growth and transformation.*'[56]

The World Congress of Faiths[57]

The *World Congress of Faiths* (WCF) was founded in 1936 by Francis Younghusband. Younghusband (1863-1942) was a soldier and adventurer in India around the turn of the century when he had a mystical experience that convinced him of the universal unity of mankind based on joy. This conviction led him to involve himself with religion and more specifically with the interfaith movement. Braybrooke does not reflect on, or even consider, the break in Younghusband's life path this event represents, for at the time he had the experience Younghusband was on his way back from leading a military mission into Tibet, during which 2700 Tibetans were killed. (French 1995:239) In one battle near the village Guru[58] alone died more than 600 Tibetans. (French 1995:224) Braybrooke merely writes: *'At Lhasa, where he* [i.e. Younghusband] *met the Dalai Lama, he successfully signed a treaty [...].*' (1992:64) In reality, the Dalai Lama was militarily defeated and forced to sign a trade agreement in favour of the British (the Russians having been the other party to compete for such a treaty).[59] Younghusband's later personal life is also not a subject in Braybrooke's account, probably because of some developments that might seem strange to the general readership: Younghusband not only came to champion free (sexual) love (French 1995:283), but also believed to have fathered a Christ-like child who, in his own words '*will manifest God more completely even than Jesus did.*' (quoted in French 1995:402)[60]

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[56] http://iarf.net/about/philosoph/ (Retrieved 19/05/12) This account has not been updated since 1999.

[57] The account of *The World Congress of Faiths* is based on Braybrooke (1992:63–92) unless otherwise noted.

[58] Guru is the name of a hamlet on the way from the Tang La pass to the city of Gyantse in Tibet. For a map of the route of the 1903-4 British invasion of Tibet cf. French (1995:xvii).

[59] Weller remarks on the connection between the early interfaith movement and Britain's colonial past: '*These early initiatives illustrate one of the unintended by-products of colonial and imperial projects: they became catalysts for a growth in consciousness about religious diversity and plurality and their related challenges. Thus, a significant number of colonial administrators, members of the imperial armed forces and Christian missionaries contributed to the dissemination in the UK of the texts, ideas and beliefs of a variety of religions. Several of these individuals also became leading personalities in one or more of the early inter-faith initiatives.*' (Weller 2009:66)

[60] French's book appeared later than Braybrooke's. There is the possibility that Braybrooke was not aware of these facts from Younghusband's biography, although it does seem unlikely Braybrooke being already at the time of publication the president of the organisation founded by Younghusband.

The initial congress organised by Younghusband took place in London in 1936 and followed the style of the Chicago Parliament of 1893: Speakers who were to represent various religious traditions spoke in a scholarly fashion in an academic-conference-style format. After the congress, a continuation committee was formed and subsequently more congresses were held, at first on a yearly basis in Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris respectively, the latter of which led to a founding of a French chapter of the organisation. There was another congress in 1942 in Birmingham shortly after which Younghusband died. Conferences seem to have continued on a regular basis, although Braybrooke does not provide a detailed list. Instead, he says these conferences have been of three kinds: large conferences in the style of the Parliament, smaller retreat-like meetings, and finally '*conferences to meet with members of different faith communities.*' (Braybrooke 1992:81) All of these conferences and meetings seem to have taken place in Britain, many of them in London.

Younghusband started a *Chairman's Circular Letter*, which in due course developed into a full-blown journal named *Forum* with reprinted talks, commissioned articles, and book reviews. The journal was renamed *World Faiths* in 1961 before it merged in 1980 with the journal *Insight*, which had been published by the Temple of Understanding, another interfaith organisation (cf. below), under the new name *World Faiths Insight*. The circulation was by Braybrooke's admission not large, but the WCF sent it to libraries world wide, this being one of the few ways in which the WCF actually operated outside of Britain. In the early 1980s, the WCF has also been involved, among other interfaith organisations, in the publication of a journal *Interfaith News*, which does not appear to exist anymore. Today, the WCF is co-publisher of the journal *Interreligious Insight* together with two North American Interfaith Organisations, namely *Common Ground* from Illinois and the *Interreligious Engagement Project* (IEP21).[61]

There is an annual Younghusband lecture, presumably similar in concept to the Gifford lectures.[62] Braybrooke does not record when they started, but the earliest such lecture he mentions dates to 1982. (1992:77) The tradition of the Younghusband lectures seems to continue into the present as the WCF's website announces '*Karen*

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[61] Cf. the Webpage of Interreligious Insight at http://www.interreligiousinsight.org/About.html (Retrieved 06/05/2012)
[62] For the nature and history of the Gifford lectureship cf. http://www.giffordlectures.org/ (Retrieved 16/05/12)

Amstrong to give Annual Younghusband lecture.'[63] It is not clear, however, whether this refers to 2012 or 2011 - the programme for 2012 only lists an Annual Younghusband Meeting with no mentioning of a lecture.[64]

Another area the WCF has been active in is interfaith worship, a notoriously contentious issue. This development took place after World War II and its goal was to create new forms of worship in which people of different faiths would be able to share. Starting in 1952, there have been annual interfaith services in London until the early 1980s. Braybrooke reports in his 1992 publication that the WRC has since continued '*to develop patterns of praying together at its conferences.*' (Braybrooke 1992:85) No information could be obtained about current practice in this regard.

The WCF has championed religious education in schools for minority faiths and the teaching of world religions. A statement was issued in this regard in 1970, because the Congress assumed new legislation on education was about to be passed.[65] The work in this area could not be sustained due to limited resources. Braybrooke says the SHAP Working Party took on leadership in this field.[66] Ultimately, there is no telling whether the WCF's activities in this field had a lasting impact.

The one characteristic that sets the WCF apart from other organisations in the field is that it concerns itself most of all with a '*truth-seeking dialogue.*'[67] Braybrooke calls it the WCF's '*metier,*' on which it concentrates. (Braybrooke 1992:91) In this understanding, interfaith dialogue is meant to go beyond understanding the other, and also beyond taking action based on common interest. The actual aim is to gain an apparently deeper understanding of religious truth than religious traditions individually are capable of. To some degree this is the defining feature of the 'interfaith movement' as such, but it is not always as explicitly manifest as in the case of the WCF. In official documents even the WCF has been

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[63] Cf. http://www.worldfaiths.org/ (Retrieved 16/05/12)

[64] Cf. http://www.worldfaiths.org/leaflet%202012.pdf (Retrieved 16/05/12)

[65] The piece of legislation anticipated was probably the Education Act, which was passed in 1973. (cf. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1973/16/contents, retrieved 11/05/2012)

[66] SHAP as an organisation to support the teaching of world religions in Religious Education in the UK was founded in the Cumbrian village of Shap following a conference on Comparative Religion in Education in 1969, which was followed by the establishment of a Shap Working Party. Unlike the WCF and other interfaith movement organisations, Shap has been an academic project, the first members of the Working party being '*3 university teachers in comparative religion* [among them Ninian Smart]*, 7 lecturers in education and 9 teachers.*' (Cf. the Website of the Shap Working Party at http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/history.html (retrieved 11/05/2012)

[67] Although there has been a period during the 60s and 70s when the focus shifted away from the mystical to stress common ethical values, by the 1980s under the chairmanship of Braybrooke, this movement seems to have been reversed.

more cautious in expressing this feature and a recent document on the self-understanding of the WCF avoids the conception of truth-seeking dialogue.[68] I think Braybrook's assessment of truth-seeking dialogue being at the heart of the WCF still holds true, not only from my own study of the WCF, but because Braybrooke has been and still is the president of the WCF,[69] and thus does know the WCF as intimately as possible and, to no small degree, has decisive influence on its orientation.[70]

Contrary to what the name *World* Congress of Faiths suggests, the organisation has always been very limited in its outreach and effectiveness (and this is very likely true of many other interfaith movement organisations, which similarly carry the word '*world*' in their name). There has evolved another focus in the WCF to complement the outreach endeavours of the organisation, though it is difficult to say, whether this came about because the outreach proved difficult, or whether, vice versa, the outreach aspect was perhaps jeopardized by this additional focus. Braybrooke writes of the Congress in the 1970s: '[…] *there has been a deepening of interfaith dialogue within the Congress.*' (Braybrooke 1992:74) Similarly, of the 1980s he reports: *'[...] considerable efforts were made to build up personal fellowship at the conferences. [...] The attempt was also made to enter into one another's spirituality [...].'* (Braybrooke 1992:78) This seems to indicate that the WCF has come to be more an internally focused organisation and the most recent programme of 2012 seems to affirm this impression. There are but seven events announced, six of which take place in London, and all of which require before-hand affirmation of attendance. Furthermore, there is no entry in the open source online encyclopaedia wikipedia for the World Congress of Faiths. Although this does not conclusively pass judgement on its importance in history, it does seem to say something about its influence today and indicates the fate of the interfaith movement, particularly after the concept of

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[68] Cf. http://www.worldfaiths.org/about.php (Retrieved 12/05/2012)

[69] Cf. http://www.worldfaiths.org/members.php (Retrieved 12/05/2012)

[70] The decisive influence that presidents of the WCF have usually had on the orientation of the organisation becomes apparent in Braybrooke's account. For Palmstierna (succeeding Younghusband) cf. p. 71; for Wallace (succeeding Palmstierna) cf. p. 72; Wallace was succeeded by Ravensdale as president and Peacock as Hon. Secretary. For their influence on the orientation of the WCF cf. p.72. The next person to lead the WCF was Sorensen - for an examination of his mark on the WCF cf. p. 73. Carpenter was another president, and for his influence cf. 74. All page numbers refer to Braybrooke (1992). This is where Braybrooke's account ends and the webpages of the WCFs does not give a list of presidents either. From Keith Ward's personal CV it is, however, apparent that he served as the WCF's president, (cf. http://www.keithward.org.uk/cv/posts.html ; retrieved 31/07/2012) the time period for which Wikipedia specifies as being 1992 - 2001. (Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Ward ; retrieved 31/07/2012) There is no hint, however, what his influence on the organisation was.

interfaith and interfaith dialogue has gained currency in the public square, as was especially the case after the terror attacks of 9/11 and the London bombings of 7/7.

The Temple of Understanding[71]

Like the World Congress of Faiths, the Temple of Understanding (ToU) has a founding figure who started an initiative that led to the establishment of the organisation. In the ToU's case, this individual was Ms Juliet Hollister[72] (1916-2000). Her original vision in 1959 was a building that would be shared by all the religions of the world, much like the UN building in New York. Hollister herself was a housewife; her husband was an influential lawyer who was able to put her in touch with Eleanor Roosevelt, former first lady of the US. This in turn led to a number of contacts on high levels of political influence, particularly in UN circles. Through these contacts, Hollister was able to meet with prominent persons in public life world-wide, such as, among others, Popes John XXIII and later Paul VI, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India at the time, the Dalai Lama, and the Secretary General of the Islamic Congress Anwar el-Sadat (and later President of Egypt).[73] Braybrooke, not untypically, calls the results of these meetings rather nebulously *'encouraging*,' without further specification. Similarly, Hollister *'gained* [...] *interest and support'* from Albert Schweitzer. (1992:94) Even U Thant, then Secretary General of the UN, *'became a great supporter*,' again with no explanation as to what exactly that means. (1992:96) After some publicity through an international radio feature (*Voice of America*, 1960) and print media (*Life* magazine, 1962), an office was established in New York in 1965 and a board of directors with 20 religious representatives was set up (although it is not clear in which way they represented).

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[71] The account of *The Temple of Understanding* is based on Braybrooke (1992:93–113).

[72] Braybrooke consistently misnames her as '*Judith* Hollister.'

[73] The Islamic Congress Braybrooke is speaking of was one of four such organisations that resulted from a split in the Pan-Islamic movement in the beginning of the 1960s. (Cf. http://www.archiveeditions.co.uk/titledetails.asp?tid=54; Retrieved 17/05/2012) Information on the Congress is scant and not easily available, at least within the limits of exertion justified by the role this piece of information plays in the overall scheme of this thesis. Despite the lack of authoritative information for me to draw on, it seems peculiar that Anwar el-Sadat, a representative of the Pan-Arabic Nasserist party in Egypt, should have presided over a Pan-Islamic organisation, as the Pan-Arabic movement was a rival of Pan-Islamism. Could it be that the Islamic Congress in question was an attempt to appropriate the influence of Pan-Islamism to the interest of a political party in power in Egypt? In any case, the Congress was primarily a political organisation and its power of representation on religious matters may be doubted.

Similar to the IARF and the WCF, and like them in analogy to the Chicago Parliament of 1893, the ToU held conference-like events, which it called 'Spiritual Summits.' The first of these Summits took place in Calcutta in 1968, followed by Geneva in 1970, Harvard in 1971, etc. There seems to have been roughly one such Summit a year, mostly in the US at educational institutions. In connection with these summits, declarations were passed, such as a Joint Statement of 1975 (which was read at the UN) or the Declaration on the Oneness of the Human Family of 1984. The unity of humankind and its religious aspirations, despite differences in teachings and practices, has been the underlying theme of the TuO throughout the years. Besides this, environmental concerns have started to play a role, first evident in the Moscow Declaration of 1990. In more recent years, education has become a focus of the ToU. The ToU webpage says: '*Once inter-religious literacy within the interfaith movement was established* [an at the same time bold and innocuous claim, considering the fuzzy meaning of 'interfaith movement' and the somewhat vague 'inter-religious literacy'], *the organization turned its attention to developing some of the most effective methods and pedagogies for educating youth and adults cross culturally and inter-religiously. Thus, the field of interfaith education began to emerge.*'[74]

In 1987, the ToU published for the first time a *North American Interfaith Directory*. In the following years, a *North American Interfaith Network* developed with its own set of meetings, multifaith services, etc. This Network acts as a co-publisher of the Directory from the 1990 onwards. From 1976 on, the ToU published a journal called *Insight*, which in 1980 merged with the WCF's journal *World Faiths* to become *World Faiths Insight*. In 1991, the ToU resigned from the journal, because '*it was unable to continue as a co-sponsor*,' presumably due to a lack of financial resources and/or personnel (although Braybrooke does not explain). (Braybrooke 1992:104) This is perhaps not only indicative of the limited resources available to the ToU, but the lack of resources itself is symptomatic of the organisation's limited influence on religious communities and political bodies, despite its claim to international representation and its association with the UN. In a similar vein, Braybrooke remarks that, although topical issues have been discussed at the conferences and voiced through declarations, '*no organization has developed to try and see that recommendations are implemented.*' (Braybrooke 1992:113) The

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[74] http://www.templeofunderstanding.org/wwa_history-1st-50-yeras-2.html (Retrieved 28/04/2012)

Temple of Understanding is still in existence today; as with the WCF, there seems to have occurred a slight shift to an internal focus in the organisation. The ToU website states: '*The traditional conference and summit models were enhanced by more personal and experiential models of community visits, service learning and immersion experiences.*'[75]

The general pattern

There are other organisations which are similar to the three discussed above. Braybrooke includes in his account for instance World Fellowship, World Thanksgiving, the World Interfaith Association, and the World Conference on Religion and Peace. The presentation and discussion here is limited to the IARF, the WCF and the ToU, because they have been at the core of the interfaith movement and are in many ways paradigmatic for other, smaller organisations as well. The pattern is roughly as follows: an individual or a small group of individuals take the initiative and organise a conference. From there (sometimes through the stage of repeated meetings) a sort of 'standing committee' or office is established and then a proper organisation. The activities of the organisation usually consist in organising meetings at certain intervals, from which declarations may be issued, and may also include the publishing of a journal. The likelihood of the word 'world' to appear in the organisation's name is very high and although the organisation may establish chapters in more than one country, a global presence or even influence, is hardly achieved. The focus of the work is mostly on leaders, both religious and secular, and the assumption is that they will be able to pass their (perhaps freshly revised or newly gained) convictions down to their respective communities. Underlying the work of the organisation is usually a notion of harmony, either existing and not yet recognised, or not yet existing and to be worked toward. Besides religious harmony, other societal issues become part of the agenda in due course, such as environmental protection from the mid-1970s or early 1980s on. A further development that commonly takes place is that the traditional, parliamentary style of meeting and issuing declarations is complemented by a focus on more personal exchanges among the members of the organisation or participants at the meetings, adding a more internal focus.

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[75] http://www.templeofunderstanding.org/wwa_history-1st-50-yeras-2.html (Retrieved 28/04/2012)

In the following sections I will look at the above organisations in terms of the parameters identified as problematic in relation to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 in order to ascertain how far these issues have persisted in the interfaith movement and are perhaps not due to historical circumstance, but rather inherent in the specific approach taken.

2.4.1 Representation

As with the Chicago Parliament, representation is also an issue with the organisations discussed above. Their mode of operation relies to a large degree on the idea of representation as they are part of an '*interreligious movement that in many ways has not deviated from the parliamentary style of gathering inaugurated by the Parliament.*' (Eck 1993:xv) How this representation is constructed is a problem to itself; there is repeated reference to 'six major world religions', for instance at a land dedication ceremony by the Temple of Understanding: '*Appropriate trees were planted to represent the six major world religions.*' (Braybrooke 1992:96–97). Such concepts may be useful for administrative, or political, purposes, but the inherent simplification hides a great deal of complexity, ignoring which is likely to impact negatively on the very purpose to which they are employed, namely to achieve representation.[76]

But even if we were to accept that this construction of representation works, the interfaith movement organisations of the 20th century were far from achieving it. Braybrooke reports, for instance, of the 1927 congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom in Prague that '*the attendance was mostly European and American, with only one Indian present. There were three people from Palestine and two from South Africa.*'[77] (1992:51) Of the 1949 congress in Amsterdam he says: "There were no Asians.' (1992:55)[78] Also, about the European Free Protestant Churches who are members of the IARF, Braybrooke writes: '*Essentially* [...] *they have remained minority churches.*' (1992:53) Also, the IARF's member organisations are all religiously liberal in outlook. Braybrooke observes:

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[76] Perhaps such simplification could be justified by the hint that the work these organisations are trying to do, is essentially political in nature. The developments in the 21st century will move interfaith engagement in that direction, cf. 2.4 below.

[77] In the beginning, the IARF included mostly Unitarian Christian churches, hence the focus on geographical location rather than religious affiliation. The point remains: achieving international representation (as the name of the organisation suggests) was difficult to achieve.

[78] Also, notice the problematic blending of religious and ethnic categories. (Cf. Baumann 1999:17–27)

'*This gives unity to the organization, but it means that some more orthodox groupings in the religions are not participants. IARF, therefore, is not representative of the whole spectrum of religious life nor does it seek to be so.*' (Braybrooke 1992:61)[79]

Such a religiously liberal outlook seems to have acted as a general filter to participation in the interfaith movement. Another example in this regard is the ToU meeting at Cornell in 1974, where Swami Adiswarananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York acted as a representative for Hinduism (Braybrooke 1992:100), although at the time the Hare Krishna Movement had already a significant presence in the U.S.. It is not only a matter of the 'interfaith inheritance' laying with Vivekananda's inheritors, but the Hare Krishna movement at the time was all but religiously liberal. A further filter for interfaith representation seems to have been social status. The Hare Krishna movement recruited their followers mainly from the circles of society drop-outs, whereas organisations like the ToU, the WCF and the IARF drew their membership from well-educated and well situated middle class contexts.

In another place, Braybrooke remarks that the ToU founder Juliet Hollister, Dr Karan Singh, who is now International Chair India Chapters and Chair of Council of Trustees, various Vice-Presidents and '*the Temple's distinguished Directors and Advisors*' all '*serve in their individual capacities, and do not represent the official sanction of any religious institutions.*' (Braybrooke 1992:112)

The World Congress of Faiths similarly failed to achieve true representation. Braybrooke, as the president of the World Congress of Faiths, sees benefits in not gaining authoritative representation for his organisation, because that had allowed '*freedom of activity*.' There is an element of irony in this, because firstly, it is more than doubtful that such representation could have been achieved (Braybrooke himself uses the past conditional: '*even if it had been forthcoming*'), and secondly, Braybrooke seems to trade in one condition (authoritative representation) to secure another (freedom of activity) when he really needs both to achieve what the interfaith movement and the World Congress of Faiths set out to achieve, namely unity (of some sort) among the world religions, and joint action to address specific wrongs in the world. In other words, the work of the World Congress of Faiths is made possible

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[79] A Jewish member organisations joined between 1993 and 1996. Cf. http://www.iarf.net/2008site/AboutUs/OurPriorities/History/vi_hi_cooperation.htm (Retrieved 15/04/2012)

at the cost of any effectiveness this work could have (beyond the immediate circle of members that is). Braybrooke himself tells of a Consultative Interfaith Council which came to nothing, not least '*because of lack of support from religious communities.*' (Braybrooke 1992:89) (Cf. also Braybrooke 1992:91)

Despite these obvious shortcomings in terms of representation, due restraint has not always been exercised when statements were made. Thus the participants of the Spiritual Summit Conference of the ToU in New York in 1975, in their Joint Statement addressed to the UN, said rather grandly[80]: '*The great religions and spiritual movements of our time stand ready to unite around their common spiritual and moral vision and to contribute to the development of a morality and ethics which is mindful of and actively concerned with basic human rights and freedoms, the natural world and our shared environment, and the vital needs for world peace.*' (quoted in Braybrooke 1992:102) and one is left to wonder on whose authority they spoke. Commensurate with the overbearing attitude, the effects of the statement seems to have remained negligible. Braybrooke admits: '*Probably, as so often, the lasting impact of the conference is on and through those who took part.*' (Braybrooke 1992:103) The next Spiritual Summit Conference in the same location but nine years later saw again the passing of a similar statement, this time called 'Declaration of Oneness for the Human Family.' Braybrooke writes '*This preliminary draft was ratified by the spiritual leaders present, who represented 2.5. billion people – over one-half of the Earth's population.*' (Braybrooke 1992:106–107) Again, one wonders in what sense the word 'represented' is used here. The Internet knows no such declaration, a string search yields but three references, all pointing to Braybrooke's book.[81]

Thus it seems fair to conclude that the interfaith movement organisations have largely failed to achieve representation. Because their mode of operation has relied so much on representation, i.e. on leaders attending their conferences and adopting their declarations, this failure implies a general failure to achieve their aims of religious unity or unity of action of religious people and communities. However, in all three organisations discussed above, there has been a development toward internal

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[80] This was at a time when the ToU was suffering from financial difficulties so that the office eventually had to be moved from Washington to New York. (Braybrooke 1992:103–104)
[81] String search for "Declaration on the Oneness of the Human Family" using search engine www.google.de retrieved on 28/04/2012

dialogue, i.e. a dialogue among the members of the organisation, which is something that does not depend on representation or authority within a religious community.

2.4.2   Abrahamic faiths' bias

The Christian bias that was so obvious at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 is not evident in the interfaith movement of the 20th century, at least not from Braybrooke's narration. Only sometimes there is an odd element of seeming Christian dominance, as when he reports of the 2nd spiritual summit conference of the ToU in Geneva in 1970 that it was concluded by a ceremony in a Christian church (although *'the representatives of the religions present prayed in their own sacred languages'*) with a sermon by a Presbyterian; and: *'At the conclusion all delegates said the Lord's Prayer.*`(1992:98–99) By way of a more contemporary example, I attended a conference on Interfaith Dialogue at the University of Winchester in September 2008, which was essentially an academic event of the interfaith movement with such people as Alan Race, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Ursula King, all from the UK and Leonard Swidler from the US attending.[82] As the last day of the conference fell on the anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks in New York, the organisers deemed it appropriate to hold a memorial event in remembrance of the victims. (This says a lot about the mixed academic / religious dialogue very much present in the interfaith movement, cf. section 2.4.3 on 'academic discourse' below.) During this event, much to the surprise of the unsuspecting Hindu, Buddhist and simply academic participants of the conference, there was an offering of prayer by a Muslim, the Jewish and Christian scholar. Although Alan Race, as the Christian speaker, introduced his prayer as not being a Christian prayer, but a prayer of a Christian, thus somewhat deflecting the issue of representation, it still seems that there was an Abrahamic faiths' bias at work. A similar bias was exhibited at a conference in Leeds (05/06/2008), where the I was approached by another participant who suggested to conceptualise the situation of interfaith dialogue as three circles overlapping to some degree, thus representing a picture of shared truths, shared falsehoods and individual truths and falsehoods. One circle, it was explained, stood

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[82] Cf. http://logosdao.wordpress.com/2008/05/23/international-interfaith-conference-interfaith-dialogue-in-modernity-and-post-modernity/ (Retrieved 30/05/2012). For a detailed programme of the conference cf. http://logosdao.wordpress.com/2008/05/23/international-interfaith-conference-interfaith-dialogue-in-modernity-and-post-modernity/#comments (Retrieved 30/05/2012).

for Christianity, another for Islam, and the third for Judaism. When I asked where the other religions in this conceptualisation were, the person seemed genuinely puzzled by my objection and explained that it was these three religions 'who were the troublemakers.'

However, judging from the literature, the people who constituted the interfaith movement seemed overall to have been genuinely respectful of other religious traditions, even to the degree to be willing to abandon traditional concepts of Christianity to achieve some kind of world-wide religious unity. This does not mean that there has been no bias at all. Rather, the willingness to transcend traditional religious boundaries has led in some quarters to a pluralist ideological bias,[83] which may well account for the examples I presented above from my personal experience.

2.4.3 The role of academic discourse

The precise relationship of the interfaith movement in the 20th century to the academy is difficult to ascertain, as detailed studies of the kind Snodgrass or Lüddeckens provided for the Chicago Parliament are lacking.[84] It is safe to say that the conference-like meetings, the publishing of conference proceedings as well as journals, as are common for interfaith organizations, are at least academic in style. The narration provided mainly by Braybrooke reveals also that academics have been participating in the interfaith movement throughout the years. Thus the founding congress of the World Congress of Faiths was attended by scholars; Braybrooke mentions a Dr Joseph Needham as an historian of China and the same Dr Suzuki who had come to the West as a result of the Parliament in Chicago to work with Carus. (Braybrooke 1992:67) For each successive congress, Braybrooke lists scholars of academic standing who were in attendance. The founder of the Temple of Understanding Juliet Hollister had herself studied comparative religions at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary.[85] Starting in 1971, the meetings of the ToU often took place at educational institutions in the U.S..

As argued above, such an academically framed discourse favours an educational elite over regular lay believers and is not representative of the reality of religious life

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[83] Cf. section 2.4.5 on 'modern character' below.
[84] Cf. Snodgrass (2003) and Lüddeckens (2002).
[85] http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/30/nyregion/juliet-garretson-hollister-84-led-temple-of-understanding.html (Retrieved 28/04/2012)

within the respective religious communities. This perhaps would not be problematic in itself, if this elite was acting on behalf of the religious communities it supposedly represents. But there seems to be a lack of both, representativeness (i.e. the interfaith organisations are unable to reflect in their membership the religious diversity of the world) and representational authority (i.e. those who are members of interfaith organisations often lack the authorisation of their religious communities to represent them at this body)[86]. Reading Braybrooke's narration, one is under the impression that, similar to the 1893 Parliament, academic credit is to act as a substitute for religious authority.[87] However, academic discourse and religious discourse are different (confessional theology being a special case): They follow different rules, they constitute truth and validity in different ways. In chapter 3 I will argue, religious and academic discourses are different language games in Wittgenstein's sense and mixing them will by necessity lead to confusion, and, if there are enough people to adopt it, the establishment of a new language game with its own set of rules. This seems to describe, at least to some degree, what has happened with the interfaith movement: They have come to be a religious community of their own creed, which is perhaps best described as *'interfaith confessionalism'* or *'para-theology'* as Morgan calls it. Morgan points out that '*as with most theologies, it has its own exclusive traits and a very particular derivation and theological language which is by no means acceptable to all.*' (Morgan 1995:167) Such para-theology cannot claim authority within any religious community and although this is also true of academic circles,[88] it still seems to rely for its reputation to no small degree on the academic

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[86] This lack of authorisation may, of course, not be due to a lack of trust, but simply because the community is not institutionally structured so as to make representation possible.

[87] Another example of academic discourse masked as discussion between religious communities is the journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, published by University of Hawai'i Press since 1980. McRae, in an article from 1991 points out that the dialogue contained therein (at least up to that time) '*is remarkably limited in both membership and scope. That is, the list of major participants has been relatively stable over the life of this journal, and the discussions have focused on a limited number of topics of philosophical and theological interest. In fact, one might say without too much exaggeration that the core tradition of dialogue represented in Buddhist-Christian Studies has been between one Buddhist, Masao Abe, and his Christian friends.*' (McRae 1991:7) Abe is not part of a traditional Buddhist community nor does he represent authoritative discourse. McRae continues: '*Abe has not published a single monograph in his native language [...] [but] has published or has in press some seven volumes of essays and translations in English for Western consumption. [...] Therefore, the "Buddhist-Christian dialogue" is in no way a process of exchange between the world communities of the two religions, but only between a small number of thinkers.*' (McRae 1991:8)

[88] Sharpe mentions the wariness of academics towards interfaith confessionalism that was present in the field of Comparative Religion his history of the subject. I will here offer one quote in relation to the World Congress of Faiths, as this is one of the organisations discussed above: '*[T]he World Congress of Faiths, coming to Oxford and Cambridge when it did, may have served to deepen the suspicion in some minds that comparative religion was not to be taken seriously as an academic discipline.*' (Sharpe 1986:261)

merit of the people who put it forward or support it. The participation of academics lent the interfaith movement authority that it should have drawn from the participation of religious leaders of genuine religious communities, the impact on whom seems to have been very little.

2.4.4   Ulterior motives

Just as there were strategic interests at play in the participation of, most notably, some of the Asian participants at the Chicago Parliament in 1893, it is likely that similar strategic considerations were at work for some of the people involved in the interfaith movement of the 20th century. To mention just one obvious example: the Dalai Lama is a religious leader with representational authority. At the same time he is forced to live in exile in India due to the aggressive imperialist politics of China and as such he is unavoidably a political figure and leader as well. His involvement in and support of many interfaith organisations thus cannot but acquire a political component as well. This is of course not to say that his willingness to contribute to the goals of the interfaith movement were not sincere or that his political aims were not justified. I am merely pointing out here that in the interfaith movement of the 20th century there likely are various motives at work besides that of religious harmony or mutual understanding.

2.4.5   Modern character: the philosophy of pluralism

Here, I will refer back to section 2.2.5 above, where I defined the notion of modernity I use in this analysis of the history of the interfaith movement. Thus 'modernity' refers to an ideology, or intellectual context, which is defined by the belief in, and quest for, a grand narrative, i.e. an overarching explanation of the world. At the Columbian Exposition, religion was integrated into that vision of universal knowledge and validity. Just as scientific and technological progress seemed both desirable and unstoppable, a universally accepted true religion was perceived to be the appropriate counterpart to match that scientific development and it was the purpose of the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago to work towards establishing such universally accepted true religion. The rhetoric of unity changed somewhat after the Parliament. As an example might serve the 1975 Joint

Statement that was read at the UN in New York by the participants of the Spiritual Summit Conference of the Temple of Understanding. The statement expressed the same parallel between science and religion and said '*that the technological unity of humankind had yet to be matched by social and moral unity and this required the utilization of religions' spiritual resources.*' (Braybrooke 1992:102). What had changed was that the unity spoken of was not anymore a unity of doctrinal beliefs or theological statements, but a social and moral unity that might be arrived at via different theological systems and through concerted action based on them. This illustrates the move to the ideology of pluralism that came to dominate the interfaith movement very quickly after the Parliament in 1893.[89]

Several reasons are conceivable to explain this move from universalism to pluralism. For one, the Parliament demonstrated that it is rather unrealistic to expect such universal agreement under the present circumstances. Also, the experience of the Parliament showed that the idea of unity was perhaps not as sincerely conceived of as it might have seemed at first. Barrows, for instance, who was quoted above as to his rhetoric of brotherly universalism, is on record to have stated elsewhere: '*The best religion must come to the front, and the best religion will ultimately survive, because it will contain all that is true in all the faiths.*' (Barrows 1893:1572) 'The best religion' Barrows referred to was, no doubt, in his mind his own Christianity. Clearly, his vision of religious unity and universalism, which decidedly shaped the Parliament, was motivated by an element of Christian triumphalism. Yet another possible contributing reason for abandoning universalism in favour of pluralism is related to the notion of progress, which, at the Columbian Exposition meant *scientific* progress and the associated technological advances. As detailed above (cf. 2.3.5) the Parliament's universalist philosophy was modelled after the concept of science. However, the two world wars that followed within a relatively short span of time after the Parliament were highly technological affairs and in the horror they produced divorced the notion of technological, and hence scientific, progress from that of moral or spiritual progress and the attainment of unity. That the world wars had had an effect on attitudes in the interfaith movement is hinted at by Braybrooke's report on a meeting of the International Association for Religious Freedom in 1922 at

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[89] Pluralism is, in fact, so inextricably associated with the interfaith movement that its founding event, the Parliament in Chicago in 1893, is often wrongly credited as being characterised by Pluralism too, when it really was shaped by the concept of a universally accepted true religion. Cf. Eck: '*On the whole, one could argue that the predominant vision of the Parliament was not pluralism, but the dawning of a new era of unity and universalism.*' (Eck 1993:xiv)

Leiden where '*the Europeans, scarred by war, were sometimes irritated by the naive utopianism of the Americans.*' (Braybrooke 1992:51)

Does the abandonment of religious universalism in favour of religious pluralism, then, signal a change in character of the interfaith movement from modern to postmodern of sorts? I suggest not. Whereas universalism promotes the establishment of a common religion for all people in the world, pluralism holds that no religion has privileged access to religious truth or salvation, and thus that all religions are likely to contain truth and are potentially salvific. By deferring the attainment of complete knowledge of religious truth to the transcendent realm, pluralism renders the necessity of a unified religion obsolete, and thus seems to be able to define religious harmony in more practical terms, i.e. less in terms of theological agreement and more in terms of social concord and mutual respect. Irrespective of the serious philosophical problems this position entails (discussed in detail in chapter 3), pluralism seems to have taken a stance less modern than universalism. However, there is more to consider: Like universalism, pluralism as an ideology demands universal assent. Furthermore this assent requires a changed stance towards one's own religion. For religious harmony based on pluralism to work, it is necessary that everyone agrees that no religion offers privileged access to transcendent truth and salvation. The assent required is not just agreeing to live peacefully with each other, but doing so on the basis of a reformed religious viewpoint. Thus religious harmony based on pluralism is ultimately less practical and requires a larger ideological commitment than appears at first sight. Pluralism is markedly modern in its demand for a global followership unified by the belief in the grand narrative of an unproblematic epistemological deficiency of all religions.[90]

In chapter 3 I will argue that any meta-narrative that is to include all religions under its umbrella (by invalidating them to some degree) is necessarily creating a new school of thought that is epistemologically on a par with the religions it seeks to transcend. The main person in the UK to theorise pluralism was John Hick (1922 – 2012) who started as a Christian theologian and in the end arrived at a position markedly resembling that of Advaita Vedantism, where the Real, as he came to name transcendent reality, has no qualities (like *nirguna brahman*), and the different

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[90] Another trait that universalism and pluralism share is their patronising attitude to people of (other) faith(s). Both ideologies are forced to claim that they offer a better understanding of other religions than the respective practitioners do. This could even be an epistemological problem, though it need not be. It will, however, in any case be operative in discourse and has likely contributed to the overall failure of the pluralist ideology to gain wide acceptance.

designations given to it by the various religions do not reveal complementary aspects of it, but rather are all culturally conditioned misconceptions: '*The Real has no qualities.*' (John Hick Centre for the Philosophy of Religion 2011: 45:12 – 45:55 min) His brand of pluralism is, thus, arrived at by invalidating all existing religions, but seems to end up espousing one of them at least conceptually, albeit using a different terminology.

How closely the idea of a universal religion and pluralist ideology are related is borne out by the discourse of universalism still current in the interfaith movement. Indeed, the idea is so strong and defining to the para-theology of the interfaith movement that frequently fairly obvious differences are disregarded or denied. Morgan says as an impartial observer, an academic '*blanches at the confident proclamation that all religions teach that we are the children of one father-God, knowing [...] how inappropriate that language is for Buddhists and Advaita Vedanta Hindus. Such inaccuracies often seem to abound as truth is made subservient to the intentions of unity.*' (Morgan 1995:164)[91] Braybrooke delivers an emic example, when he says that interfaith organisations have come '*to disavow any attempt to create a single world religion. They recognize the distinctiveness of world religions and see in their variety an enrichment of the human spirit.*' which seems to indicate that the idea of universalism is a thing of the past. But he continues like this: '*Yet, although they may not agree how, members of these organizations sense or hope for*

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[91] Instances where religious particularities are glossed over to promote an agenda of unity can be found not only among well-meaning non-specialists. Both the famous Max Müller of the 19th century and Perry Schmidt-Leukel, formerly Professor of Systematic Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Glasgow, now Professor for Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at the University of Münster and a vocal proponent of a pluralist ideology, quote the Bhagavad Gita chapter 9 verse 23 to support their respective discourse of unity. Max Müller translates the Sanskrit as '*Even those, who worship idols, worship me.*' (Müller 1895:424) Schmidt-Leukel, in his pluralist manifesto 'A New Spirituality for a Religiously Plural World' translates the same passage as: '*Even those who are devotees of other gods, worship them with faith - they also sacrifice to Me alone ...*' (Schmidt-Leukel 2010:2). There is a part missing in that verse, though, which Schmidt-Leukel at least indicates by '...', and which Müller just drops. This missing part says (variously translated as): '*though with an improper understanding*' (Dasa 2004:171), '*though not according to injunction*' (Schweig 2007:133), '*albeit not according to the prescribed rules*' (Johnson 1994:43) 'by the wrong method' (Baladeva Vidyabhusana w/o year:300) or '*in a wrong way*' (Prabhupada 2001:9.23). Even though this addition may not, judging from the text alone, make a pluralist interpretation impossible, it certainly is a serious qualification of Schmidt-Leukel's and Müller's quote. Furthermore, to rely on texts alone seems a very Christian Protestant position to take. Each theological school of thought in Hinduism, or sampradaya, has their own commentaries on the texts, which define how the often aphorismic meaning of the Sanskrit stanzas is to be understood. Two commentaries of the widespread Gaudiya tradition are at hand. Both take the verse to refer to demigod worship (which Schmidt-Leukel and Müller would likely agree, is not what they are talking about). Bhaktivinoda Thakura's reads: *However, such ignorant worship will never award eternal benefit.*' (Purnaprajna dasa 2006:216) Bhaktivedanta Swami's commentary reads: '*Krishna does not approve of the unnecessary worship of the demigods.*' (Prabhupada 2001:9.23)

an underlying unity or future convergence of religions.' (Braybrooke 1992:45) It is a remarkable combination of statements as they seem incompatible, even contradictory. For the World Congress of Faiths Braybrooke says:

> Much dialogue is at the level of seeking to understand what others believe and practise, in the hope that this will promote tolerance and goodwill. The Congress goes beyond this and sees dialogue as a 'truth-seeking' exercise. The assumption is often voiced that there is a truth which transcends any one world religion, and that the coming together of religions is mutually enriching.' (Braybrooke 1992:74)

Similarly, Reverend Nikkyo Niwano of the IARF said: '*The time has come when we must, while paying ample respect to each other's faith, search out the true religion that underlies all our beliefs.*' (Quoted in Braybrooke 1992:53)[92]

To conclude with an example of the ToU, the third interfaith organisation reported on above, at the V Spiritual Summit Conference in New York in 1975, the hope was expressed for the younger generation to be '*pioneers of a new syncretic community which will encompass all religious traditions,*' although there was no agreement on this among the participants. (Braybrooke 1992:101)

2.4.6   Summary

Besides the interfaith movement, there are other organisations that have been concerned with interfaith dialogue, like the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue of the Roman Catholic Church, or the Reference Group on Inter-Religious Relations of the World Council of Churches (in which most Christian Churches participate except the Roman Catholic Church). Unlike the interfaith movement, these bodies do not espouse a pluralistic perspective, but work from theological grounds that are internal to their particular religious tradition. On the other hand they do enjoy full representational authority from their mother organisations. After World War II the International Council of Christians and Jews came into existence which has been concerned with the relations between Christian and Jews following the experience of the Holocaust. The Council's theological work concerns how to view the other, rather than pursuing any universalist or pluralist agenda. There are,

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[92] The reference Braybrooke gives points to a magazine article published in 1990, but he does not mention when the statement was made. A likely point in time would be during Niwano's presidency of the IARF between 1981 and 1984.

however, religions as such which from their own conception have been oriented toward an universalist or pluralist agenda and who therefore tend to have played a comparatively larger role in issues of interfaith dialogue and also the interfaith movement. This is true only to some degree of Sikhism, but more obviously so for the Bahá'í faith or the Unification Church. Especially in regard to the latter there is some concern over this involvement, as it is usually counted among the new religious movements. Prime, for instance remarks:

> One wonders where all the money comes from for some of these huge gatherings. For example, the Moonie-backed Council for the World's Religions and Global Congress of World's Religions attract large numbers because they are held in exotic places and everyone's air fare and accommodation is paid for by the Unification Church, which demonstrates that there is never a shortage of people for a freeby, and that religious leaders love to speak on a platform. It also raises questions about the funding of interfaith activities in general which Braybrooke fails to address […].(Prime 1995)

Notwithstanding the sponsorship of some gatherings by the Unification Church, the interfaith movement in general has suffered from a lack of resources despite its rather grand aspirations, as becomes apparent from Braybrooke's account. Undoubtedly this has to do with the fact that there was very little, if any, support by religious communities. Instead, the interfaith movement often drew their membership from enthusiastic individuals who are, as Morgan puts it, '*on the boundaries of their traditions*' (Morgan 1995:162); or, in Forward's words '*sit light on their religious origins*' and are '*at the edge of their religion or even outside the camp.*' (Forward 2002:46)

Ultimately, it is very hard to tell what influence these interfaith organisations have had in society. As these processes are complex, such an assessment is, by its nature, difficult to make. The emic narration they themselves deliver is not a reliable source in this regard and independent historical studies are lacking. Braybrooke says in relation to the World Congress of Faiths: '*It is hard to estimate what has been achieved by the World Congress of Faiths. Indeed it is always difficult to assess the results of bodies concerned to change attitudes by the long-term education of the public.*' (Braybrooke 1992:90) One can certainly argue that the attitude of the public toward religious plurality has changed during the last century in that the presence of other religions is not perceived as a theological challenge as much as it has been in the past. Perhaps many people even adopt a sort of unreflected-upon pluralist theory

of religious truth. But is that a result of the interfaith movement? Barnett proposes that public opinion is a powerful agent and influences intellectuals rather than vice versa. In speaking about the role of the British Deists of the 17th and 18th century (who, in many ways are similar to the interfaith movement protagonists of the 20th century), Barnett remarks:

> There is little evidence that in the achievement of religious toleration – the bedrock of any secularization programme – deistic radicals played any fundamental role. Yet their rhetoric would have us believe just that. On the contrary, there is evidence to indicate that religious toleration began to assert itself as an idea and a practical reality at the grass-roots level of eighteenth-century society and that the enlightened responded to public opinion rather than created it. (Barnett 2003:4)[93]

I suggest the case is similar with the interfaith movement of the 20th century. Although many people may nowadays adopt a sort of hands-on, practical pluralist attitude, there is little indication that this is connected to, or even originates with, the interfaith movement.

2.5 Recent UK-based developments in the field of interfaith dialogue

Recent changes in the interfaith movement are marked by two developments: Firstly, there has been a shift of focus away from questions of doctrinal truth and toward working together on pressing social and political issues of a global scale, such as poverty, environmental protection, and human rights. Although these topics have been present in the interfaith dialogue discourse before, they play a much more prominent role now and they do so at the cost of discourse about religious truth. Secondly, a concurrent trend is towards local interfaith dialogue work. By the 1970s sizable immigrant communities of Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu faith had developed in the UK and the need for faith-to-faith relations was becoming an issue on a local

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[93] To substantiate – or disprove – Barnett's claim about the power of public opinion, it would be interesting to research the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 in this regard. Newspapers, which extensively covered the event, reported on the various addresses given. Some of their comments are included in Seager. (Seager 1993) In preparing this chapter I had the opportunity to take only a cursory glance at them in that book. However, this seemed to indicate that the newspaper comments were generally more disapproving of orthodox, and potentially confrontational, presentations and more approving of tolerant, liberal views. If a closer study substantiated this impression, this would seem to indicate that public opinion was more tolerant and 'progressive' than the assembly at the Parliament, thus providing strong evidence for Barrows view of the power of public opinion.

level. Thus interfaith dialogue moved from the margins of society to become a fairly prominent theme in public discourse to which 'ordinary,' non-specialist believers are admitted. This is reflected also by the fact that world religions began to appear on syllabuses in religious education across the UK.

The tradition of the Parliament reflects these developments. The centennial Parliament of the World's Religions took place in Chicago in 1993. Its central document was *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*. It had been drafted by Hans Küng, a Swiss Theologian in the Catholic Christian Tradition who has been in conflict rather publically with the ecclesial authorities of his church. The idea behind the document is that although there are perhaps unbridgeable differences between the various religious doctrines in the world, there is enough agreement on ethics so that religions could agree on a universal standard of conduct, to which even non-religious people could assent. Based on Küng's book *Projekt Weltethos* (Küng 1991), the declaration proposes a number of principles to guide human conduct. They are: non-violence and respect for life, solidarity and a just economic order, a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness, equal rights and partnership between men and women. (Parliament of the World's Religions 1993) These principles sound rather abstract and the terminology used is certainly employed by various people to mean very different things. The document, however presents sub-sentences to each of the principles detailing what they are meant to encompass. This does make it clearer, but, by necessity, also less universal and there still is plenty of scope for disagreement, particularly with more traditional and/or fundamentalist interpretations of religion. Building on the Declaration, the next Parliament, which convened in Cape Town, South Africa in 1999, issued a further document: *Call to Our Guiding Institutions*. This *Call* specified further the principles laid down in 1993 by detailing (by necessity in still rather abstract language) what they meant for people from different areas, such as education, science and medicine, government, religion, and others. (1999 Parliament of the World's Religions 1999)

The next Parliament in 2004 in Barcelona placed its focus on more concrete issues that even more clearly signalled the abandonment of theological discourses on religious similarities or differences, and a turning towards social issues and political action. These issues were access to clean water, mitigating religiously motivated violence, the fate of refugees worldwide, and the elimination of external debt in developing countries. The last Parliament to date took place in Melbourne, Australia

in 1999. The key topics again included such global issues as global poverty, environmental care, and migration. However, there were also particular themes like aboriginal reconciliation as well as education of the young and even a rather surprising topic as the value of sports.[94] The move away from discussions of religious truth as such is apparent in the topics. Significantly, on the website of the Council for a Parliament of the World's religions there is a quotation by one Sean Rose prominently displayed that reads: '*It's not about religion, it's about relationships.*'[95] Also, there seems to be no continuity between the interfaith movement organisations and the council's staff, so that the new Parliaments can indeed be considered a new development which does not properly belong to what was originally called the interfaith movement.

In regard to the second development, interfaith dialogue on a local level, I am here limiting myself to examine the situation in the UK and England specifically. A comprehensive and lucid account is given by Weller. (Weller 2009) Regional interfaith bodies have come into existence and deal with municipal policies, community relations and the administration of governmental services on a neighbourhood level.[96] The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 and operates as an umbrella organisation for and a coordinating hub of national organisations with an interest in interfaith dialogue and work. The Network operates on the basis of group membership and among its roughly 190 members are 110 local interfaith organisations, 28 organisations representing a single faith community nationally (such as the Hindu Forum of Britain), 39 'Other Inter Faith Organisations,' among which are the traditional interfaith organisations reported on in the previous section, and also 11 educational and academic bodies.[97] A decisive factor to facilitate this development of local and regional interfaith initiatives has been the interest the government started to take in this area.[98] This was, no doubt, spurred on by public concern about interfaith relations following the terrorist attacks

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[94] The information on the 2009 Parliament is taken from
http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=7&sn=112 (the webpage of the organising body) where, three years after it had taken place, it was still being talked about in the future tense. (Retrieved 03/08/2012)
[95] Cf. http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=1&sn=7 (Retrieved 04/08/2012)
[96] Cf. Weller on the different names local and regional interfaith organisations adopt and what that reveals about their self-understanding. (Weller 2009:63)
[97] Cf. http://www.interfaith.org.uk/members.htm (Retrieved 30/07/2012).
[98] Weller says that interfaith initiatives engaged at the interface between religion and public life '*have been 'called into existence' by public policy developments.*' (Weller 2009:65)

of 9/11 in New York and the bombings in London of 7 July 2005.[99] From 2003 there were new government initiatives to improve communication between government and faith communities. First a Faith Community Unit was set up in the Home Office and in 2006 the Inner Cities Religious Council (established 1992) in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was transformed into the Faith Communities Consultative Council (FCCC) in the newly created Department for Communities and Local Government. In 2008 the Department published the guiding document 'Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society'. It details how the Department '*will support a stronger dialogue between people of different faiths and beliefs in every community and encourage the kind of practical inter faith cooperation that can make pleasant and harmonious neighbourhoods for all.*' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2008:5) The support did not only consist in encouragement to participate in political decision making processes, but, arguably more decisively, in providing funding for various interfaith projects. Between 2006 and 2007 local interfaith projects received grants through the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund administered by the Community Development Foundation and sponsored with £7.5 million first by the Cohesion and Faith Unit of the Home Office and later by the Race, Cohesion and Faiths Directorate of the Department for Communities and Local Government. A second round of funding was announced in 2007 for another £4.5 million. Although most of it was allotted to applications for small grants (less than £5000), there were requests for a total of £ 52 million, which demonstrates the energy that can potentially be harnessed at the local level. (Ladds 2006:30) A similar funding scheme was Faiths in Action. Running from April 2009 to 31 March 2011 it funded 575 projects with a total of £4.4 million. It was directed toward faith, inter faith, voluntary and community sector groups and organisations in England and '*strengthened relationships between people of different faiths, and between those who are religious and those who are not.*' (Pearmain 2011:2) The grants were limited to a maximum of £12000 so as to cater to projects of a local scale. (Pearmain 2011:38) Yet another funding scheme related to the Regional Faith Forums located in each of the Government Office regions in England and allocated £1.9 million to support initiatives that related to both dialogue and social action. (Pearmain 2011:4) In January 2010 thirteen Faith Advisors were appointed by the Communities Secretary representing various faiths, but also specialist academics

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[99] Between 2000 and 2006 alone the membership in the Inter Faith Network for the UK had risen from 70 organisations to 220. (Pearce 2006:5)

and faith-based non-profit organisations.[100] The Faith Advisors are to '*enhance ministerial understanding of, and engagement, with faith communities nationally*'[101] On the other hand, in 2011, the Faith Communities Consultative Council was discontinued, because '*[w]e believe that it did not add value to the effective arrangements that Departments already have in place for consulting faith communities on policy*,' as Andrew Stunell, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department of Communities and Local Government wrote in 2011.[102] Instead, there seems to be an attempt to utilize more traditional faith networks such as the Church Urban Fund of the Church of England, which was sponsored by the Department with £5 million.[103]

From my own practical experience attending various interfaith dialogue programmes in the Leeds/Bradford region I can report that a pluralist discourse of sorts is part of the regional and local interfaith dialogue scene. The commitment of many people active in local forums of an interfaith nature is fuelled by pluralist sentiments, which are often voiced quite explicitly. There is usually not an elaborate theological reflection to back up such an outlook; rather they are based on personal acquaintance with people of other faiths and a general attitude of goodwill. As far as I can see, there is no obvious connection between the traditional interfaith movement and the local interfaith initiatives. As described above, the interfaith movement has always targeted leaders in society and maintained a very academic discourse through both their own theoreticians and through some of the responses it inspired by theologians of particular faith traditions. In this regard, a recent study undertaken in the Leeds area of Beeston has found a remarkable disjointedness between the dominant discourse of theology and the demotic practices of people in multi faith neighbourhoods. (Prideaux 2009)

2.5.1   Representation

Representation continues to be a problematic issue in matters of interfaith dialogue. The Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town in South Africa in 1999 exhibited some awareness of the problem. In the introduction to the central

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[100] A complete list of the Advisors is to be found here: http://www.derby.ac.uk/news/derby-expert-joins-new-national-faith-panel (Retrieved 06/08/2012)

[101] http://www.derby.ac.uk/news/derby-expert-joins-new-national-faith-panel (Retrieved 06/08/2012)

[102] http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2011-06-23a.55499.h (Retrieved 04/08/2012)

[103] Cf. http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2011-06-23a.55499.h (Retrieved 04/08/2012)

document to be associated with that Parliament, '*A Call to Our Guiding Institutions*,' the authors write: '*[...] the authority of the Call will come only in small measure from its endorsement by religious and spiritual leaders. It strength flows primarily from its expression of beliefs and convictions already deeply held – and held in common – by the world's religious and spiritual communities [...].'* (1999 Parliament of the World's Religions 1999:5) In other words, representation is not necessary, because agreement is already there. While it is true that there is obviously much more commonality in questions of ethics among religions in the world than there is in doctrinal matters in general, one might still wonder whether the issue of representation (and thus representational authority) can be done away with quite so easily. The impact the document has had on our guiding institutions is, by nature, hard to measure, but it is safe to assume that it could have been bigger, if all religious communities in the world had seen the Parliament at which it was issued truly as *their* parliament.

On the other hand the new Parliaments seem to achieve better representation than the original one of 1893 and any of the organisations of the interfaith movement. The Board of Trustees of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions includes besides believers from the so called world religions also a Wiccan Priestess, a Kriya Yoga minister, a Native American, and many people who are distinguished not by their religion, but by their involvement in non-profit organisations of various sorts.[104] Furthermore, representation is perhaps less important when tackling social concerns like eliminating world poverty. Although the project would certainly benefit from as many people as possible joining in the effort, success here depends not on the representational legitimacy of the body passing declarations, but on getting the job done. However, whether the new Parliaments are achieving better results in getting the job done than the original one did in achieving universal religion remains to be seen.

The local interfaith groups that have emerged in general also achieve better representation, because they often are based on group membership, i.e. not individuals become members of the body, but faith communities who then send people to represent them in the forum. For instance the *Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship* is one of the earliest local interfaith groups in the country established

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[104] Cf. http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=1&sn=7 (Retrieved 08/08/2012)

more than 30 years ago.[105] The *Fellowship* has individual membership and focuses on 'spiritual dialogue.' *Leeds Faiths Forum*, on the other hand, was set up in 1998. It only has group membership and its work centres around faith-based social action. (Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom 2005:17–18)

However, there is the danger that by accepting local leaders to represent other members of their faith community, the government authorities are strengthening traditional hierarchies within those communities.[106] Not only may such hierarchies be at odds with democratic values the state is based on,[107] but for less traditionally minded members of the community the traditional leadership becomes the intermediary through which participation within wider society is filtered. Authorities here have the difficult task of weighing the benefits of reaching people at all with the potential harm of funnelling participation in ways that limit the choices of individuals.

In the case of government sponsored faith organisations, representation becomes an issue in yet another way. Because the government is using interfaith organisations to reach communities for drafting and implementing legislation, and perhaps even for the provision of social services, the question of representation is not limited to the plurality of faith communities in the UK, but concerns the entire population, a significant portion of which is non-religious. The 2001Census found for England and Wales that 15.05% of the population identified as having no religion.[108] The British Humanist Association has claimed that the relatively low figure is produced by the context of the question about religion on the census form.[109] It appeared close to the question about ethnicity and thus may have led people to enter a religion that was part of their cultural identity rather than a faith they were indeed practicing.[110] Other surveys have in fact found much higher percentages of non-believers, for instance the

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[105] The website of the Fellowship does not contain any information as to when it was founded other than the rather unspecific 'more than 30 years ago' referred to in the text above. Cf. http://www.concord-leeds.org.uk/ (Retrieved 28/07/12).

[106] The state, as was the case with the Chicago Parliament in regard to the Asian delegates, creates realities in the attempt to faithfully map what it assumes is already there.

[107] For example, Weller acutely observes that '*where inter-faith bodies strongly reflect the formal leadership of the religions concerned, it is often the case that women, who generally form majorities in the active membership of religious groups, are not so prominent.*' (Weller 2009:77) He also points out that '*there remains a question of how far existing inter-faith bodies and structures are able adequately to engage with the concerns, perspectives and energies of young people.*' (Weller 2009:78)

[108] Cf. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ethnicity/focus-on-religion/2004-edition/focus-on-religion-data.zip (Retrieved 08/08/2012)

[109] (Cf. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12637201 Retrieved 08/08/2012)

[110] On the ambiguous relationship between ethnicity and religion in a context of relations between government policies and local communities cf. Baumann 1999.

European Social Survey records for the same point in time as the census 41.19% and for 2010 (the most recent numbers available) even 49.93%.[111] This leaves just over 50% of the population potentially represented in an interfaith advisory body and arguably the number of people actually practicing their religion is even lower. A report by Tearfund on church attendance from 2007 found 53% of the population in the UK identified as Christian, but only 15% of all people attended Christian church services at least once a month. (Asworth 2007:4,6) While church attendance is not the only way to measure religious practice, it certainly does indicate that more people give a religion when asked on a form than are probably directly affected in their lives by legislation relating to faith.

Also, in the political sphere representation carries with it the notion of proportionality. Whereas in questions of religious truth the number of adherents of a particular view in itself says little about its validity, when it comes to political interest the number of people supporting one option over another is certainly relevant. Practically, it would be nearly impossible for an interfaith advisory council to proportionately represent the local constituency in terms of world-views, if non-religious people were to be included, when all except Christians and Muslims make up less than 1% of the average population.[112] Since these councils have no decision-making power, proportionality is perhaps not an issue; however, the concern of the British Humanist Association (BHA) for non-religious people being entirely left out of the advisory process is justified. An announcement posted on 09/09/2011 at the website of the BHA states:

> In terms of social cohesion initiatives, religious groups and communities have been singled out by Government as having a special importance and being in need of special attention and assistance, mostly in isolation from other communities and almost always to the exclusion of the non-religious – normally under the remit of 'faith' or 'interfaith' strategies. (http://www.humanism.org.uk/news/view/889; retrieved 09/08/2012)

Consequently, in 2007 the BHA set up a Local Development Project (funded by the FCCBF) and tried to involve itself in initiatives of an interfaith nature and groups

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[111] Cf. http://www.britsocat.com/Marginals/RELIGION (Retrieved 08/08/2012)
[112] According to the 2001 census there were in England and Wales 71.82% Christians, 2.78% Muslims, 0.98% Hindus, 0.59% Sikh, 0.47% Jews, and 0.26% Buddhists. Cf. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ethnicity/focus-on-religion/2004-edition/focus-on-religion-data.zip (Retrieved 08/08/2012)

working toward social cohesion.[113] Most interfaith forums have no humanist representative as a member, though it is not clear whether this results from them not being allowed or due to a lack of volunteers. Another organisation to criticise what it sees as the conflation of faith and policy making is the National Secular Society, whose president Terry Sanderson duly protested the appointment of the thirteen faith advisors by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG):

> This flies in the face of every social trend that is being recorded in this country. To appoint religious people because they supposedly have superior 'values' is a gross insult to that half of the population that has no religion and doesn't want to have a religion and is appalled by some of the activities of religious bodies. What kind of democracy do we have here when unrepresentative people are wheeled in to help make policy? And why is it considered that this panel has any qualifications to advise on economic policy? It is quite clear that few people in this country live their lives by reference to traditional religious teachings, so social policy based on religion would be keenly resisted. (http://www.secularism.org.uk/ government-appoints-faith-adviso1.html; published 08/01/2010; retrieved 04/08/2012)

In summary, although the focus on questions of ethics and social work in local environments seems to make the issue of representation less pressing, there are serious concerns. Moving from the sphere of religious truth to the sphere of politics (in the sense of negotiating interests of various groups in society) changes the issues involved in representation, but does not eliminate the need for it.

2.5.2   World religions bias

A Christian bias, as was clearly at work during the Parliament in Chicago in 1893 and still to some degree in the interfaith movement of the 20th century, is no longer obvious in the recent developments in interfaith dialogue. As regards the new series of Parliaments of the World's Religions, there are members of minority religions on the Board of Trustees of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. Still, there is no unanimity at the Parliaments themselves about who is a worthy participant. At the 1993 centennial Parliament at Chicago, four Jewish organisations and Orthodox Christians withdrew, the former due to the presence of

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[113] Cf. http://www.humanism.org.uk/news/view/234 and http://westsussexhumanists.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98&Itemid=148 (Both retrieved 09/08/2012)

Nation of Islam minister Louis Farrakhan who was accused of anti-Semitism, and the latter due to the participation of wiccans.[114] This however, cannot be blamed on the organisers of the Parliament who sought to include all these groups, but it does show that a focus on practical issues does not resolve issues of bias, although it does seem to alleviate them.

However, if the move toward global social action is not just seen as an opportunity for faith traditions to usefully cooperate, but instead, if it is postulated to be an inescapable ethical imperative for all people religious, then there is a certain bias at work indeed. To quote Knitter, who is one of the main figures of the 20th century paradigm of interfaith dialogue: *'[...]theologians engaged in dialogue are realizing that religion that does not address, as a primary concern, the poverty and oppression that infest our world is not authentic religion.'* (Knitter 1987:180)[115] This is a very patronising statement coming from someone supposedly advocating religious plurality.[116] Knitter's words betray a bias towards the Christian concepts of compassion and agape, and of the idea of daridra-narayaṇa, or 'God in the poor and the lowly,' which was introduced into Neo-Hinduism by Vivekananda, to create '*a sense of responsibility for the average man.*' (Chattopadhyaya 1999:324)[117] Forms of religiosity that do not have material altruism at the heart of their practice, such as schools of world-negating renunciation that appear to be present in many religions are rendered inauthentic by Knitter's account, which clearly is a very biased position to take. However, it is probably unfair to lay this accusation on the broader

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[114] Cf. an article by the *Chicago Tribune* at http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1993-09-05/news/9309050156_1_global-ethic-parliament-war-atrocities (Written 05/09/1993, retrieved 26/08/2012). Anthony J. N. Judge, author of unknown repute, confirms these events and writes: *'The organizers successfully concealed most dynamics of this kind although they are arguably at the core of inter-faith dialogue,'* (http://www.laetusinpraesens.org/pdfs/1993_6.pdf, p.350; retrieved 26/08/2012) which perhaps explains why these events seem absent from any official record by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religion accessible through the Internet.

[115] The text is also available online at http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/relat/255e.htm (Retrieved 10/08/2012)

[116] As a representative of the ideology of pluralism, Knitter, in Eck's words is engaged in ' *an attempt to come to terms with plurality in a positive way.*' (Eck 1993:xiii) But in fact, Knitter's all but tolerant statement is unsurprising in the light of the analysis of pluralism as a variant of universalism offered above in section 2.3.5.

[117] Arguably, Vivekananda was inspired by Christian compassion in creating the concept of daridra-nārāyaṇa. His religious vision was essentially aimed at creating a national identity for India and he explicitly travelled to the West to take inspiration of how to improve the destitute situation of India's poor masses. (Hacker and Halbfass 1995:322–323) Material altruism as a religious practice in Neo-Hinduism inspired by Christian influences can be further traced through Gandhi, whose concept of ahimsa was an appropriation of a traditional Hindu term in light of Christian ideas adapted by Gandhi from, among others, Tolstoy. Vinobā Bāve, trying to continue the Gandhist movement, used Vivekananda's concept of daridra-nārāyaṇa to encourage a religious attitude of societal altruism in his followers. (Hacker and Halbfass 1995:242–243)

movement of the World Parliaments, as it comes from someone who rather belongs to the traditional, 20th century interfaith movement with its strong pluralist bias and typical lack of awareness of its own epistemological precariousness.

A bias discernible within the field of local interfaith work in the UK is perhaps best labelled a 'world religion bias.' Apart from the issue of non-religious people needing representation on bodies that advise on local policy, some groups are denied membership in local interfaith fora on the basis that they are 'not really religions.' A controversial group in this respect have been pagans who tried to gain access to interfaith fora. Kaur reports on the Scottish Inter Faith Council and explains that pagans were given temporary status as 'observers.' (Kaur 2006:17) In the end, it was decided not to admit the Pagan Federation into the Scottish Inter Faith Council, because '*[s]ome major faith groupings within SIFC had said that if the Pagan Federation were to become full members, then they would withdraw from its work. There were arguments about whether the Pagan Federation really fell into the same category as other faith groups already within membership of SIFC [...]*', (The Inter Faith Network for the UK 2012:72) the category being presumably that of religion, or 'world religion' which not just happens to encompass the usual '*nine main nationally recognised faith groups, i.e. Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian*' (The Inter Faith Network for the UK 2012:71) but rather is defined through them. In the future SIFC will restrict membership further to Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths (The Inter Faith Network for the UK 2012:72); apparently the Jain and Zoroastrian faiths do not sufficiently fit the definition of world religion either. An application for membership was also filed by pagans with the Leeds Faith Forum (Kaur 2006:21), but no information is available about what became of it. Faithnetsouthwest admitted pagans to non-voting, associate membership, but Alistair Beattie, Chief Executive, reports of difficulties because '*some people from the Christian Churches were not willing to sit round a table with Pagans,*' (The Inter Faith Network for the UK 2012:72) notably the Catholic Church. There is no comprehensive information available which local interfaith council or forum admits pagans. A survey conducted in 2003 by The Inter Faith Network for the UK, which itself does not have a pagan organisation among its members,[118] lists 12 pagans as

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[118] Weller writes that '*at successive Annual General Meetings [of the Inter Faith Network for the UK] the issue has been debated of Pagan Federation inclusion under the Network's category for affiliation of national faith community organizations.*' (Weller 2009:76)

involved in local interfaith bodies, though none of them on a committee. (Crabtree 2003:19)[119] The case is similar for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (popularly known as the 'Mormons'). They, too had observer status with the SIFC, but were ultimately not admitted to membership and thus lost the observer status as well. (Kaur 2006:21)

In 2010 the Charity Commission for England and Wales decided to grant the Druid network charitable status[120] and thus implicitly recognised it as a genuine faith.[121] This might serve as a role model for other pagan organisations to apply for the same. Whether or not this will make it more difficult for representatives of mainstream religions to deny pagans a seat on interfaith fora, remains to be seen.

2.5.3   The role of academic discourse

The role of academics in the interfaith movement has been ambiguous. The danger has been that they use their outsider's perspective to influence insider's issues thus failing to appreciate the epistemological problems that this entails (which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3) and also misusing their academic standing (their etic authority so to speak) to make statements about religious truth (which would require emic authority). Often they have supported a pluralist view of religions, i.e. the view that all religions are historical, and thus essentially human, constructs which to a greater or lesser degree reveal divine reality, judgement about which is best possible from a perspective outside of any one religious tradition. As this old paradigm persists under the circumstances of the new developments discussed in this section, this continues to be a problem. For instance, academics were involved in the founding of a Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1988 that was to prepare a centennial Parliament for 1993.[122] However, with the focus having shifted away from questions of religious truth and to more practical worldly concerns, there is less scope for such mixed academic/religious discourse. Especially for the new developments in interfaith activity in the UK on a local and regional

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[119] The survey, however, was based primarily on questionnaires with a return rate of 55% so that the results are not representative. (Crabtree 2003:131)
[120] The official document announcing the decision can be found at
http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/Library/about_us/druiddec.pdf (Retrieved 05/08/2012)
[121] That this interpretation is not unreasonable is confirmed by the website of the North East Regional Faiths Network, where the decision of the Charity Commission is announced in exactly those terms. Cf. http://www.nerfn.org/page/recognition-of-druidry-as-a-pagan-faith/ (Retrieved 05/08/2012)
[122] Cf. http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=1&sn=4 (Retrieved 25/05/12).

level, there are many examples of the involvement of academics in their proper role as etic experts. For instance the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber commissioned a feasibility study on the issue of the establishment of a faith forum in the region from the Community Religions Project at the University of Leeds. The academics involved researched existing institutional structures of faith, interfaith and governmental bodies in the region; they documented possible issues identified mainly through interviews with potential stakeholders and identified possible models for a faith forum, finally suggesting one of them as the most appropriate. (Knott, McLoughlin, and Prideaux 2003) Although one of the aims set by the study was '*to give a theological rationale for inter faith working*' (Knott et al. 2003:58), the scholars did not set out to provide one, but instead researched what rationale for inter faith working potential stakeholders gave. Thus they maintained their etic integrity and did not trespass into territory reserved for emic authority. Another such example is the Report for Engage East Midlands on infrastructure support for faith-based groups by Weller and Beale. (Weller, P. and Beal, D. 2004). Here, too, academic discourse is properly exercised.

There has been another development in the interfaith dialogue context, particularly in the U.S. and the UK in recent years that involves academics: the practice of Scriptural Reasoning. A small group of academics from theology belonging to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism started to meet and do reading of and reasoning from and about their scriptures in the presence of each other. They found that activity to be fruitful and developed the format into the now somewhat formalised practice of Scriptural Reasoning. In 1994 the Society for Scriptural Reasoning (SSR) was established and in the following years *'a network of scholarly societies* [developed] *focusing on different but overlapping aspects of the original project*' and a sort of umbrella organisation has come into existence called the SSSR, the 'Societies for Scriptural Reasoning'.[123] Since 2001, the *Journal for Scriptural Reasoning* is published online through the University of Virginia, UNW.[124]

Unlike the theologians and philosophers of the pluralist interfaith paradigm, these scholars do not seek to create harmony, but only better understanding of the other:

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[123] Cf. http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/participating.html (Retrieved 04/01/2013)
[124] Freely accessible on the Internet at http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/.

In Scriptural Reasoning, 'SR', participants meet to read passages from their respective sacred texts. Together they discuss the content of those texts, and the variety of ways in which their traditions have worked with them and continue to work with them, and the ways in which those texts shape their understanding of and engagement with a range of contemporary issues. The goal is not agreement but rather growth in understanding one another's traditions and deeper exploration of the texts and their possible interpretations.
(http://www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/en/sr; retrieved 03/01/2013)

Scriptural Reasoning does not assume or depend on representativeness, although the theologian academics participating will, by virtue of their identity as such, have at least some representational power invested in them by the authorities or communities of their own religious tradition, and will likely present what counts as an legitimate, expert understanding of their tradition. However, Scriptural Reasoning has been limited to the Abrahamic faiths, which is certainly due to them sharing certain scriptures and religious history, which formed the basis on which the idea of SR was originally conceived. At least on the scholarly level (as SR is now sometimes practiced by non-academic believers as well)[125], the literature shows no evidence of participants other than from the Abrahamic faiths.[126] The scope of participants is inherently limited to people of such religious traditions that have sacred texts of some extent and participants, although perhaps they could be lay-believers, must have considerable expertise within the theology of their own tradition to be able to deliver their share of scriptural reasoning to the assembly. Epistemologically, there are certain theological presuppositions, formulated by David Ford in the Stephenson lectures at Sheffield University in 2007 as a rule for SR thus:

Acknowledge the sacredness of the other's scripture to them without having to acknowledge its authority for oneself. Accept that their scripture is in some sense from God and that the group is interpreting it before God, in God's presence, for God's sake. (Ford, David. 2007. *Stephenson lectures*. The University of Sheffield. http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/eventsteam /lectures/stephenson_lecture_1.m3u; retrieved 30/10/09).

Similar statements can be found elsewhere. Kepnes, for instance, states that SR '*releases sources of [...] divine spirit for healing of our separate communities and for*

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[125] Cf. http://stethelburgas.org/sites/default/files/How%20to%20pitch%20a%20Tent%20Final.pdf
[126] Kepnes, for instance, in his widely referenced 'A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning' states: '*SR is a practice of group reading of the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam[...]*' (Kepnes 2006:369) and Ochs says '*SR may be characterized as [...] inter-Abrahamic.*' (Ochs 2006:465; emphasis in the original)

repair of the world' (Kepnes 2006:367) There thus are some theological assumptions implicit in SR, to which not all members of the religious communities of the respective participants may be willing to commit. However, these are much less weighty than those required by a pluralist paradigm and may be held without epistemological amendments to one's own religion. Thus, epistemologically, the practice is sound and there is no criticism to be levelled against academics from the field of theology who participate according to the set rules of SR.[127]

2.5.4   Ulterior motives

The new Parliaments of the World's Religions engage in a mixed discourse perhaps best described as ethical and political. It is an ethical discourse, because the project of a global ethics plays a prominent role, i.e. the establishment of ethical principles and universal agreement to them. But the discourse is also political in that it deals with negotiating conflicting interests within a group of people, the group of people being the world's population. The Parliaments take the side of the disadvantaged such as the poor, the marginalised within a society, or those threatened by environmental pollution, etc. Unlike the discourse about religious truth where motives other than discovering such truth are inherently manipulative, with the mixed ethical/political discourse typical of the new Parliaments and their practical focus, a plurality of motives is not in itself a problem. The same is true for the local interfaith initiatives in the UK; different people pursuing different goals does not automatically invalidate the process.

However, there still are motivations possible that are considered unacceptable. For instance, the Pagan Federation was suspected of being interested in becoming members of the Scottish Inter Faith Council not because of wanting to contribute, but to gain recognition for the Pagan tradition as a genuine religious tradition: '*There were arguments about whether the Pagan Federation really fell into the same category as other faith groups already within membership of SIFC, and how far its membership application was in the interests of inter faith dialogue and how far in pursuit of 'recognition' for the Pagan tradition.*' (The Inter Faith Network for the UK 2012:72)

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[127] Cf. '*Twelve Rules of Scriptural Reasoning*' (Kepnes 2006:367–369)

This ability to gain recognition as a faith tradition through participation in an interfaith organisation again derives from the presumed representative nature of the organisation. From it, as was the case with the original Parliament, a power of definition is derived that is able to create realities by assuming them. Stakeholders are naturally aware of this mechanism: '*[T]he involvement of public bodies in legitimising participating groups through recognition of inter-faith bodies has an effect on how the latter are constituted and on the criteria used for specifying the range of traditions that are welcomed into particular organised inter-faith initiatives.*' (Weller 2009:76)

Today it may be the Pagan Federation the purity of whose motivation is doubted, but the implications of participating in interfaith dialogue have been made use of by diaspora communities of the so called world religions as well. Kim Knott points out that interfaith dialogue is '*one issue that might be of particular symbolic or functional significance in the reproduction of religions in a new location.*' (Quoted in Morgan 1995:163)

2.5.5   Modern character

By characterising the interfaith movement as modern in section 2.2.5 and 2.3.5, I was referring to the fact that it relies on and promotes a grand narrative, or overarching theory that supposedly encompasses and makes sense of the diversity of religions in the world in an attempt to harmonise their conflicting claims to truth and validity. At the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, this grand narrative was the belief in a universal religion; later on in the 20th century, this transmuted into pluralist philosophy. A belief in and the promotion of a grand narrative as such is not surprising in the context of religion, as religion is by nature concerned with the fundamentals of life in the world. The problem with the interfaith movement being 'modern' in this sense has been that it has failed to appreciate just how fundamental a perspective religions offer and that a grand narrative that seeks to encompass all of them must inevitably end up as its own quasi-religion in the eyes of many members of traditional religious communities (Cf. chapter 3.6). Instead of securing universal, or even general, agreement, the supposedly overarching narrative of first universalism and then pluralism required a rather large ideological commitment not unlike a conversion from one faith to another. As such, rather than

creating harmony among the religions, it seemed that another competitor for ultimate truth had entered the arena. This situation persists to the degree that the new series of Parliaments of the World's Religion retain an element of pluralist ideology.

However, the shift to a focus on practical matters is clear in the context of the new Parliaments and a different discourse underlies issues like the elimination of poverty, rights of indigenous people, safe access to water etc. The question here is not what our ultimate justifications are, but how we can act in the best interest of all. There is an obvious similarity, even overlap, with the discourse of universal human rights. The narrative is still rather grand and in its claim to universal validity not uncontested, but by leaving ultimate justifications up to the individual, it is better equipped to indeed encompass people from various religious backgrounds without infringing on their religious beliefs. Of course, this potential for consent among people of different religious traditions is bought at the expense of the more narrowly conceived religious nature of the discourse itself: secular voices are part of it as well. (Cf., for instance Amartya Sen's capability approach and Martha Nussbaum's work on global justice; Nussbaum and Glover 1995; Alkire 2002; Nussbaum 2007)

On a national, regional and local level the situation in regard to a modern grand narrative has also changed. To the degree the traditional interfaith organisations typical of the 20th century persist with their leaning toward a pluralist philosophy, the discourse retains its strikingly modern character as described in section 2.3.5. However, although there is still some universalist and pluralist rhetoric present in the current interfaith dialogue discourse, the focus here too has decidedly shifted to the alleviation of more 'material problems' and away from questions of religious truth. Knott et al. in their feasibility study regarding a possible faith forum for Yorkshire and the Humber divide existing interfaith organisations and groups into 'dialogical' and 'practical' ones. (Knott et al. 2003:19)[128] They confirm:

> The older, dialogue types of interfaith group show some evidence of declining. [...] There was recognition between many respondents that these more dialogue oriented groups were considered peripheral by those involved in community-based work. Fears among some communities of a syncretistic, pluralistic, and potentially secularising agenda for these groups may have implications for their role in communities. It is important to note that inter faith dialogue is, for most faith communities, not considered to be a priority.' (Knott et al. 2003:30)

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[128] Knott et al. also list 'pastoral' as another type of interfaith organisation, referring to educational and healthcare chaplaincies.

The narrative that underlies community-based work is similar to the one of global relief work, with perhaps an additional, faint, element of identity discourse on the level of neighbourhood, region or perhaps state. It centres around acting in the best interest of all, rather than on rationales about ultimate reality.

It seems fair to say that interfaith dialogue of this practical character, both on the international scale with the new series of World Parliaments and on the national, regional, and local level in the UK, follows the pattern of the role that religion as such has come to play in the public sphere, the forum shared with non-believers. This role, roughly, consists firstly in delivering charity work on a communal level. Traditionally religious schools have played a large role in this context, but also poverty relief and helping those disadvantaged within a community in some way or other. A lot of local interfaith work takes place in this area. At the same time, religious organisations have, secondly, been active on a global level to deliver welfare programmes world-wide. The Parliaments of the World's Religions since 1993 seem to have aimed at a similar agenda, albeit quite theoretically so. Lastly, religious leaders, communities, or organisations may act as moral authorities in society. In the UK, even if very few people practice Anglican Christianity to the fullest degree, many still expect the Archbishop of Canterbury to speak out on their behalf on matters of moral concern.[129] Hans Küng's and the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions' project of a Global Ethic seems to seek to provide just such moral authority to be operative in the public realm, but based on the voice of many religions, rather than a single one. These roles are not straightforward in any sense, as there is always the tension between the state which claims sovereign authority over the public sphere on the one hand, and the religious institutions on whose contributions it relies.

2.5.6 Summary

The changes that have taken place in the field of practical interfaith dialogue are evident: '*Between the early 20th century and the opening years of the 21st organisations seeking to work across the religions have moved from a socially and*

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[129] Cf. Davie's notion of 'vicarious religion.' (Davie 2000:49) Knott et al. also note the function of faith communities '*to provide a critique to the working of regional and local government, holding it accountable on grounds that are shared by faith adherents.*' (Knott, McLoughlin, and Prideaux 2003:27)

religiously peripheral position to a more 'mainstream' one.' (Weller 2009:65) It is my contention that the burgeoning of interfaith activity in the last decade represents a break with the traditional interfaith movement. The traditional interfaith movement was focused on an elite audience and tried to operate on an international level. Their agenda was a convergence of religions to be realised not by creating a universalist religion, but by securing universal theological agreement on the proposition that the big world religions are in some ways effective and in others defective, but still manage to mediate religious truth and consummation of some sort. The new developments in the interfaith dialogue context, as described for the UK in this section, are driven by national level debates about cohesion and security in the context of globalisation. They have a local focus and have often come into existence to '*engage at the interface between religion and public life,' often propelled by 'public policy developments.*' (Weller 2009:65) Their agenda is better characterised as political than religious (or at least theological) per se in that it deals with the negotiation of interest between various groups within society rather than with questions of ultimate truth. It may be justified to see the new series of the Parliaments of the World's Religions as the heir of the interfaith movement, but even there, the agenda has taken a similar turn to issues of practical need. Through that shift of focus, many problems inherent in the traditional interfaith movement cease to be problems. The modern character has given way to what could be considered a postmodern pragmatic being at-peace of sorts with a fractured reality of incompatible final justifications. Academic voices find themselves more naturally situated and contributing to the discussion without intruding into territory of religious truth that follows different rules and pursues different kinds of results. Although there continue to be biases at work and also issues of representation persist, they nevertheless are now possible to be addressed by practical measures. Scriptural Reasoning as a primarily academic exercise mainly limited to the three Abrahamic faiths can be seen as the deflation of exaggerated aspirations of the traditional interfaith movement to a sound practice within inevitable limits. Wherever the 20th century pluralist paradigm continues to exist, its problematic nature is still present. But if existing trends are to continue, this will remain the concern of a small minority of people, possibly even fading entirely.[130]

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[130] On my subjective judgement, we might see the completion of a paradigm shift, as Kuhn described it for the practice of science: the protagonists of the old paradigm die out. From my impression, the

2.6   Chapter summary

This chapter has provided both the general context of the thesis and some analysis of that context as well. This context is historical, rather than theological or philosophical, because I understand this thesis to be a commentary on and a contribution to the tradition of the interfaith movement rather than a presentation of a theological or philosophical perspective of a certain school or religious tradition. Thus, the historical narrative and accompanying analysis is meant to serve in lieu of what a literature review would be for a theological or philosophical context.

After a brief consideration of possible antecedents to what has come to be called interfaith dialogue, this chapter presented in three sections the history of the interfaith movement as well as contemporary forms of interfaith engagement. Five categories or parameters served as a matrix to analyse the character and inherent traits of the history under consideration. The main point of contention at the Chicago Parliament of 1893 was likely the Christian bias it exhibited. The issue of a bias has continued in milder forms in the interfaith movement during the 20th century until today. The main issue during the 20th century has been, in my judgement, the espousal of pluralism. The universalist project of the Parliament of 1893 was less problematic, as a claim to universal truth is more or less epistemologically built into the notion of religion and participants in Chicago were free to assume it was their particular religion which was in possession of it. The rather explicit pluralist agenda of the 20th century, on the other hand, has alienated potential participants from mainstream religious positions and has kept the interfaith movement from gaining significance for society or religious communities at large. Because the interfaith movement has, by and large, pursued a top-down approach, i.e. addressing leaders of religious communities rather than people at the grass-roots level, it has had to deal with the issue of representation. Because of the movement's marginality due to the pluralist agenda, representation has never been achieved to any operable degree and is perhaps principally unachievable given the heterogeneity of hierarchical structures of religious communities worldwide. The resulting lack of legitimacy was in part

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protagonists of the pluralist paradigm are in their majority beyond retirement age and young people taking up this ideology are few. (Kuhn 1996:150–152)

attempted to be compensated for by drawing on academic authority. The relative affinity between a pluralist point of view and an academic outlook is perhaps grounded in the distance to traditional religious authority they share. However, the espousal of a pluralist point of view by religious studies scholars transgresses methodological boundaries and is thus unsound. Lastly, the issue of representation has led people to participate in interfaith dialogue activities who were less interested in promoting pluralism or any other agenda, and more in achieving public recognition for themselves and their religious community as genuine and respected members of society, a status implied by the apparent representative nature of a given interfaith dialogue forum. This has been true not only for the traditional interfaith movement, but also for the newer developments, where representation is an issue as well. On the other hand, the new focus on practical material issues instead of ultimate truth has obliterated the concern for pluralism or any other grand narrative. Academic discourse in religious studies relates to this new form of interfaith discourse in an appropriate manner by refraining from intruding into the field of religious authority; and with Scriptural Reasoning academic theology has established a form of dialogue that retains the concern for ultimate truth, but by avoiding to construct meta-narratives also preserves strong connections to the respective religious 'home' traditions.

The focal point of this thesis is the development and execution of a practical programme of interfaith dialogue with students in higher education institutions and the analysis offered in this chapter will feed into the process of drafting such a project, which will be the topic of chapter 5. But before the process of drafting can be discussed, there is some theoretical clarification to be done. Thus the next two chapters discuss first how discourse on religious truth works epistemologically, how it can be freed from all biases of particular traditions, and how it can be made relevant to lay believers.

3 The epistemological characteristics of religious teachings and their implications for philosophical interfaith dialogue

3.1 Introduction: to disentangle discourses

The previous chapter presented the history of the interfaith movement and recent developments in regard to interfaith dialogue in the UK. It also offered an analysis of the problems in this field. These problems were the inability to achieve representation (in both scope and authority), a certain theological bias, the mixing of academic and theological discourse, the divergent interests brought to the situation of interfaith dialogue, and the universalist-turned-pluralist attempt to transcend the epistemological boundaries of religious traditions.

This chapter marks the transition to a conceptual, rather than historical, investigation. The basic argument presented here is that what I marked out as 'problems of the interfaith movement' is due to a confusion of discourses. By 'discourse' I refer roughly to what Wittgenstein calls 'language games'. (Wittgenstein 1953:PI § 7)[131] specific regions of language use that are defined by their grammar, or their inherent set of rules. These rules determine what the objective of the discourse is, what counts as success towards achieving this objective, and what acceptable instruments in the process are.

There are three principal discourses discernible in the history of interfaith dialogue: theological discourse, academic discourse, and political discourse. The issue of ultimate truth is clearly situated in a discourse best characterised as theological. Such theological discourse is characterised by its commitment to certain beliefs, which are held to be axiomatically true. Here, success would be agreement on whether a certain theoretical proposition is coherent with and perhaps even follows from the axiomatic beliefs. In respect to practice, success in theological discourse would be agreement on whether a certain practical course of action is compatible with or even commended by the system of beliefs that ultimately rest on some axiomatic truth.

Academic discourse in respect to religion (i.e. religious studies discourse), is on the other hand a second-order activity. As I argued in the introduction (cf. 1.2), it

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[131] I follow here and henceforth conventional practice in specifying not a specific edition of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* with date and page number, but only the paragraph number under which the referenced statement is made (which is identical in all editions) preceded by 'PI'.

does not commit to the truth (or falseness) or the beliefs of a particular religious tradition; it is concerned with the fact of religion rather than the truth of it. Instruments in academic discourse are descriptions and analysis of causal relationships. It counts as successful, if it can be backed up by empirical data and logic, and if reliable predictions can be made.[132]

Lastly, the objective of political discourse is to negotiate conflicting interests among groups of people. Success in the political arena will have to do with persuasion rather than truth, and compromise rather than agreement. Diplomatic moves to promote one's advantage are, within certain limits, acceptable in political discourse and they have to do with power rather than truth of any kind. This is true even in democratic society which uses the tool of proportionate representation to balance power relations.

Thus, using representation, a tool of political discourse, to arrive at agreement about absolute truth, a goal in theological discourse, is bound to be problematic, because it is based on a confusion of discourses. Likewise, compromise, acceptable or even desirable in the political arena, does not seem an option where ultimate truth is concerned. The exclusivity of each grand narrative in the truth discourse turns into a bias when agreement on truth is to be reached by political means.[133] In the same vein, the negotiation of interests in the political sphere can become burdened with undue 'truth baggage.' If pluralism is seen as acting in the political sphere for achieving practical harmony between faith communities, then the impetus to re-assess one's stance toward one's own religion (thus bringing ultimate truth into the mix) is patronising. In which respects it is problematic to mix academic discourse with theological discourse has been discussed in chapter 2 (cf. section 2.3.3 and 2.4.3); they require different qualifications and (mis)taking academic credentials for theological authority is methodological dubious and morally questionable.

I suggest that disentangling these discourses increases the chances for success in any of them. The relative success of the interfaith initiatives of recent years is arguably also due to the fact that they more clearly focused on political discourse with relative disregard of questions of ultimate truth.

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[132] Of course there is also a social element to academic discourse as the community of academics have to agree whether these truth criteria are indeed fulfilled in a given case. Nevertheless I would argue that the truth criteria themselves that this community is committed to are – in all necessary generalness – those I suggest.

[133] The concept of 'Parliament' is a genuinely political notion.

Thus, in view of the interfaith programme to be designed as part of this thesis, the question that now suggests itself is: Which discourse should it focus on? All of them – theological discourse, academic discourse, and political discourse – are potentially useful. Political discourse further recommends itself by the success it has been enjoying in the public realm and would likely find support within universities as secular institutions. It could consist, more theoretically, in discussions for instance on citizenship and the fair treatment of religious minorities, or, more practically, in doing charity work in groups of students from a variety of religious backgrounds.[134] Academic discourse might also seem an obvious option, as students – the target group of the programme – are by definition aspiring academics, and can be expected to have some familiarity with academic discourse and its rules. However, the academic perspective is that of an outsider and although it facilitates learning about religions or about relations between religions, maintaining the integrity of the outsider's view would preclude participation in discourse about ultimate truth between people of different religions.

This thesis' project is a theoretical and practical exploration of the conditions of the possibility of philosophical interfaith dialogue. Thus, the discourse it seeks to involve students in is the discourse of ultimate truth. As explained in the introduction, the notion of 'philosophical' in this thesis is to remain respectful of and therefore bound to the form of theology. (Cf.1.4)

3.2 The task of this chapter and its place within the thesis

The purpose of this chapter is firstly to explicate precisely what it means for philosophical reasoning to be bound by a theological framework, or, in other words, how truth is constituted within the framework of a religious tradition's system of theological reasoning. I will use Wittgenstein's concept of language games and his remarks on religion to substantiate my claim that each religion is epistemologically a frame of reference unto itself. Furthermore, in this chapter, I will discuss the implications of this view for the possibility and conditions of interfaith dialogue about the truth and validity of religious teachings.

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[134] Cf. 'Building the Interfaith Youth Movement: Beyond Dialogue to Action' (Patel and Brodeur 2006)

Importantly this chapter is *not* meant to ascertain how religions could relate to each other epistemologically under certain favourable circumstances, or how two specific religions could do so, but how religions work epistemologically *in general*. This is a necessary stipulation, because the practical interfaith programme to be developed in light of the insights gained from this chapter's investigation is to be open to all students in higher education, including particularly those who are trained neither in theology or philosophy, nor in the subtleties of theological traditions that may or may not exist within their religion. The object of the investigation here is thus how such regular lay believers would, on a day-to-day basis, relate to other religions epistemologically from within their own religious point of view.

It may seem as if a lot of potential for finding 'bridges', as it were, between religious traditions is lost by focusing on the 'regular' believer's mode of relating. However, there are good reasons for my abstaining from attempting to construct epistemological bridges for others. Firstly, I am not an expert on even one religious tradition, let alone a significant number of them, so as to be able to find transition points between them, should they exist. Secondly, to attempt to find general transition points or bridges (which would be valid for all religions) through abstract philosophical reasoning would, if successful in finding or constructing them, lead inevitably to some kind of pluralist philosophy, detached from the grass-roots reality of religious life and lacking in religious authority to make people indeed use these bridges.[135] In the terminology of Wittgenstein (who I am going to use for the analysis in this chapter) religions are language games following their specific rules and in order to modify such a game, or even to invent a new one, it is not enough to change the rules or to set up new ones; one must also get people to play by them. I will here take the opposite route: Instead of suggesting possible ways for believers to relate to religions other than their own, I will seek to explicate how religions typically work epistemologically vis-à-vis other religions, again in keeping with Wittgenstein, who said: '*Philosophy*[136] *may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. [...] It leaves everything as it is*' (Wittgenstein 1953: PI §124) That does not mean that the explication I intend to deliver is without gain or that I would not critique common practice. By showing what limitations the typical epistemological outlook of a religious point of view, if strictly thought through,

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[135] Cf. my argument about the problem of philosophy superseding theology in the introduction 1.3 and my provisional critique of pluralism in 2.4.5.
[136] I consider the theoretical chapters of this thesis to be philosophy in Wittgenstein's sense.

imposes on philosophical interfaith dialogue, I will clear the ground, as it were, for what is possible.

As to the limits: I will argue that it is indeed not possible to reason across the boundaries of religious traditions, but only within them. In regard to the possibilities: It is, however, possible for someone to reason within an alien frame of reference if they 'project' themselves into the other's theological system of reasoning. Through such projection one becomes a hypothetical participant in the other's frame of reference, as it were. As such a hypothetical participant one can, without committing to the overall framework, reason for certain conclusions and even hold the other, who is 'native' to this frame, accountable in terms of coherence, consistence, plausibility and such categories of sound philosophical reasoning.

It is thus possible for followers of different religious traditions to engage in dialogue about the truth and validity of religious teachings if they limit their reasoning to the frame of reference to which these teachings belong, be it their own or that of their conversation partner.

3.3   The notion of 'frame of reference'

The notion of 'frame of reference' is helpful to explain the interdependence of meaning of different statements that occur in a common context. Put simply, a frame of reference is a set of ideas, conditions, or assumptions that determine how something will be approached, perceived or understood. Applied to religions, this would mean that they provide a conceptual framework that, once established, is prior to experience and from within which and relative to which experiences are understood. The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought defines 'frame of reference' thus:

> The context, viewpoint or set of presuppositions or of evaluative criteria within which a person's perception and thinking seem always to occur, and which constrains selectively the course and outcome of these activities. (Bullock, Trombley, and Lawrie 1999)

As such, 'frame of reference' has a place in psychological discourse. Gestalt psychology, for instance, demonstrates how the mind is always seeing something as something and not just as an undifferentiated mass of sense data. Thus according to

this view the mind *imposes* a frame of reference to structure the sense data rather than drawing it from the data itself.[137] Similarly, Piagetian schemata function as frames of reference. Schemata are modified through the process of accommodation to fit incoming sense data; but there is also the reverse process of assimilation where the sense data are modified to fit the existing schema.[138] Another example of frame of reference from the field of psychology is Festinger's concept of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance refers to the situation where the sense data do not fit an existing cognitive framework. There is no guarantee that it is the cognitive framework that changes in the face of conflicting sense-data. Festinger writes:

> Let us imagine a person who has some cognition which is both highly important to him and also highly resistant to change. This might be a belief system which pervades an appreciable part of his life and which is so consonant with many other cognitions that changing the belief system would introduce enormous dissonance. […] Let us further imagine that an event occurs and impinges on this person's cognition creating strong dissonance with the existing cognition. If, under these circumstances, attempts at reduction of dissonance by acquiring new cognitive elements consonant with the original cognition are unsuccessful, one would expect an attempt to be made to deny the validity of the event which gave rise to the dissonance. (Festinger 1957:198f.)

What all of these notions of frame of reference have in common is that they posit pre-existing conditions that determine and shape our perceptions and experiences and thus co-constitute them.

In philosophy the question of how our perceptions of the world are constituted is dealt with under the heading of epistemology. Although the term 'frame of reference' may not have had much currency as such, the concept has long been well established. The most famous historical instance of a philosopher expounding on the preconditions that make possible and shape our perception of the world is perhaps Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. (Kant [1787]1998) His transcendental categories of pure intuition *time* and *space* along with the pure concepts of quantity, quality, relation and modality (*unity*, *plurality*, *totality*, *reality*, etc.) (A80/B106) form a conceptual whole that is a frame of reference in the epistemological sense. Later developments in epistemology have led to the insight that thought and knowledge are not only mediated, but also constituted through language and that therefore language can have characteristics of a frame of reference. Thus examining the structure of

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[137] Cf. Wertheimer (1971)
[138] Cf. Piaget (1999: especially pp. 350 ff.)

reality entails examining how language works and how language units derive their meaning. Wittgenstein, whose work falls in the category of language philosophy, says this about what I have called a frame of reference:

> All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments; no, it belongs to the nature of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life. (Wittgenstein 1969: OC §105)

Malcolm explains: '*A "system" provides the boundaries within which we ask questions, carry out investigations, and make judgements. Hypotheses are put forth, and challenged, within a system. Verification, justification, the search for evidence, occur within a system. The framework propositions of the system are not put to the test, not backed up by evidence.*' (Malcolm 1977:202 emphasis in the original)

In the case of religion, this is a very complex issue, because the concepts involved are for the most part not verifiable through empirical observation. Different modes of how meaning is verified come into play, like revelation, socially defined authority or discursive interpretation of texts. This complex situation is best accounted for, I contend, by Wittgenstein's conception of language games.

3.4 Wittgensteinian language games as frames of reference

My strategy in the subsequent sections is going to be dialectical in the following respect: Moving one way, I will use the concept of frame of reference to first illuminate Wittgenstein's notion of 'language games' and to then argue that Wittgenstein understands religions to be such language games. Moving in the opposite direction, I will built on the discussion of Wittgenstein's remarks on religions as language games to argue why religions should be considered frames of reference.

Interpreting Wittgenstein is a notoriously contentious matter. It is not my primary intention to engage in the field of Wittgenstein exegesis and argue for a specific reading of Wittgenstein within the wider scholarly discussion in this field

(which would warrant a separate thesis in itself). All I want to do here is to characterize the situation of how different religions relate to each other epistemologically and invite the reader to follow my portrayal and accept my suggestion that this indeed describes more or less adequately the empirical reality.

Whereas the early Wittgenstein proposed that language and world are in a relation of picture and pictured, the later Wittgenstein rejected this idea and forcefully made the case for words deriving their meaning from the situational context and the activities into which they are woven. (Wittgenstein 1953: PI §7) Wittgenstein coined the term *language game* for this. Games are primarily rule-governed activities, where the rules leave a certain amount of freedom for the game to be played as the individual intends or as the situation requires. Over time rules may be adapted and changed. Likewise the meaning of an utterance is bound to the specific situational context within which the activity that it accompanies and/or constitutes takes place. As specific as a situation can be, as complex are the rules that govern it in regard to the language game that it constitutes. It is therefore impossible to generalise meaningful definitions of utterances that would be universally valid. Wittgenstein himself, when talking about what a language game is, describes fairly specific situations and explores how meaning is constituted within them, instead of giving definitions.[139] Epistemologically then, the specific situational context within which an utterance occurs forms a frame of reference within which utterances acquire a certain meaning. Each language game situation is, of course, not just determined by the given physical surroundings but also by the cultural context with its web of symbols and practices.

3.5   Religions as a language games according to Wittgenstein

In explicating religions as language games, I will draw on Wittgenstein's lectures on religious belief (Wittgenstein 1966). Although this is not entirely unproblematic as the published form in which they are available is based on lecture notes that three of Wittgenstein's students took who were present when he delivered them, they are still the most specific remarks by Wittgenstein on the topic we have.

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[139] Cf., for instance, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, §2 (Wittgenstein 1953) or Wittgenstein's Lecture on Aesthetics (Wittgenstein 1966:11–18).

Also, questions of authenticity are of only secondary concern as my intention is to explicate what I consider to be the epistemological situation of believers in an interfaith context using Wittgensteinian concepts rather than contributing to the ongoing debates about Wittgenstein exegesis. Although the lectures are located chronologically between the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's early work, and the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein's later philosophy, I will 'read' the lectures from the point of view of the Philosophical Investigations.[140]

Religious belief then, according to Wittgenstein, forms a specific frame of reference.[141] He gives the following example:

> Suppose someone were a believer and said: "I believe in a Last Judgement," and I said: "Well, I'm not so sure. Possibly." You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said "There is a German aeroplane overhead," and I said "Possibly I'm not so sure," you would say we were fairly near. (Wittgenstein 1966:53)

In the latter case of the German aeroplane, both speakers are very 'near', because they share a common frame of reference. It is perfectly well established what *a German aeroplane overhead* means and both agree on that. The difference is only that one person holds this proposition to be true whereas the other is not entirely sure. The difference is comparatively small as opposed to the first example

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[140] Wittgenstein says in the preface to his *Philosophical Investigations*, which were published in 1945, that they are the result of the last 16 years of this thinking. Thus the *Lectures on Religious Belief*, which were held in 1938, fall within this period.

[141] My explanation of the Wittgenstein quotes that follow may seem rather simple and obvious and the question arises whether it really does justice to what Wittgenstein says, for if it was that simple, why didn't he say so himself? There are two reasons why he did not: Firstly, Wittgenstein's style of writing is marked by his refusal to engage in what he calls nonsensical utterances – utterances that seek to transcend the limits of language and engage in a kind of meta-narrative that, according to Wittgenstein, violates the criteria for proper use of language. (I am presupposing in this regard a continuance between the early and the late Wittgenstein.) Instead Wittgenstein uses examples, usually several at a time, to illustrate his point. On the use of examples and the lack of other kinds of explanations, the following passage from the *Philosophical Investigations* is revealing. (Notice that when Wittgenstein says 'game' he refers to what I have been trying to explicate as 'frame of reference'):

And this is just how one might explain to someone what a game is. One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way.—I do not, however, mean by this that he is supposed to see in those examples that common thing which I—for some reason—was unable to express; but that he is now to employ those examples in a particular way. Here giving examples is not an indirect means of explaining—in default of a better. For any general definition can be misunderstood too. The point is that this is how we play the game. (I mean the language-game with the word "game".) (Wittgenstein 1953:§71)

Secondly, as mentioned in the text already, the lectures on religion are available to us only in a (re-) constructed form that has been prepared from the notes which three of his students took who were present when Wittgenstein held them. They were thus not delivered in a fashion meant to be read and some of the implicit meaning obvious at the time of delivery may be lacking in this reduced form of the text.

Wittgenstein describes. Here it is a religious statement about the Last Judgment and when the second speaker says he is not so sure, he is not expressing doubts about whether the Last Judgment will take place or not (for if one accepts the religious framework within which the statement is made, the truth of the proposition is more or less a given), but he is unsure whether he wants to accept or reject the entire frame of reference, or as Wittgenstein says: *It isn't a question of my being anywhere near him, but on an entirely different plane, which you would express by saying: "You mean something altogether different, Wittgenstein."*(Wittgenstein 1966:53)

Rejecting the frame of reference is not the same as disagreeing in the usual sense, for the notion of disagreeing, or contradicting (or in this case: believing and not believing), is itself bound to the frame of reference. Wittgenstein says:

> If you asked me whether or not I believe in a Judgement Day, in the sense in which religious people have belief in it, I **wouldn't** say: "No. I don't believe there will be such a thing." It would seem to me utterly crazy to say this. [...] I can't say. I can't contradict the person. (Wittgenstein 1966:55, my emphasis)

> Would you say: "I believe the opposite", or "there is no reason to suppose such a thing"? I'd say neither. (Wittgenstein 1966:53)

> Suppose someone is ill and he says: "This is a punishment," and I say: "If I'm ill, I don't think of punishment at all." If you say: "Do you believe the opposite?" – you can call it believing the opposite, but it is entirely different from what we normally call believing the opposite.

> I think differently, in a different way. I say different things to myself. I have different pictures. (Wittgenstein 1966:55)

> It strikes me that a religious *belief* could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it's belief, it's really a way of living or a way of assessing life. It's passionately seizing hold of *this* interpretation. (Wittgenstein 1984:64e; emphasis in the original)

Thus a Christian would not be able to disagree in the usual sense with a Hindu on matters of religion, because the reasons for or against the proposition they could each give would be internal to their respective frames of reference that is constituted by the conceptual framework of their religion and the practical situation related to it.

The following example might illustrate this point: The statement 'The goal of human life is to lovingly serve God' might be agreed to be true by both a Christian

and a Hindu.[142] When asked why they thought it was true, the Christian would perhaps make reference to the Bible, whereas the Hindu would point to the Bhagavad Gita or his family guru. Thus their agreement is only a superficial appearance, the underlying 'grammar' of their assent is different. They do not agree in the usual sense. Of course the frame of reference is not just made up by either the Bible or the Bhagavad Gita, but is far more complex than that and so are the underlying grammars. This is apparent in the meaning they attach to the individual words in the statement: God, for the Hindu could be the blue boy Krishna, either the supreme form of God, or one among many. For the Christian, 'God' will perhaps be a person of the Trinity, or possibly the Trinity as such. The concepts involved are very different and specific to the frame of reference from which they derive their meaning. The use of the same word 'God' deceives us into thinking that we are talking about the same thing. Similarly, the use of the same sentence deceives us into believing we are dealing with the same statement. But in fact, the Christian and the Hindu agree to different statements, although they are expressed by the same sentence. Thus they do not agree at all.

But they also do not *dis*agree in the usual sense, for disagreeing, just like agreeing, requires a shared frame of reference within which these notions have meaning. Another Hindu could, for instance, contradict the first above and say 'No, the highest goal of life is to achieve complete detachment and to move beyond even the idea of God as a person who can be served.' When asked for her reason why she thinks this is the case, she would perhaps also point to the Bhagavad Gita. If the Bhagavad Gita serves as the shared frame of reference (to simply somewhat), then indeed, the first Hindu would disagree with the second in a meaningful way, because the 'grammar' of their disagreement is the same, because they agree on the rules of what to base the meaning (including the truth) of a statement on. They are playing the same game, they move within the same system of reference. To disagree, Wittgenstein says, is to disagree within a system: '*Whether a thing is a blunder or not – it is a blunder in a particular system. Just as something is a blunder in a particular game and not in another.*' (Wittgenstein 1966:59)

There is a fundamental difference between negating a statement and negating the entire frame of reference. The first is a judgment regarding the truth of a proposition

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[142] I am aware, of course, that not all Christians or all Hindus might agree on the truth of this statement. This is only an example and could work as such even if no Hindu and no Christian agreed to this statement, although I think it is reasonable to assume that some would.

within a frame of reference that gives meaning to it; the other is a rejection to engage with the overall 'picture' in which it is set. In the first case, I can give reasons why I believe or don't believe something. In the second all I can do is say 'I think differently' and perhaps offer an alternative frame of reference.[143]

3.5.1 Answering an objection: Wittgenstein considers religion to be merely 'expressive'

I believe that the interpretation of language games as frames of references and of religion as such a frame of reference as I have given above legitimately draws on the cognitive content of the idea of language games. In the literature, however, Wittgenstein's view of religious language is sometimes seen as being merely 'expressive' i.e. he does not consider religious language to consist in making statements about the world but in expressing a certain attitude toward it. (Griffiths 2001:45)[144] The reasoning for this view is based to a large degree on the observation that for some believers certain basic propositions are not open to questioning. But from this does not follow, as Griffith alleges, that all religious claims would be of this kind. Although there are some assumptions that function like axioms and define the frame of reference of the particular theology, within the frame thus set there is scope for reasoning and hence agreeing and disagreeing. The notion of *theology* embodies the idea of reasoning within a given frame of reference – this is the meaning of *theological system*. Appeal to evidence as a structural move is naturally part of this process, although such evidence will of course not be scientific evidence, as the notion of evidence is itself internal to the respective frame of reference. For example a particular line of reasoning within a theological argument will refer to already established truths (for instance based on scriptural authority) as evidence.

Griffith further argues that Wittgenstein's view of religion is expressive, because in the lectures Wittgenstein says of a Father O'Hara that he turns religion into something ludicrous, because of his trying to prove religion with the help of science. This, Wittgenstein says, amounts to superstition. (Wittgenstein 1966:59) But it is superstition, I would argue, not because O'Hara is reasoning for his point of view as

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[143] I disagree with Diamond here (Diamond 2005:104).
[144] Griffith disagrees with what he sees as Wittgenstein's view of religion. Hence I do not disagree with Griffith's own view of religion (in fact, it is roughly similar to what I am proposing in this section), but only with his reading of Wittgenstein.

such, but because he is doing so with scientific arguments. That religion is bad science does not hinge on the notion of expressive versus descriptive, but on the fact that religions and science each are their own frames of reference that work according to different rules – they are separate language games. Mixing the language game of a religion and of science results in a classic category mistake of the sort that Wittgenstein's language philosophy set out to expose and 'cure.'[145]

3.5.2   Answering an objection: religion is a form of life, not a language game

Another consideration that presents itself in this context is whether religions can be *forms of life*, as this is another important concept in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. A form of life is a broader category and can be said to roughly encompass the totality of the language games and the related acting in the world within a certain however loosely defined culture.[146] Wittgenstein says '*to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.*' [147] (Wittgenstein 1953:PI §19) Such a form of life is indeed a frame of reference in the sense discussed here. Wittgenstein says: '*[...] It is what human beings say that is true and false, **and they agree in the language they use. This is not agreement in opinions but in forms of life**.*' (Wittgenstein 1953:PI §241; my emphasis) . Again we find here the distinction between agreeing on truth and falsity and agreement on the frame of reference, the language, which defines what counts as truth and falsity. Agreeing on the language is not yet agreeing on the truth of a statement expressed within it (an 'opinion'), but it is agreement on the frame of reference, the form of life. A number of scholars have discussed the idea of religion being a form of life (Malcolm 1960, 1995; Phillips 1993; Sherry 1972) and Sherry observes that Wittgenstein came very close to describing religion as a form of life by saying in his lectures on Religious Belief:

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[145] Scientism makes the same category mistake in pretending that its propositions about the value of life and the related ethics follow from the discoveries of science. The values perceived by proponents of scientism and the ethics they arrive at can, of course, form a legitimate frame of reference in itself. But that frame of reference is not related to the frame of reference, or the language game, of science per se in any other way than other religious frames of references are. In other words, science does not privilege scientism over other religious points of view.

[146] For an exhaustive discussion of how *forms of life* could be and has been understood, cf. Glock's Wittgenstein Dictionary. (Glock 1996:124–129)

[147] 'Language' here of course does not refer to a language in the sense that English or Spanish are languages, nor is the relationship between language and form of life in any way as Whorf imagined. (Whorf 1956)

'Why shouldn't one form of life culminate in an utterance of belief in a Last Judgment?' (Wittgenstein 1966:58). (Sherry 1972:159)

I agree that religion tends to be a very fundamental frame of reference that can influence, or contain within itself, (all) other frames of references that play a role in a person's life (or form of life) such that for a deeply religious person their religion will in some way be present in all their perceptions and actions. Still, for the purposes of this thesis, I will argue that within the context of doing interfaith dialogue philosophically, i.e. for the purpose of mapping out the situation of people of different religious traditions discussing the truth and validity of their religion, each religion vis-à-vis another religion is better conceptualised as a different language game and not a different form of life. The reason for this is that forms of life 'overlap' as it were, whereas language games do not; although they may be similar to each other in the way of family resemblances.[148] Examples are the language game of building a house (an example Wittgenstein himself gives in PI §2) or similar everyday, practical situations like paying at the till in a grocery shop or doing small talk at the bus stop. There is no reason why different religious forms of life (if we accept they exist) should not completely share these language games, as long as they are situated broadly within the same culture of everyday life, as it were, like for instance the British one. Thus these religious forms of life overlap. However, epistemologically, discussions of truth and validity of religions do not overlap. Religions are, in this admittedly limited epistemological sense, separate.

3.6   Religious frames of reference

In the following I will elaborate on three reasons why religions are conceptual frameworks that do not overlap with each other even though they may be similar. I will use arguments that are not drawn from Wittgenstein, although I quote him in order to clarify what I mean. Thus, whereas section 3.5 used the concept of 'frame of reference' in order to make sense of Wittgenstein's remarks on religion, this section here will conversely use Wittgenstein's aphorisms to support the explication of why religions function epistemologically more or less as closed frames of references.

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[148] Family resemblance is another Wittgensteinian term. It denotes the situation where a word is used for a variety of phenomena which do not share a common essence but are connected by a series of overlapping similarities. No one feature is shared by all phenomena subsumed under the word. (PI: §66)

First of all, religions provide a very fundamental set of categories through which to view the world. These categories are not basic in the sense that they relate to simple perceptions or constitute simple facts. Rather they are fairly complex concepts, such as joy, duty, suffering, worship, sin, guilt, bliss, redemption, liberation, etc. They are fundamental not in how we describe the world and the occurrences in it, but in the way they shape how we make sense of the world and occurrences in relation to ourselves, especially in the existential perspective of the *sub specie aeternitatis*. Thus people with different sets of such fundamental categories are likely to experience their being in the world differently, although their respective description of the world might be similar. It is reasonable to suggest that people of different religions experience their being in the world differently, independent of their actual material situation, because they make sense of it with different sets of fundamental categories.[149]

Secondly, this fundamental role of a religion as an interpretive frame of reference is borne out by the fact that there is no space for meta-theory – each 'stepping back' from a religious viewpoint will involve an at least temporary stepping out of this frame of reference and taking on an outsider's perspective. The outsider's perspective will not be able to do justice to the 'experience' of someone who has an insider's perspective. The discussion of how insider's and outsider's perspectives relate to each other is not new. The methodological debates of the academic discipline of Religious Studies centre on this issue. While the phenomenological approach within Religious Studies has arguably succeeded in offering a method to comprehend and present an insider's perspective to an outsider audience, it has been able to do so only by suspending all judgement (epochē). Suspending judgement when apprehending other world views is not usually part of a religious perspective, and it cannot be where decisions of ultimate concern to a person's direction in life are to be made.

In Wittgensteinian terms, one would have to say in this regard: What Wittgenstein insists is the case for all utterances, namely that the language game is the primary phenomenon which cannot be understood by explanatory approaches, but only acknowledged as being played, is certainly true for religion. The point of it is in the 'playing' and trying to look from outside that perspective will inevitably

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[149] Wittgenstein says: '*I describe the alteration like a perception; quite as if the object had altered before my eyes. "Now I am seeing this", I might say (pointing to another picture, for example). This has the form of a report of a new perception.*' (Wittgenstein 1953:196)

lead to a distortion of what it is for people on the inside: '*Our mistake*' says Wittgenstein '*is to look for an explanation where we should see the facts as primary phenomena. That is where we should say: this language game is played. The question is not one of explaining a language game by means of our experiences, but of noting a language game.*' (Wittgenstein 1953: §§654-655)

Thirdly, although interpretive categories will normally be adjusted when empirical data seems to resist them over time (Kuhn 1996), the case with religion is different. Since the interpretive categories of religion are not basic, although fundamental, they usually defy empirical verification.[150] Whether something counts as sin or ignorance does not necessarily depend on the actual occurrence thus labelled, but on the overall conceptual framework from within which the occurrence is understood. It is difficult to see how empirical evidence could here swing the pendulum in favour of one category over the other. Besides, religious teachings of one tradition are usually flexible enough to accommodate at least mild changes in conceptual categories within themselves. Thus, there is no reason to assume that followers of different religious traditions with different sets of teaching could come to an agreement in doctrinal matters simply on the basis that they share the same empirical reality.[151]

Furthermore, there are some claims advanced by religious doctrine which are, in principle, verifiable by empirical means. However, in practice they are not. Statements about an afterlife and heavenly domains that are meant literally can only be checked for their truth in hindsight, as it were, after one survived death (if one should). Hick calls this eschatological verification (Hick 1990:103 ff.), but it all the same remains elusive to this world's attempts of interfaith dialogue about doctrinal truths.

In conclusion, I suggest that it is justified to treat religions each as separate frames of reference, and thus in Wittgensteinian terms as language games rather than forms of life, because they are conceptually fairly closed and self-sufficient systems

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[150] Stark and Bainbridge suggest that the persistence of religion in a largely scientifically dominated world is due to precisely this characteristic. They draw a distinction between religion and magic. Magic can be disproved (in a broadly scientific sense), religion cannot. (Stark and Bainbridge 1996) This may in itself be a theological statement, as it seems to prescribe what religion ought to be. Historically the belief in religion and magic certainly was not clearly separable. In any case, it seems true enough that belief in magic is less widespread nowadays than in the Middle Ages. Wittgenstein draws the same distinction, only what Stark and Bainbridge call 'magic', Wittgenstein calls 'superstition.'

[151] Forward calls religions '*truth systems, each claiming validation by Transcendent reality.*' (Forward 2002:17)

of meaning within which statements and related action are situated and from within which they acquire meaning in turn.

Whether or not this theoretically idealised conception of the situation does indeed manifest in any obvious way in a given believer's life when talking to his neighbour who is of a different faith is another question. They may well argue across the boundaries of their religious tradition without noticing epistemological problems (which does not mean that there aren't any). The purpose here is not to describe the reality of religious life at grass roots level in the UK today, but to explicate a minimal consensus (i.e. to err on the side of caution) on the epistemological situation of a religion vis-à-vis another from a philosophically stringent position. This will find its application in chapter 5 and 6 when discussing the design and evaluating the results of the interfaith dialogue programme. Building this programme on the philosophically conservative point of view that religions are each separate frames of reference will ensure that no problems occur, not because of luck or lack of awareness, but because they are systematically avoided through the programme design.

3.7   Implications of treating religions as frames of reference

All of the above characteristics of religious faith justify treating religions epistemologically as individual frames of reference. The implications for interfaith dialogue on doctrinal truth are far-reaching. In the first place, the issue is not whether people of different faiths are able to reason about the truth and validity of their religious teachings across the boundaries of different religious traditions. Before reasoning and agreeing and disagreeing can be attempted, people need to understand each other first. While the very notion of agreeing and disagreeing is meaningless (in the technical sense) if no understanding can be secured, the situation vice versa is different: There may well be understanding of each other, but this does not guarantee the ability to reason across religious boundaries. This latter description represents the situation for interfaith dialogue, as I will argue below.

As for the possibility and conditions of understanding between followers of different religious traditions, it is clear that in order to understand what a religious

believer is saying, it is necessary to understand the frame of reference from within which the statement is made. Not being at home in one frame of reference does not mean one would automatically be prevented from understanding it. We move between different frames of reference all the time, including into previously foreign ones. For instance being a member in a sports club might come with a certain set of language games, like specific ways of greeting each other and what to say when scoring. This may be new and unknown, but by participating in the sports club or even only by observing other sports club members play those language games, one will come to understand the rules and be able to participate in the language games, much like we learn a language as children. Thus there is no reason why being a participant in one language game, or one religion, should categorically prevent one from understanding another language game or another religion. One might object that one would need at least some familiarity in order to understand a language game,[152] and perhaps that is so. But as forms of life overlap, I believe they do so sufficiently for every human being to be able, on principle, to understand a language game any other human being is engaged in. In conclusion, understanding the various utterances made within a certain frame of reference presents no problem, when one is a proficient participant in it, when one is skilled at playing the language game. Such understanding is still possible to a significant degree when one only hypothetically takes part in the frame of reference, as when observing how a language game is played, i.e. how utterances, context and actions are interrelated. Although this may be laborious, it can be done.[153] I concede that in reality a full understanding of the other's frame of reference is unlikely to be ever achieved in completeness, but rather is a goal that one can endeavour towards. Still, I think that in practice a level of understanding can be achieved that will make a difference.

Agreeing or disagreeing about the truth of religious doctrine presents a greater difficulty than just understanding statements from a different religious tradition and I propose that this is not possible, at least not generally and not without expert knowledge (the focus of this thesis being lay believers). Besides the practical demand that a philosophical discussion about truth across religious boundaries requires not

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[152] Wittgenstein made this point by saying: '*If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.*' (Wittgenstein 1953:225)
[153] Bernhardt calls this the '*art to emphatically inhabit a foreign semiotic system*' and agrees that it '*can be learned and continuously deepened.*' (Bernhardt 2005:74) The quote is my translation; the German original reads: '*Die Kunst, ein fremdes semiotisches System emphatisch zu bewohnen, lässt sich erlernen und immer weiter vertiefen.*'

only a thorough understanding of the other's frame of reference, but a very reflective awareness of one's own, there is the additional difficulty of matching one frame of reference appropriately to the other, or in other words to find points of transitions between them. What is more, the criteria themselves by which to judge such appropriateness is not obvious. Would it be agreement about empirical content of a statement? Would it be a comparable function in relation to the larger body of doctrines? Would it be an analogous impact on the life of the respective believers? Would it be similar kinds of responses evoked in the religious practice of believers?

Related to this problem is the further difficulty that there are no impartial ways to judge the validity of each other's religious doctrines. Because there is no room for meta-theory, validity will be judged from within the respective own frame of reference and there seems to be no alternative to this. Strictly speaking, there is not even disagreement, because the notion of disagreement is also embedded within and dependent on each frame of reference.[154]

In Wittgensteinian terms, trying to come to an agreement about the truth and validity of religious belief, where such an agreement transcended borders of religious traditions would be like two sports teams trying to win against the other team on a court while one was playing football and the other basket-ball. Even if something that looked like a game would ensue and if each team would stick to the rules of their own games, there would still be no agreement as to who won and who lost.[155]

To further explicate and illustrate the conceptualisation proposed above, I suggest it is useful to leave the purely theoretical realm and consider possible scenarios and their respective implications for philosophical interfaith dialogue. I suggest furthermore that to this end it is most advisable to examine scenarios that seem to represent opposite ends of the spectrum of possible situations. In order to understand the constellation of agents in a particular situation, it is expedient to take the parameters along which it occurs to their respective extremes. The change thus caused in the constellation will reveal the inner relationship between the agents. The two in this sense paradigmatic scenarios in the given context of discussing the truth of religious doctrine in dialogue are 1) where parties of the dialogue share a common frame of reference in regard to their doctrinal viewpoints and 2) where they do not.

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[154] Cf. Wittgenstein's refusal to call his not believing in a Judgement Day 'contradicting' someone who does believe in it. (Wittgenstein 1966:55ff.) Cf. also section 3.5 of this chapter.
[155] Wittgenstein himself uses the notion of 'game' to explain his concept of family resemblances. (PI §§66-67)

The first example I will consider is an instance where the parties to the dialogue about the truth of religious doctrine share a common frame of reference: Erasmus of Rotterdam's debate with Martin Luther about the freedom of the will. This dialogue took place in form of a series of treatises each answering the previous one, between 1524 and 1527. (Winter 2005a) The scenario I will discuss as an instance where the parties to the dialogue do not share a common frame of reference is Jean Bodin's fictional account of the *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime (Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Rerum Sublimium Arcanis Abditis)*, which he wrote in 1593. (Bodin 1975 [1593]) Both of these examples thus come from the century which saw the Protestant Reformation in Europe and the full impact of the 'discovery' of America, events which brought the problem of religious plurality in the West to the fore. (Strenski 2006:13) (Harrison 1990:3).[156] Both have well been covered in the academic sense and I can draw on the discussions.

3.8   Religions as frames of reference: examining two possible scenarios

The purpose of this section is to examine and illustrate how a frame of reference at the same time makes possible and limits the possibility of agreeing on truth in dialogue about religion. One might object at the outset that the instances of dialogue selected are rather atypical and thus question the insights drawn from examining them. It is true that Luther and Erasmus were engaged in a scholarly debate by way of writing rather than in what we typically think of as a situation of dialogue, namely a face-to-face meeting and a rather prolonged exchange of arguments. Yet, to be able to carry out an examination at all, I am forced to rely on enduring forms of dialogue, such as ones written down. Furthermore, although I eventually want to explore the possibility of doing philosophical interfaith dialogue with non-expert believers, it may still be useful for this examination to look at experts' dialogues, because they may be more aware of the theoretical implications and more explicitly referring to them. With Bodin's *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* a further charge can be made in that

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[156] Cf also: '*Philosophisch betrachtet ergibt sich seit der Aufklärung eine Spannung zwischen dem Wahrheits- und Absolutheitsanspruch der Religionen und ihren unübersehbar partikularen geschichtlichen Erscheinungsformen, die sich universalistischen Rationalitätskriterien entziehen.*' (Mittelstraß 2004: Entry 'Religion')

it is fictitious.[157] Although historically verifiable accounts would perhaps be preferable, literary ones are not necessarily useless. On the contrary, well crafted literature is able to present reality in a condensed fashion and thus might in many respects be more easily accessible to an examination of reality's underlying structure and forces at work than purely documentary accounts. (Gabriel 1991)[158] Also, the examination intended here is not concerned with political decision making which would have to rely on a good understanding of the concrete historical situation. Rather, the point here is to draw out the effects a certain epistemological constellation has on real life situations. In this case it is quite sufficient if the scenarios considered have the ontological status of a thought experiment, which is equivalent to that of a literary account. A further, albeit weaker, factor that recommends all three authors, Erasmus, Luther, and Bodin, is that they biographically made in some way the transition from a more protected religious situation to one where they moved 'into the world' and where their religious convictions had to stand the test of regular, everyday life. Erasmus and Luther had been ordained as priests in a monastic situation and Bodin wanted to become one and was a novice in the Carmelite order where he lived like a monk. (Remer 1996:205) Later, all three moved into an 'in-the-world' situation: Erasmus gained permanent dispensation from the pope, Luther rejected monasticism and lived as a married man, and Bodin '*was released from his vows because he had been too young to render them.*' (Voegelin 1998:186) The idea of testing religious conceptual categories against real life events (and not just against coherence within the conceptual system itself) is what I will identify below (cf. 4.4) as the locus of philosophising that every believer is more or less forced to engage in in regard to their faith. Maybe Erasmus, Luther, and Bodin are, because of their biography more likely than other writers to take this aspect into consideration?

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[157] Faltenbacher contends that the text may not be entirely fictional (Faltenbacher 1988:33,40) as it exhibits the traits of a '*Gedächtnisprotokoll eines authentischen Gespräche*s' or a record of an authentic spoken exchange written down from memory some time after one has witnessed it. (Faltenbacher 1988:55, footnote 1)

[158] The academic study of literature assumes justifications of this sort.

3.8.1 A shared frame of reference: Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther on the freedom of will

The historical context of Erasmus' and Luther's exchange was the emerging reformation in Europe. Winter says: 'Erasmus and Luther argued over what they and their contemporaries thought was the characteristic difference between the evolving Catholic and Protestant positions concerning human nature, namely, the question of the freedom of the will.' (Winter 2005b:v) This was by no means a petty issue to the people of the day. Rather salvation itself was considered to hinge on it. The question at stake was whether good deeds in this world contribute to salvation or whether it is faith alone which secured it. Thus the truth or falsity of the doctrines discussed had real-life implications for many people and the debate accordingly received wide attention. That is not to say that political interests were not involved for some of the partisans on either side. But the debate was fuelled by the interest in religious truth.

Erasmus' tract *On Free Will /Diatribe seu collation de libero arbitrio* appeared in Basel in 1524. Luther is thought to have written his tract *The Enslaved Will / De servo arbitrio* (1525) as an answer to Erasmus. Erasmus again responded with *Hyperaspistes Diatribae adversus servum arbitrium M. Lutheri* in 1526/1527. (Winter 2005a) [159] The frame of reference they both shared and within which their debate via treatises took place was for the most immediately obvious part the Bible. Erasmus writes: 'But we are not involved in a controversy regarding Scripture. The same Scripture is being loved and revered by both parties. Our battle concerns the sense of Scripture.' (Winter 2005a:13) Scripture is the stable frame within which the discussion takes place: 'Scripture cannot contradict itself, since all passages are inspired by the Same Spirit.' (Winter 2005a:17)

Thus showing a certain view to be true means showing how it is coherent with or even follows from teachings in Scripture. Erasmus' treatises are consequently full of quotes, which he sorts under the two headings: quotes supporting my position, quotes defying the other position. He then goes on in separate chapters and discusses consecutively 'Old Testament Proofs Supporting the Free Will' and 'New Testament Proofs Supporting the Free Will'. The then following chapter 'Apparent Proofs Against the Free Will' is also based on scriptural exegesis and extensively quotes the

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[159] The exchange between Luther and Erasmus is published in one volume by Winter as Discourse on Free Will: Erasmus-Luther. (Winter 2005a) Thus in the following, when I refer to or quote from either Erasmus or Luther (the primary sources), the source will be given as: ' Winter 2005**a**' plus page number. When I quote from Winter's introduction (as secondary literature) the source will be given as 'Winter 2005**b**' plus page number.

Bible as are the next ones addressing directly Luther's teachings. Clearly, Erasmus considers this dialogue to be fruitful in that through such dialogue truth can be found, or gotten closer to. (Remer 1994:315) Hence Erasmus is able to close with the following remark: '*We have proven that our opinion is more evident in scriptural testimony than the opinion of the opponents*'. (Winter 2005a:80)

But the Bible is not the only constituent of Erasmus' frame of reference, i.e. of what is indisputable for him and from within which he reasons. He also refers to the authority of the church fathers (Winter 2005a:12–13) and thus appeals to what Smith calls 'the cumulative tradition'. (Smith 1991:154ff) (Cf. also 4.4) For Erasmus, a further stipulation is that all discussion can only be about what is adiaphoral, or nonessential to salvation. (Remer 1994:310) He believes human's capacity to comprehend truth is limited and so he should not meddle with essential doctrines, but rather simply accept them. However, the list of things Erasmus considers nonessential is rather extensive and so the restriction is not as limiting as it might sound. (Remer 1994:316) Nevertheless, these essential doctrines contribute to the 'shape' of the frame of reference from within which Erasmus is arguing, they represent the axiomatic beliefs of his theology. (Cf. 1.2)

The case is different with Luther. Although he certainly accepts the Bible as the main element in his frame of reference, there are other constituents that more seriously restrict the possibility of Erasmus and Luther reasoning along the same lines and perhaps coming to a common conclusion. Luther, like Erasmus, presents quotations from the Bible, albeit much less often. As he answers Erasmus, Luther argues about how to interpret the quotes Erasmus presented, i.e. how meaning should be derived from within their shared frame of reference. He argues for instance for a literal understanding of the Bible unless it could be proven for a certain passage to contain figurative speech. (Winter 2005a:111–112) In another case Luther contends that a certain argument does not remove the contradictions Erasmus intended it to resolve (Winter 2005a:114–115), or accuses Erasmus of misquoting St. Paul. In these cases both Erasmus and Luther move within the same frame of reference and even though they disagree, they are, as Wittgenstein puts it 'fairly near'. (Cf. 3.5)

The force of Luther's reasoning, however, seems to rely on what could be called 'his own experience with God', or what he himself would maybe call the strength of his faith. He speaks of the Spirit (with a capital 'S') that is in him and in his books (Winter 2005a:86) and states that God has promised to save him (which is not an

automatism in his view). (Winter 2005a:117–118) This really constitutes a change in the frame of reference, because that is something that Erasmus has no access to. Wittgenstein would say Luther and Erasmus are here separated by 'an enormous gulf'. (Cf. 3.5) Erasmus can only accept or reject it in the way one can accept or reject a frame of reference without being able to reason for either decision. Luther is quite aware of this as he demands not so much concession, but submission from Erasmus. He says: 'God may even condescend to visit you [...] through me' and 'I have not made comparisons, but have asserted and still do assert. I wish none to become judges, but urge all men to submit.' (Winter 2005a:120) Of course, Erasmus could offer his own experience as an alternative, but that would not be a counter argument, but a (similar) departure from the shared frame of reference in yet another direction.

On the strength of his experience with God Luther also dismisses the authority of the church fathers, (Winter 2005a:100) another illustration of his move into a somewhat different frame of reference. At one point Luther addresses the issue of a shared frame of reference explicitly. The contentious point for him is the importance of the issue of free will (a rather obvious point, it might seem, when the issue is already being discussed; but not for Luther). Erasmus stated that he was willing to engage in the discussion, because he considered the issue to be adiaphoral, or nonessential. This enrages Luther, who responds: 'If you consider this subject [the issue of free will] not necessary to Christians, I ask you to withdraw from the debate. We have no common ground. I consider it vital.' (Winter 2005a:91)

In conclusion, Erasmus' and Luther's exchange operated on the assumption that both parties were trying to reach, or at least move closer to, a common position on the issue discussed. It was thus focused on the expected result. This implied that both shared a common frame of reference, which indeed is evident in the discussion. However, at the same time, there is a re-negotiation of that frame of reference going on and as a result Erasmus and Luther seem less able to agree or disagree. Because the dialogue took place by way of written treatises, there is less opportunity to observe how the discussion evolves on its own accord, simply because taking turns is so limited. History tells us, however, that the difference in frame of reference between Erasmus and Luther and the people of their respective religious parties persisted and ultimately manifested itself in the formation of a distinct brand of Christianity, the Protestant confession. Thus not only did Erasmus and Luther fail to

achieve a common result, but their fellow believers on either side were not any more successful either during the last few centuries. The re-negotiation of the common frame of reference thus led to indeed divergent frames of reference that have solidified and make an agreement on religious truth between both parties impossible.

3.8.2 No common frame of reference: The discourses of the seven in Bodin's *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime*[160]

Jean Bodin (1529/30-1596) lived in France during the French Wars of Religion (1562–98) and thus will have lived through a lot of political unrest caused by conflicting convictions about religious truth. His enduring reputation is that of a political theorist and the author of the *The Six Books of the Commonwealth* (*Les Six livres de la République*, 1576). Thus, religious toleration was for him foremost of all a topic in regard to the maintenance of civil order. This theme also occurs in his *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime.*[161,162] However, the *Colloquium* covers a much broader discussion of religion and religious truth in an unusually unprejudiced manner.[163] In the end, no solution or final verdict is given, which I will interpret to be a result of respecting each religion discussed as a frame of reference unto itself.[164] This lack of passing judgment or, as it would have been put at the time, Bodin's 'failure to clearly profess to the one true religion,' which in his context would have been Catholicism, was so controversial that the book, although originally written around 1588, circulated only in manuscript form until a first printed edition was finally published as late as 1857. (Remer 1994:307–308)[165]

The Colloquium describes the discussions of seven men, each of a different religion or world view: a Muslim, a Catholic Christian, a Lutheran Christian, a Calvinist Christian, a Jew, a proponent of deism-like natural religion, and a sceptic. Their meetings are set in Venice in the house of the Catholic Christian, a wealthy

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[160] I owe the idea to contrast Erasmus' and Luther's dialogue with that of Bodin's Colloquium to Remer who compares both under the perspective of toleration. (Remer 1994) (Remer 1996)

[161] The Latin title of the original reads: *Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Rerum Sublimium Arcanis Abditis*. (Bodin 1975) In the text I will refer to the book from now on in short as the *Colloquium*.

[162] For the theme of religious toleration in regard to civil order; cf. Bodin (1975: 466-471)

[163] There is some dispute as to whether Bodin is indeed the author of the *Colloquium*. (For a list of authors participating in it, see Anon. n.d. "Jean Bodin (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)." Retrieved May 20, 2011 (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bodin/#6). I will not engage with this discussion here, both because it would go beyond the possibilities of this thesis and because it is of only secondary importance if at all, as I treat the text as a thought experiment or a literary text.

[164] In this interpretation I am indebted to and go along with Remer. (Remer 1994)

[165] Ford gives 1841 as the date of first publication. (Ford 1972:138)

merchant, who thus acts as host. They meet for seven consecutive evenings over dinner and speak about their respective religious teachings and convictions. In doing so they are very outspoken and quite confrontational.[166] Although the Catholic among them, Coronaeus, voices a position similar to Erasmus that there is no harm in discussing things that are non-essential,[167] the discussion of the seven does not stop there, but well extends to what are the essential beliefs of each of them. Remer writes:*'Unlike Erasmus's dialogues on doctrinal adiaphora, the conversations in Bodin's* Colloquium *revolve around the fundamentals of faith and there is no consensus among the interlocutors about the fundamentals.'* (Remer 1994:324)

Another parallel of sorts to the Erasmus-Luther exchange is the quoting of scripture and scriptural authorities in the *Colloquium*, the striking difference being of course that each speaker cites their own authorities and thus provides reasons, arguments and proofs within their respective frame of reference only. Although the Jewish character's word seems to carry particular weight, as does the deist's, it is impossible to construe the *Colloquium* to present the case of any one of the seven participating world views.[168]

In presenting the different issues, Bodin shows himself to be an avid compiler of the various positions taken by the respective faiths rather than a literary genius, as the discussion covers a vast range of issues, but moves at times rather abruptly from one topic to the next. This is, on the other hand, not out of line with the overall character of the *Colloquium*, as no solution of any kind seems to be intended or aimed at. Rather, contradictions are not only left unresolved, but no effort is made to smooth over or soften the differences. For instance, Toralba complains about the fighting and disagreements between and within the various religions and concludes: 'Since these things are so, is it not better to embrace that most simple and most ancient and at the

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[166] This is true in two ways: Firstly, none of the disputants seems to ever concern themselves with hedging statements, i.e. trying to present their position in a less assertive manner so as not to provoke conflict. And secondly, the opinions voiced about other religions are at times rather belligerent. Although overall the conduct of the parties in the discussion is quite civil, at times a rather problematic tone is manifest. To illustrate this point, here is an example: Fridericus, the Lutheran, says the following in response to something Octavius, the Muslim, has said: *'Indeed, that is the most destructive fiction of that **most filthy Mohammed**: namely that [...]'* (Bodin 1975:305; my emphasis)

[167] Seamus, the sceptic, says; *'I have learned from the Roman pontiffs that no one is a heretic who defends one or the other opinion as is pleasing, from among two or more opinions of learned men which are at variance about religion'* to which Coronaeus, the Catholic, replies: *'Indeed, I agree, if the discussion is about indifferent things, but I do not agree if the discussion is about a keypoint of religion or about principles of faith.'* (Bodin 1975:461)

[168] Cf. Faltenbacher. (Faltenbacher 1988:48)

same time most true religion of nature [...]?' (Bodin 1975:462)[169] The participants in the colloquium also discuss how rituals are necessary for the common men to relate to religion, whereas they are superfluous for more intellectually inclined believers. There is a certain consensus on this point, but Salomon, the Jewish character, is not hesitant to declare his religion to be superior in this regard to all others: 'The Jews perform only the ceremonies of divine law, not those devised by the will of men, with the worship of the true eternal God so that they easily hold the souls of the common people as well as of the educated in duty without any sacrifices.' (Bodin 1975:463) As a direct response Coronaeus, the Catholic, claims superiority for his religion: 'I believe that the Roman pontiffs have handed down the true Religion to posterity in a continuous line from Christ, true God, and the most holy apostles and the disciples, and that they protect with constant faith the splendour and honor of their worthiness among the shattered remains of heretics, Jews, and Turks, Pagans, and Epicureans.' (Bodin 1975:463)

At the same time, the participants in the discussions do not talk past each other. They follow common themes and take similar or dissimilar stances in changing alliances on various points[170]. Still, arguing across their divergent frames of reference proves difficult. This is not always apparent, because the religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam share a common historical context. However, when it comes to the epistemological issue of ultimate reasons, they are simply different frames of references. What looks like agreeing and disagreeing represents, from an epistemological point of view, merely a similarity on the level of linguistic expression, because the reasons for or against a certain position are different for each of the seven, especially when traced through the causal chain down to the ultimate justificatory foundation.

The author of the *Colloquium* seems to be well aware of this, because there is hardly any language of agreeing and disagreeing in the text and the exchanges between the seven disputants that comment rather than state are more than anything else literary devices to keep the text flowing. Also, Bodin does not present a final

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[169] This and the following examples are from the last pages of the book and thus carry additional weight in that they occupy the space that in a text, literary or otherwise, is usually reserved for the conclusion or the moral of what has been presented before.

[170] Such themes that cut across religious traditions are for instance the question whether prayer for the deceased will influence their situation in the beyond, (Bodin 1975:459) or whether it is acceptable to profess publicly to something one does not privately subscribe to. (Bodin 1975:235) These are but two examples; the list could be continued extensively, as the more than 450 pages provide the seven wise men with ample space to discuss very many issues indeed.

conclusion in the end, or even a concluding comprehensive summary of each position so as to leave it up to the reader to 'see' among them the one true religion – again, agreeing or disagreeing does not feature here.

The various frames of references are evidently at work in the text. For instance, in the discussion on the efficacy of prayer for the dead there is a section where Coronaeus, the Catholic, engages with Fredericus, the Lutheran, and Curtius, the Calvinist, on the topic. Coronaeus cites verse 12:44 from 2 Maccabees as support for his claim that the dead benefit from intercessory prayer. 2 Maccabees is a so called deuterocanonical book, i.e. a book of the Old Testament that is not part of the Hebrew Bible. While deuterocanonical books are considered canonical by the Catholic Church (and Eastern Christianity), most Protestant Churches consider them acanoncial. Consequentially, Fridericus and Curtius reject Coronaeus' claim by pointing out that Maccabees is considered *'apocrypa, and the most holy decrees of the Council of Laodicea repudiated them.'* (Bodin 1975:460) In epistemological terms Coronaeus offered evidence for a claim he had made. Fridericus and Curtius do not re-interpret the cited passage or offer counter-arguments, but they reject the frame of reference within which Coronaeus' evidence 'makes sense' or works as evidence. Another instance occurs between Salomon and Coroneus. Salomon rejects the Gospels of the New Testament and Coroneus replies: *'If you reject the evangelical testimonies, it is as if you denied the principles of the sciences, without which not even the geometricians will have any proof.'* (Bodin 1975:292)

A most interesting feature of the discourse (and I will return to it later again), is that there are instances where one person demands coherence from another not within their own, but within the other person's frame of reference. Thus Coronaeus, the Catholic, asks Salomon, the Jew:

> If the prayers of the living do not help the dead in any way, why do the Jews, as they carry their dead to the tombs, sing their own "laying in" song, in which they use these words: "May the Spirit of the Lord make N. rest in the garden of Eden in peace, him and all the dead Isrealites."? (Bodin 1975:460)

This is not reasoning across divergent frames of references, but the speaker puts himself, as it were, in the position of his dialogue partner. In the above case the speaker believes to detect an inconsistency in the stance his respondent takes and appeals to him to clarify or revise his position. There are numerous instances of this

sort within the more than 400 pages of the *Colloquium*. As all participants are erudite theologians, they are aware of many aspects within each other's systems of religious doctrines, and are thus quite equipped to 'project themselves' into the respective other religious frame of reference. In fact, besides reasoning within their own system of doctrines and thus offering them as a frame of reference to step into, this 'projecting themselves into their dialogue partner's frame of reference,' in order to point out difficulties inherent in them, becomes their main form of relating to what their partners in dialogue are saying.

Having presented the relevant characteristics of the dialogue of Bodin's Colloquium, I will, in the next section, draw out the implications of such dialogue and defend my understanding of it against other readings. This will lead to a further clarification of the nature of the Colloquium's dialogue. In doing so I will once again draw on Wittgenstein, this time on his distinction between saying and showing, or between being say-able and showing itself.

a. *Frames of reference in the Colloquium examined*

I contend that this is what the *Colloquium* demonstrates: Firstly, reasoning across the epistemological boundaries of a religion is not possible; but secondly, there can still be discussion about religious truth among people of different faiths, if sound reasoning is demanded from a speaker, whereby 'sound' is defined by that speaker's own frame of reference. Each of the participants in the discussion will thus reason according to their own religion and insist on the outcomes of such reasoning. When relating to the other, they have only two choices: reject the other frame of reference and offer their own as an alternative. Or they can 'step into' the frame of reference of the other and demand sound reasoning from within that projected position. The criteria for soundness are valid across all frames of reference as they are part of the very notion of rationality, such as coherence, plausibility, deduction from already established truths, freedom from contradiction, relevance and possibly confirmation through practical testing.

Remer disagrees with my point of view. He sees manifest in the *Colloquium* a different kind of understanding of truth. Whereas he calls the truth conception underlying the discussion between Luther and Erasmus *'monistic'* (Remer 1994:308), truth in the *Colloquium* is supposedly *'multifaceted'*: *'The speakers do not agree on the truth because truth – especially religious truth – is complex, and*

each speaker represents a different facet of that multifaceted truth.' (Remer 1994:305) This interpretation, however, does not follow from the text at all, but is imposed in an attempt to find sense in a dialogue that ends without result. For the speakers in the text, truth is just as monistic as it was for Erasmus or Luther. For instance, Coroneus says: *'[H]ow is it possible to defend the religions of all at the same time, that is, to confess or believe that Christ is God and to deny that He is God, that He has been overcome by death and snatched from torment, that bread becomes God, and does not become God [...].'*[171] (Bodin 1975:465) Octavius, the Muslim, rejects the authority of the Gospels of the New Testament on the grounds that they contradict each other. He says: *'It is impossible that there is more than one thing which is true; therefore the others are false.'*[172] (Bodin 1975:292) Seamus, the sceptic says: *'With such a large number of religions before us, perhaps, it is possible that none of these is the true religion; on the other hand, it is not possible that more than one of these is true.'* (Bodin 1975:154)

Faltenbacher, on the other hand, agrees with me. He says that in the conclusion of the *Colloquium* in Book VI the statements of the seven *'persist, as it were, irreconcilably alongside each other'*[173] and that this is in line with the character of the entire *Colloquium*. (Faltenbacher 1988:97) The text ends stating that the seven *'held no other conversation about religions, although each one defended his own religion with the supreme sanctity of his life.'* (Bodin 1975:471) This holding fast to one's own convictions and the giving-up of dialogue after the colloquium had ended has been interpreted to signify a failure of the enterprise to have discussions about religious truth between adherents of different religious traditions.[174]

However, there is indeed another aspect there that Remer draws on when concluding that the Colloquium promotes a view of religious truth being multifaceted, although his inference, or at least the stating of this inference, is still

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[171] In response, Seamus, who seemed to have proposed a 'multifaceted view of truth' of the kind Remer does, defends his position by quoting Paul I Cor.9:20-21: *'I have become a Jew to the Jews, a Gentile to the Gentiles [...]'*. Regardless of the validity or invalidity of this argument and the persuasive force of this quote or lack thereof, this is another example of the speaker adopting a position projected into the frame of reference of the partner in dialogue.

[172] Octavius being Muslim, but responding to a Christian, goes on to cite Augustine, a religious authority in the Christian Church, to substantiate his verdict. Yet another example of what I called above 'adopting a position projected into the frame of reference of the partner in dialogue.' Cf. 3.7 above.

[173] My translation. In the original, this quote reads: *'quasi unversöhnlich nebeneinander bestehen bleiben.'*

[174] For instance by Skinner, Lecler, and Roellenbleck, all of which are cited by Remer. (Remer 1994:323)

mistaken. This other aspect is what Faltenbacher calls 'the second ending,' namely that the disputants leave each other on a surprisingly civil note, given their rather unyielding habitus and at times confrontational tone during the discussions. Bodin even says that the seven in parting '*embraced each other in brotherly love*.' (Bodin 1975:471). This seems to at least hint at the possibility of agreement between them, and the seven do indeed agree on certain views. Despite their unchanged opinion about the superiority of their own religious teachings, they all agree that a) faith cannot be forced but has to come of its own accord (Bodin 1975:169, 468ff.), b) that rites and ceremonies are necessary only for the common people, c) for such common people discussion of faith like the one the seven just held are unwholesome and to be avoided lest they confuse them and cause them to lose faith. (Bodin 1975:165ff) Does that mean that the seven do, after all, share a common frame of reference; does it mean they have transcended the frames of reference constituted by the teachings of their respective traditions, much in a way as the modern day pluralist John Hick has done, thus rationalising and essentially invalidating the axiomatic status of the core beliefs of their religious traditions?[175] This is the position Benz takes. (Benz 1934) Since many of his objections against the kind of dialogue the *Colloquium* presents, are also raised against some forms of interfaith dialogue today, I will discuss them in the following. This will also serve to further elucidate the careful construction of the dialogue in the *Colloquium* by Bodin.

b. The Colloquium – a hidden frame of reference? Walking the philosophical tightrope.

Benz' article (Benz 1934) raises issues that are pertinent to how the basic character of a religion as an epistemologically closed frame of reference may play out in an interfaith dialogue situation. Although I will argue that Benz' critique ultimately misses the mark in regard to the *Colloquium*, the points he makes are surprisingly astute in regard to a lot of contemporary interfaith dialogue philosophy.

Like Remer, Benz reads the *Colloquium* as the construction of successful philosophical interfaith dialogue.[176] However, unlike Remer, he disputes the usefulness of this kind of dialogue, because he considers the success a false one, because it is bought at the expense of the authenticity of the religious confessions of

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[175] Cf. 1.3 and 2.4.5
[176] For examples of readings of the Colloquium as unsuccessful dialogue cf. Remer 1994: 323.

the seven disputants; or to use a medical simile: the operation is successful, but leaves the patient dead.

Benz' argument is that the seven participants in the *Colloquium* do indeed share a common frame of reference which enables them to hold the kind of discussion Bodin describes. This shared frame of reference, Benz argues, is their commitment to the humanist educational ideal. (Benz 1934:550) The seven embody, according to Benz, a new form of life[177] that is shaped by humanist education. They all use the same language (Latin), they know the same canon of literature, share the same way of life, and cultivate the same manners.

The first problem with this Humanist frame of reference is that it is elitist. It cannot claim universal validity, as Benz caustically points out, simply on the grounds that not everyone can afford it: '*You cannot be a real Humanist without a pension of at least one thousand Sequins and no obligation to work.*'[178] (Benz 1934:547) Indeed, it is difficult to see how the standard of education set by the colloquium's participants can possibly be expected of every, or even of a large number of, believers. Also the leisurely forum of discussion will appeal only to people whose basic needs of food, shelter, and health are securely met, a situation the so called first world is perhaps closer to today, than Bodin's society was in the 16th century. Conceding that Benz' point is a valid one in general, it is still fighting a straw man in regard to the *Colloquium*. The seven participants in the colloquium already agreed that the kind of discussions they are engaged in are not recommendable for the mass of believers. (Bodin 1975:165ff), because they would not be able to handle the challenges the way the seven are able to. Of course, this does not make it any less elitist, and a practical programme for philosophical interfaith dialogue, as is the project of this thesis, will have to look into this issue carefully. Still, the *Colloquium* does not want to present a form of dialogue that is open to everyone, and thus reproaches of elitism seem somewhat misplaced. In any case, elitism does not in itself disprove the possibility of philosophical interfaith dialogue.

But Benz' objections go further. His actual criticism is that this new frame of reference does not deliver what Benz alleges it promises, namely an impartial standard against which to measure the various religions and world views represented in the *Colloquium*. Instead of the Humanist frame of reference being somehow

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[177] Benz uses here the German term 'Lebensform' – the same term Wittgenstein employs.
[178] My translation. The German original reads: '*Unter tausend Zechinen arbeitsfreier Rente kann man kein wirklicher Humanist sein.*'

superimposed on all others, it simply replaces them. Benz says: '[*The seven*] *have long lost their awareness of the exclusivity of their respective faiths,*'[179] (Benz 1934:550) and that the mutually exclusive claims of their confessions have become irrelevant to them.[180] (Benz 1934:551) Benz makes out three components of the Humanist frame of reference, which he argues enables the participants to hold the kind of amicable discussions they do, but which at the same time estranges them from the heart of their respective religious traditions.[181] They are the following: Firstly, from the humanist point of view, all religions are conditioned by the culture in which they manifest. (Benz 1934:568) Consequently all positive religions would be '*on a par; they are reflections, images, veilings, historical manifestations, which express the eternal personal connection between God and the soul.*'[182] (Benz 1934:543) Secondly, Benz argues, the seven employ a concept of symbolism in understanding their religious doctrines that enables them to understand essential historical revelation as symbols, such as the Last Supper. Religion thus becomes a matter of inwardness and spirituality. (Benz 1934:568f) Thirdly, all seven agree that the ultimate organisational or administrative unit of all humans is the state, within which all religions are situated on an equal level. '*Practically,*' Benz writes, '*this means the goal of all religious ethics is reduced to the preservation of public order.*'[183] (Benz 1934:569) Benz goes so far as to call this 'Preisgabe,' i.e. abandonment or betrayal of religious ethics. '*The characteristic historical claim and the characteristic form of life connected to the individual religions are abandoned and replaced by the concept of humanistic culture and the new, political ethics.*'[184] (Benz 1934:570)

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[179] My translation. The German original reads: '*Vertreter, in denen das Bewusstsein der Ausschließlichkeit ihres Glaubens längst gebrochen ist.*'

[180] My paraphrase. The German original reads: '*[Sie werden] durch die Gegensätze ihrer Glaubensbekenntnisse gar nicht mehr berührt.*'

[181] This is less true of Seamus, the sceptic, and Toralba, the deist, as their stance is more in the way of a Humanist philosophy of religion to begin with. Not surprisingly then, Benz critically remarks that it is unsound to treat their point of views on a par with religious doctrines, because while behind the latter there is a church and a claim to a historical revelation, the former are related to a 'merely' personal quest for truth. (Benz 1934:553f) This corresponds to the difference I pointed out in **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** between theology and philosophy (Seamus' and Toralba's position being philosophical rather than theological).

[182] My translation. The German original reads: ' *[alle] positiven Religionen [sind] auf einer Ebene der Betrachtung; sie sind Brechungen, Bilder, Verhüllungen, geschichtliche Kristallisationsformen, in der sich die ewige persönliche Berührung zwischen Gott und der menschlichen Seele äußert.*'

[183] My translation. The German original reads: '*Praktisch bedeutet das die Einengung des Zieles aller religiösen Ethik auf die Wahrung der öffentlichen Ordnung.*'

[184] My translation. The German original reads: '*Der eigentümliche geschichtliche Anspruch und die eigentümliche Lebensform der einzelnen Religionen ist preisgegeben und hat praktisch dem humanistischen Kulturbegriff und der neuen, politischen Ethik Platz gemacht.*'

It is easy to see how Benz' charges can be valid in a given situation. Again, they are astutely illustrative of the dangers of trying to reason across the boundaries of different frames of reference and the corrupted results such attempts deliver. As argued above (cf. 1.3 and 2.4.5), religions are such fundamental frames of reference that any attempt to create a meta-frame of reference will inevitably fail and lead to the construction of yet another 'same level' frame of reference that, instead of harmonising the various frames supposedly encompassed within it, merely ends up being in competition with them for the acceptance by followers,[185] who are hence not split up into believers of individual frames and religious scientists, so to speak, of the meta-frame, but are all believers on a par.[186] Yet, for all its astute perceptivity, I would like to argue that Benz' criticism is not justified in regard to the *Colloquium*. Looked at with, as it were, Wittgensteinian eyes, the *Colloquium* is quite skilfully walking the philosophical tightrope and manages to avoid the mistake of crossing essential boundaries.

Benz' accusation that every religious ethics is cheaply reduced to the maintenance of public order if the state is the ultimate organisational unit of a people is valid in extreme situations. In the case of a dictatorial state that, from its very set-up, pursues immoral goals and acts immorally while at the same time demanding absolute obedience from its citizens (as was indeed the situation where and when Benz wrote his article: Nazi Germany after Hitler had risen to power), it would indeed be wrong for a believer to subordinate his religiously inspired behavioural standards to the upkeep of public order. But in less extreme situations, there is less reason to object from a religious point of view to the state securing an arena defined by certain, more or less minimal, ethical norms that ensure the peaceful coexistence of believers of various faiths. The alternative scenario where people of faith pursue their respective religious ethics with no regard to people of other faiths is not limited

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[185]A pertinent example is the interfaith movement of the early 20th century and a good portion of its contemporary hereditary with its ideology of pluralism (cf. 2.4.5 and 3.6) – a version of which Benz sees (wrongly, I believe) presented in the *Colloquium*.

[186] Of course I am articulating a rather static picture here (since my aim is to lay out the epistemological parameters of the interfaith dialogue situation, and specifically so in reference to the *Colloquium*). But faith is dynamic and may change and individuals may amend their religious beliefs and practices. But there is a decisive societal aspect (the parallel here is Wittgenstein's argument against the existence of private languages) and on that level changes can only be made by those who have the authority to do so: church or community leaders, members of institutional bodies, possibly theologians. A phenomenon in the traditional interfaith dialogue movement seems to be that a lot of those changes and amendments are made without institutional or societal /community backing. Forward confirms this view. (Forward 2002:46) Cf. also his assessment of perennial philosophy. (Forward 2002:45–46)

to religiously motivated strife within society, but easily extends to (civil) war, a thoroughly undesirable option for Bodin, who witnessed the religious wars in France, and, it is safe to assume, a likewise undesirable option for most people in the UK today. Benz himself acknowledges that it is historical experience that brings the seven to accept the primary role of the state within society.[187] In the specific case of *philosophical* interfaith dialogue there is a further argument against the validity of Benz' objection that submitting to the political framework set by the nation state would in itself mean abandoning one's religious ethics. This argument is that philosophical dialogue can be separated from the political sphere to a considerable degree. Philosophy being a reflection on categories, how they relate to the individual in a given situation and what imperatives follow, philosophical interfaith dialogue would be a dialogue about ethics, and not yet acting out the ethics in society. Though each religious community might want to implement as much as possible of their given ethics within the nation state, achieving this might be best done via political means, such as negotiation and diplomacy. To take that route may just be the most prudent thing to do and does not compromise one's religious ethics, but rather makes it as effective as possible.[188]

The other two objections Benz lodges are weightier. To recapitulate, they were that the seven agree with each other on the basis of a) a humanist understanding of religion that sees it as conditioned by culture, and, related to it, b) a symbolism that allows them to interpret ritual and practices that have traditionally been understood to be revealed as metaphorical or symbolic. If Benz' argument holds, then indeed the humanist frame of reference would have replaced the 'native' religions of the seven, and it is clear that this would indeed have rendered the dialogue perhaps not useless, but certainly not inter-faith (all of the participants belonging to the Humanist creed). The discussions of the Colloquium would be 'preaching to the choir,' and the agreement Benz imputes to the Colloquium would be a rather cheap one indeed.

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[187] Benz says that the ideal of humanist education as it is embodied by the seven draws on a certain basic attitude that originates in a '*resignation in regard to the dogmatic differences after half a century of European religious wars.*' (My translation; the original reads: '*Ermattung der dogmatischen Gegensätze nach einem halben Jahrhundert der europäischen Religionskriege.*') (Benz 1934:551)

[188] Even more specifically, in regard to the project of this thesis, namely interfaith dialogue in a higher education environment, both the thesis itself and the projected target group of students are part of the academic sphere in the religiously plural state of the UK and as such are bound by its rules. This thesis can therefore build on the view that a secular state setting certain minimal standards to maintain public order is desirable without having to provide elaborate arguments for it.

However, Benz' argument does not hold, simply because there is no agreement in the *Colloquium*.[189]

Benz bases his argument that these two reasons lead to humanist pluralism on the observation that the participants of the colloquium do not run away from the talks. (Benz 1934:552) He thinks it is absurd that the disputants continue with the talks, when one of them has just put the teachings of their religion on a certain issue before the others and expecting neither agreement nor discussion ends with saying '*My religions teaches thus.*' In order to explain the continuance of the dialogues, Benz sees himself forced to assume a tacit agreement between the participants of the colloquium. The notion of 'tacit' is a decisive one though, because there is no explicit agreement at all. Quite the contrary, there are many situations of intense disagreement, as Benz himself admits. (Benz 1934:552) Two distinct but related questions present themselves at this point in my argument: Firstly, can there be other reasons for not running away from the dialogues? And secondly, is this presumably 'tacit' agreement really a particularly hideous form of cheating, as Benz seems to think, or does it rather indicate a careful avoidance of crossing essential boundaries?

As to the first question, there may be other reasons for not running away.[190] Mere politeness is an option, even if the talks do not seem particularly polite. Or, as Remer argues, the participants of the colloquium might see benefit in understanding their own religion better in the process of defending it in the face of alternative worldviews.[191] Or, as it is a literary text, because the author just wanted to bring the contrasting comparison between their religions and worldviews to an exhaustive completion.[192]

The second question is the more interesting here. Is there a tacit humanist agreement between the participants of the colloquium? I would like to argue that this is not the case. Instead, what is manifest is awareness, by each of the individuals, of the epistemological situation they are in, in respect to the dialogues, awareness of the epistemological, i.e. structural, parity of their respective frames of references.

Such awareness requires an outsider's perspective, but this is not the same as a pluralist perspective. To acknowledge the epistemological parity of several frames of

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[189] Faltenbacher also states that the quasi-final statements of each of the seven are left standing unresolved. (Faltenbacher 1988:43, 97)

[190] Benz himself speaks about an attitude of resignation prevalent in the *Colloquium*. (Cf. footnote 50 above). This could also be a reason for not 'running away.'

[191] This is a thought I will come back to later on in this thesis: cf. 6.8.3.

[192] Although, in this case, Benz would argue that the *Colloquium* is a bad piece of literature.

references means to make a statement about the form of those frames. It would be a distinct further step to move from such an acknowledgement of structural parity to the rationalisation of the axiomatic beliefs of one's own religious tradition, a step that pluralist philosophers take, but the seven of the colloquium clearly do not.[193] Although their discussions reveal the epistemological side-by-side-ness of the seven worldviews, no attempt is made to construct from there a meta-frame that would make content statements about religious truth. Seamus, for instance, says: '*I think those discussions will come to nothing. For who will be the arbiter of such a controversy?*' (Bodin 1975:170) Following this statement various options are offered of what could act as a common standard against which to measure the truth of religious doctrines: Christ, the Church, the Divine Law and the Holy Scripture, but all are recognised to fall within separate frames of reference and thus as being unfit to act as ultimate truth criteria across religious boundaries.

This demonstrates that another religion can only be either only be not judged at all or judged from within one's own frame of reference, i.e. from the viewpoint of one's own religion. Although this is commonly shunned as a great faux-pas in interfaith dialogue circles, it is in fact the only proper way to relate to another religion in a judging manner.[194]

By 'judging' I do not mean judgemental, but judging in the sense of assessing something as to its validity, truth and relevance for one's own beliefs and practices (something that is unavoidable for a reflective practitioner). Of course, one can withhold or suspend judgement. This is a valuable strategy in understanding the religious other in their own terms. But eventually a practitioner will be more or less forced to form some kind of judgement about which religious frame of reference to follow and if no conversion takes place, this will be one's own religion's. What is likely is that one's behaviour towards a person of that other faith will then be less adjudging having seen the internal validity of the other's religious frame of

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[193] The theoreticians of Scriptural Reasoning (cf. 2.5.3) also do not take this second step. Nicholas Adams, being one of them, writes: '*Scriptural Reasoning does not try to ground its own possibility. Its attempts at theory (such as this essay) are not attempts to explain how it is possible, but more modestly and usefully to describe its practices in an ordered way.*' (Adams 2006:385)

[194] Judging is usually seen as a sign of disrespect and this may be true if one does not, at the same time, see the epistemological parity of the judged's position vis-à-vis one's own. But perhaps the grand gesture of not judging is more often than not motivated by what Benz astutely calls 'Ghettoising the religiously other' (Benz 1934:542), because this supposed respect for differing opinions allows one to conveniently relegate them to irrelevancy. I do not see the seven of the colloquium to be guilty of such ghettoising; the intensity of their debate proves otherwise.

reference, and this, in my view accounts for the amicable behaviour of the seven on their departure.[195]

Thus respecting the boundaries of their epistemological reach, the seven participants in the dialogues of the *Colloquium* are left with presenting the internal qualities of their respective frames of reference. They try to demonstrate the soundness of their religion by showing how its teachings are coherent, free from contradictions, and overall plausible, i.e. not strictly provable (because that would require an overarching frame of reference, a meta-frame, that cannot exist) but in its practical application so successful as to suggest its truth. When they argue against another's frame of reference, they do so without stepping out of existing frames of references: Either they argue from within their own frame of reference and try to show how it is more plausible or superior in coherence. Or they critique the teachings of the other internally from within that other's frame of reference by showing how there are inconsistencies between statements.

Thus the discussions of the seven thus show in which way interfaith dialogue about religious truth is possible, despite conceptualising each religion as a separate frame of reference. Admittedly, the discussions of the seven are not easy to emulate for non-specialist lay believers, for they require an in-depth knowledge of one's own, but also of one's dialogue partner's religious tradition. Furthermore, such a theoretically inclined dialogue may not do justice to what is at the core of faith. The category of 'life', or personal experiences, does not feature in any major way.[196] Thus the actual discussions of the seven in the *Colloquium* may be difficult to relate to for and be rather irrelevant to an individual believer today. In creating an interfaith dialogue programme for non-theologians in a higher education context, these issues must be dealt with and the *Colloquium* is, in these respects, not a useful model. But the purpose of the investigation in this chapter has been to draw out the epistemological situation of philosophical interfaith dialogue and the *Colloquium*, in this respect, is, I suggest, a good example of philosophical interfaith dialogue with integrity. By not creating a meta-theory into which the convictions and beliefs of the seven would be assimilated, Bodin skilfully manages to avoid crossing

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[195] This corresponds to the second ending of Faltenbacher's notion of the *Colloquium*'s 'two endings', the first ending being the unresolved doctrinal differences. (Faltenbacher 1988:97/98)

[196] Although there is one, almost ironic, hint in the *Colloquium* that refers to the ultimate test of 'whether a religion works in practice': At one point, Coronaeus, the host, has apples served at the table. Among them are artificial ones that are indistinguishable from the real ones – until one tries to eat them. (Bodin 1975:233)

epistemological boundaries that would compromise the identity of any of the seven as being a follower of their particular world view or religion. At the same time, Bodin, as it were, parades the various viewpoints in front of the reader's mind in order for him to see their epistemological parity.[197]

3.9   Conclusion and Summary

This third chapter has been devoted to discussing the epistemological nature of theologies or religious doctrines. I suggested, and have tried to reason for the view, that they operate epistemologically as frames of reference, i.e. meaning (and hence also truth) is established within a religious tradition not only through reference to an empirical reality, but primarily through recourse to a network of already established meanings. Axiomatic sources of truth may include revelation of some sort or other established authority within the religious community. To reason about the implications of religions operating epistemologically as frames of reference, I used Wittgenstein's concept of language games. The result of the discussion has been that (philosophical) understanding is quite possible across religions, but reasoning for the truth and validity of certain teachings is not. Understanding is possible, because one can 'project' oneself, as it were, into the other's religious frame of reference and understand the internal workings of that system of meaning. However, reasoning for the truth and validity of certain teachings is not possible cross-religiously, because meaning and hence truth and validity are established internally in each frame of reference and no common standard on which to judge truth across religions can be established. Attempts to do so end up creating a new frame of reference that is on a par with the ones it attempted to synthesise, because religious meaning is at the same time so fundamental and in its claim so all-encompassing that it leaves no room for meta-theory. To harmonise the various conflicting axiomatic beliefs of different religions would mean to strip them of their axiomatic nature. Finally, the last part of this chapter has been devoted to illustrate how religions' epistemological nature as frames of reference manifests in situations of interfaith communication using the

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[197] Of course, one can argue that one view point presented in the Colloquium is epistemologically superior to another, because it meets the rational criteria of freedom from contradiction better, or because it better resonates with one's own life experiences. Far from defeating my argument that the Colloquium shows the epistemological parity of the points of view presented, this very possibility is proof that no decision is made in the Colloquium itself.

debate between Luther and Erasamus of Rotterdam on the one hand and Bodin's *Colloquium of the Seven About Secrets of the Sublime* on the other.

Although the answer to the original question whether truth can be agreed on cross-religiously is a 'no', that does not mean that it would be a worthless enterprise to do what *is* possible: It is possible to discuss and argue for the truth and validity of religious teachings *within* the framework of one religious tradition. It is also possible to engage in these discussions with participants from different religions at the same time. The restriction is that the participants would have to empathically participate in the frame of reference of the religion whose teachings are discussed. They would apply the accepted truth criteria of philosophical discourse (such as freedom from contradiction, coherence, etc.) within this frame only and would not demand from the other congruence or coherence with their own religious doctrines.

Adhering to these restrictions in the philosophical discourse, instead of limiting the discussions, may actually have a liberating effect. Freed from the impositions of having to strive for an agreement, and freed from the conflict of having to compromise one's religious integrity in the process of doing so, the discussion is likely to be philosophically sounder and more satisfying to the participants.

However, a serious limitation of the insights gained thus far is that they hinge on the condition that all religious traditions do indeed have an element of 'religious teachings' or doctrines with its distinct character of axiomatic beliefs pre-defining the frame of reference they thus constitute. But do all religions provide within themselves for a system of reasoning? In other words, is the epistemological description of religious teachings as theologies that are defined by axiomatic beliefs really a universal element in all religions? These questions are addressed in the next chapter.

4 Removing the theological bias: tradition-to-life philosophising

4.1 Introduction

The history of the interfaith movement as narrated and analysed in chapter 2 revealed, I argued, a confusion of mainly three kinds of discourses: political, theological, and academic. The purpose of chapter 3, then, was to 'separate out' the theological discourse about religious truth, because this is the discourse the thesis wants to engage with, as the predicate 'philosophical' qualifying the notion of 'interfaith dialogue' in the title indicates. Separating truth discourse from other discourses and determining its suitability for interfaith dialogue has meant to clarify the epistemological nature of a system of 'religious teachings' or 'doctrines' or 'theology' and to lay open the consequences this nature has for the possibility of interfaith dialogue about religious truth. I argued that respecting the form of theologies as epistemologically more or less closed frames of reference defined by a set of axiomatically true beliefs, requires that one does not rationalise those beliefs or strip them of their axiomatic character.

Consequently, it is *not* possible to reason about religious truth across the boundaries of religious traditions, because the justificatory processes take recourse to, and are situated within, the respective fames of reference out of which the teaching or the theology arises.

The picture I presented in chapter 3 of theologies or religious doctrines being closed frames of reference is, I have admitted there already, a rather generalised portrait of the situation. This is necessary, because the interfaith programme toward the design of which this thesis argues, is to include believers from any and all religious traditions. Thus I am looking here for a minimum consensus to which all possible religions would be able to agree rather than sounding out all the possibilities that exist between the various pairings of theologies. I am making no claim as to whether two specific theologies, perhaps historically related, would under certain favourable conditions be less closed to each other when experts of both traditions were to discuss religious truths, although I remain doubtful about such an enterprise, considering the complex nature of religious teachings as embedded in a specific community with specific hierarchical structures of authority. I am also not saying that individual believers could not rationalise the axiomatic truths of their religions and thus arrive at a shared stance that puts them *epistemologically* outside their

respective religious tradition while they continue to be in all other respects (practice, social belonging) situated within their community, as religions are more than just teachings or theologies. In fact, I do not make any claims about the reality of interfaith dialogue at the grass roots level of communities, but I speak strictly from an epistemological position.

From this position, interfaith dialogue about religious truth across the boundaries of religions is not possible. It is possible, however, for people of different faiths to project themselves into the frame of reference that another religion constitutes and become hypothetical participants in that frame, i.e. to reason and to discuss religious truths within their 'native' setting. Although this is not philosophical interfaith dialogue across religious boundaries, it still is philosophical interfaith dialogue in the sense that people of different religions participate in it.

Thus chapter 3 has clarified the character of the truth discourse and determined its implications in relation to interfaith dialogue. However, I have not yet moved beyond the Christian, or possibly Abrahamic, faith bias that I also pointed out in chapter 2 as a problem of historical interfaith dialogue practice, because it is essentially from this setting that the notion of theology as a set of religious teachings or doctrines has evolved. I have stated above that the interfaith dialogue programme toward which this thesis argues is to include believers from any and all religions – but do any and all religions manifest the aspect of theology in the way I described in chapter 3? Do all religions indeed have a set of doctrines that rest on axiomatic propositions?

I have also not yet moved beyond the rather elitist requirements made of potential participants in theological/philosophical interfaith dialogue, even in the limited sense of not reasoning across religious boundaries, but only within established frames of references through (hypothetical or native) inhabitation. Many lay believers would not be able to contribute to such discussions for a lack of knowledge and/or confidence.

The task of this chapter is, then, firstly to discuss definitions or descriptions of religion and to ascertain whether such an aspect of doctrines is indeed universal to all religions and if so in which way. Here the argument moves away from a purely epistemological perspective and considers definitions derived from empirical study. Secondly this chapter is also to ascertain how such an element of 'teachings', if it is

universal to religions, is accessible to non-specialist lay believers, because such is the target audience for the projected interfaith dialogue programme.

I will cast the central question of this chapter, namely 'Do all religions have an element of religious teachings or theology?' in the alternative formulation of: 'Is a philosophical approach possible to all religions?' where 'philosophical' is understood to be subordinated to the form of theology. (Cf. 1.4) This is helpful, because the focus is not just on whether such teachings exist, but whether the activity of reasoning that they bring about is applicable within the context of all religions. As a result of the discussion in this chapter I will propose that although religious doctrines of the kind discussed so far cannot be assumed to exist in all religions, the situation of a believer does by necessity involve a certain kind of reasoning that is structurally similar to the reasoning theology facilitates. I will call this different kind of reasoning 'tradition-to-life negotiation' and I will further argue that because of the structural similarity between theology and tradition-to-life negotiation, the conclusions of chapter 3 about the limitations on the possibility of philosophical interfaith dialogue remain valid as they can be mapped from the first onto the latter. The language of 'philosophical approach to religion' encompasses both, theology as a system of religious teachings and the tradition-to-life negotiation. I therefore find it economical to use that broader concept in delineating the issue.

4.2   Approaching a definition of religion

I argue that there are some concepts of religion that are more justified than others to be considered in determining whether philosophical interfaith dialogue is possible. In the following I will first discuss which kinds of perspectives on religion are systematically possible. I will then determine which ones of these approaches to religion are suitable to use in the context of interfaith dialogue. Finally, I will look at two definitions or descriptions of religion that have been proposed historically in the study of religions and examine them for their compatibility with a philosophical approach. Many approaches to religion have been advanced in the past. They are too numerous to even attempt to trace them through the history of ideas and assess them here. However a simple, systematic distinction is useful: Approaches to religion can be divided into two kinds, *interpretive* and *explanatory*. This is not to claim that

every approach to religion historically undertaken necessarily falls purely into one or the other category; certain mixtures are possible. But interpretation and explanation are two elements that can be usefully distinguished.

With Lawson and McCauley I understand an explanatory approach to relate to *causal relations* and an interpretive approach to be concerned with *questions of meaning* (1993:12–31) The explanatory approach's typical mode of investigation is embodied by the physical sciences. It looks for objective facts and, in relation to human subjects (as perhaps in the social sciences), for the causes of their behaviour. The perspective it takes is decidedly an outsider's, or observer's, perspective.

An interpretive approach, on the other hand, looks not for a system of causes, as it were, but for a world of meaning. (1993:16) An interpretive approach holds that humans are subjects whose subjectivity is defined by networks of meanings. This subjectivity is inescapable even if they become the object of study, not only but also because the investigator and the investigation are similarly part of a network of meanings, and one which is not clearly distinct from the one studied. Geertz, for instance, puts it this way: '*[...] man is an animal suspended in a web of significance he himself has spun.*' (Geertz 2003:174) An interpretive approach thus takes account of the frameworks of value and subjectivity human thoughts and actions operate in. Its focus is, therefore, to explicate the meaning of those thoughts and actions. In other words, an interpretive approach attempts to first understand and then communicate an insider's perspective. The objectivity that an explanatory approach claims for itself is dubious from this point of view, because questions of meanings are reduced to causal relationships.[198] (Lawson and McCauley 1993:16)

Lawson and McCauley observe a debate between proponents of an interpretive approach and proponents of an explanatory approach about which method is generally appropriate or even at all possible for a given subject in the social sciences and humanities. They describe two exclusivist positions in the debate: i) those who think only an interpretive approach is possible and who consider the attempt of an explanatory approach fundamentally misguided. And ii) those who argue that all inquiry should be modelled after methods of the physical sciences and who think that although an interpretive approach is possible, it is unduly personal, subjective and ultimately irrelevant. A more inclusivist position, and one that is fairly common in

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[198] Therefore explanatory approaches may also be called 'reductionist'. (Turner 1991)

regard to religion, is one that admits both methods but subordinates explanation to interpretation. (1993:16)

For the purposes of this thesis, the question that presents itself is: In the context doing interfaith dialogue in such a way that takes seriously the truth claims of people of different faiths which they hold in regard to their beliefs and religious teachings, i.e. which subordinates the philosophical method of reasoning to the form of theology, which approach, or which degree of combination of approaches, is appropriate to understand 'religion'?

4.3 Interpretive vs. explanatory approaches to religion in the context of the thesis

An explanatory approach claims for itself an objective position from which it assesses and analyses the subject of its study. Such an outsiders' perspective in relation to religion has historically been taken for instance by David Hume[199], Edward Burnett Tyler, James Frazer, but also Sigmund Freud, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. The overall characteristic of their various anthropological (Tyler, Frazer), sceptical (Hume), psychoanalytical (Freud), or sociological (Weber, Durkheim) approaches is that a meta-theory is advanced as to how religions have come about and why people participate in them. The inner religious narratives about some transcendent origin and foundation are disregarded, or held to be in some way deficient, as valid models of explanation. Other than the immediate meaning of the term, 'explanatory' in this context refers to a material account that usually makes reference to evolution of some kind. It thus constructs a chain of material cause and effect for what followers of a particular religious tradition would commonly hold to be of divine origin.

Furthermore, explanatory approaches offer their meta-theories of religion not for a specific religious tradition or even a subgroup thereof, but speak of religion in general. They are thus able to create a framework of reference that is able to comprise more than one religion, or perhaps even all the religions or all possible religions. They construct a context of meaning within which different religious traditions can be related to each other.

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[199] Russell, Paul, "Hume on Religion", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/hume-religion/> (Retrieved 21/11/2012)

From the point of view of engaging people in interfaith dialogue, an explanatory approach to religion appears unhelpful. Explanatory meta-theories of religion do not build bridges between religious traditions, but place them altogether in an alternative frame of reference, one that is alien to their self-perception. (Cf. 3.5) They provide a language to talk *about* a plurality of religions, yet they do not facilitate religions talking with each other. It is therefore problematic to use a concept of religion based on an explanatory theory of religion for the purposes of this thesis. As outlined above, philosophical interfaith dialogue entails to take seriously the truth claims of people of different faiths which they hold in regard to their beliefs and religious teachings. Taking them seriously requires letting them speak for themselves.

Aside from the questions of whether philosophy is subordinated to the form of theology or not, such an understanding is also problematic from the point of view of philosophical discourse in itself. Since an explanatory account refers to material causes in the context of religion, it is structurally similar to the philosophically inadmissible argument ad persona, where, instead of addressing the validity of a philosophical argument, one partner in dialogue changes discourses and asks, for instance, for the psychological motivation of the other to pursue it. Thus, if used for interfaith dialogue, explanatory concepts of religion will lead to a problematic mix of discourses that obscures philosophical reasoning. A likely scenario to arise is that participants in interfaith dialogue cannot help but use an interpretive concept of their own religious tradition, but refer to an explanatory one for everyone else's.[200]

This suggests that it would be more appropriate to refer to a concept of religion that is derived from an interpretive approach in determining whether the philosophical method of rational discourse is possible for interfaith dialogue or not or whether there is a universal element of 'teachings' present.

It is not the case that interpretive approaches do not involve theory.[201] There might be and there are different theories of what a religion or what true religion is. What makes interpretive theories different from the theories an explanatory approach would typically advance, is that they take religion itself to be a genuine enterprise and argue from there how it is best to be understood. One example for a decidedly interpretive approach to religion is Mircea Eliade. He says:

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[200] See, for instance, W.C. Smith who warns of such a situation. (1991:42–43)

[201] There is also a more Weberian tradition in sociology which finds later expression in Geertz. I will not draw on this branch in the following as my approach is philosophical and less sociological.

> A religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied *as* something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false. It misses the one unique and irreducible element in it – the element of the sacred. (Quoted in Lawson and McCauley 1993:13. Emphasis in the original.)

This insider perspective comes at a price, however, because the resulting accounts of religion cannot claim general validity and are often even highly individualistic. Another concern related to an interpretive approach is that there is an inherent theological element, i.e. a, subtle or obvious, value judgement about what religion really is or should be. (Gabriel 1972) Such judgement is problematic, because it arises from within the normative framework of a particular religious tradition or from a viewpoint within a tradition. To apply it to other religious systems and practices violates the principle of letting them speak for themselves.

There is a third kind of approach to religion which has been undertaken in the history of the study of religions. Lawson and McCauley call it 'inclusivist interpretive approach'. It combines interpretive and explanatory elements, but explanation is subordinated to interpretation. (Lawson and McCauley 1993:18) It seems that such an approach would best ensure respect for the self-perception of religious people while offering some degree of general validity without being prejudiced toward a particular religious tradition. Such a combined approach is, however, not a true synthesis of both, but rather a balance struck between them. It offers a measure of the advantages of both approaches, without being able to completely eliminate the disadvantages of either one. Thus, it may be argued that there still is an element of theology inherent in them. As discussed in the introduction (cf. 1.4 b) and in chapter 3, my premise has been to subordinate philosophy – or any reasoning about religion and faith – to the form of theology. Hence I see such inclusivist interpretive approaches to be the most suitable of the available options. I will therefore take recourse to them when looking for a concept of religion against which to judge the universality of the element of 'teachings'.

4.4   Two kinds of inclusivist interpretive approaches to religion

Again, the scope of the thesis does not allow for an extensive overview of all the concepts of religion historically advanced, even after narrowing the material down to

inclusivist interpretive accounts. I will therefore draw one further systematic distinction and then discuss an example for each.

There are two possible strategies to define religion: Firstly by looking for an essence that is at the core of all instances of religion; and secondly by offering a grid of characteristics, as it were, which defines religion while particular instances of it will embody different characteristics to different degrees.

In the following I will first discuss Ninian Smart's phenomenological approach to religion as an example of the latter kind of definition and then move on to discuss Wilfred Cantwell Smith's account of religion as expressed mainly in his *Meaning and End of Religion* as an example of the former. I choose both of these authors mainly because they fit the systematic distinction I would like to draw, but also because both of them have not only worked on the topic of religious plurality and interfaith dialogue, but have also dealt with the philosophical questions of truth claims within that context. (Ward 1996:229)

4.4.1 A non-essentialist definition of religion: the phenomenological approach of Ninian Smart

The phenomenological approach did not originate with Ninian Smart; however he is an influential proponent and has contributed his own version of it. His conception of the dimensions of religion is foreshadowed in the thought of early proponents of a phenomenology of religion, like Chantepie and Kristensen, who believed in grouping religious manifestations and conceptions in order to subject them to philosophical analysis in an attempt to determine the 'meaning' of religious phenomena. This is done from an interpretive approach, seeking '*the meaning that religious phenomena have for the believers themselves.*'(James 1995:144) At the same time, Kristensen and, following him, van der Leeuw who was another prominent proponent of phenomenology of religion, both also posit that there is an essence of religion, to conceptualise which they appropriate Rudolf Otto's notion of 'the Sacred.' On the one hand, positing such an essence may be a necessary move to define what is going to be the subject of one's research. On the other hand, there is the danger of over-generalising traits that are really not shared by everything

commonly understood to be religion.[202] In this case, the interpretive approach breaks down and turns into an explanatory one, where concepts alien to a religious tradition are used to explain it in a meta-, or rather: external-theoretical way.

Although Smart had originally been indebted to Rudolf Otto as well (Smart 1958, cf. especially the preface) his phenomenological definition of religion is able to do without the notion of an essence and thus is less likely to create a meta- (or external) explanation.[203] Instead of an essence, Smart offers a grid of general characteristics which, taken together, create what he calls a 'portrait.' (Smart 1992:21) This grid consists of seven dimensions: the practical and ritual dimension; the experiential and emotional dimension; the narrative or mythic dimension; the doctrinal and philosophical dimension; the ethical and legal dimension; the social and institutional dimension; and the material dimension. (Smart 1992:12–21) A given religion, as an instantiation of the broader 'portrait' Smart offers, does not necessarily have to be fully developed in all dimensions, but will be sufficiently described by those in which it is to be classed as a religion. Thus religions, in this definition, are conceptually related to each other via family resemblances in the Wittgensteinian sense, i.e. akin to members of a family who share certain traits between them, but not necessarily everyone the same ones with everyone else. (Wittgenstein 1953:PI §67)

As a result, secular world views can also be portrayed by Smart's seven dimensions as he himself recognises, such as nationalism and Marxism. Smart concedes that it would be '*not really appropriate to call them religions [...] for they conceive of themselves, on the whole, as antireligious.*' But, he points out, they can '*be said to play in the same league*' as religions (Smart 1992:25) and that the line drawn between religions and atheist ideologies, according to his definition, is drawn somewhat arbitrarily (Smart 1992:507) This foreshadows the issue of who may take part in interfaith dialogue and whether non-religious or even anti-religious participants are allowable or desirable.

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[202] For instance Kristensen's research was limited to a very specific sector only; religions around the time of the origin of Christianity. His maintaining the concept of an essence of religion is thus perhaps based less on his actual fieldwork findings but was rather a philosophical preconception he brought to it. Even if all his research indeed revealed a shared core idea from which all the varied manifestations of religious phenomena he studied could be developed, to posit such an essence for all religions would still be a problematic generalisation.

[203] Smart's own critique of the idea of an essence of religion focuses on the phenomenological vagueness such a concept necessarily entails in order to be general enough to apply to all religions: '*The search for essence ends up in vagueness – for instance in the statement that a religion is some system of worship or other practice recognizing a transcendent Being or goal. Our problems break out again in trying to define the key term "transcendent."*' (Smart 1992:11)

As earlier phenomenologists of religion, Smart is not only concerned with the empirically observable manifestations of religious belief, but he wanted to also include as the subject of his study the aspect of their meaning to the believer. This is apparent in his inclusion of the 'parahistorical' dimensions of doctrine, myth and ethics in the definition of religion. Smart rejects Peter Berger's notion of 'methodological atheism', or 'flat neutralism' (Wiebe 2000:56) and instead maintains a position he calls methodological agnosticism. (Cox 2006:160) (Wiebe 2000:63) (Smart and Shepherd 2009:8) He defines this methodological agnosticism as '*a structured empathy or informed inwardness to bring out the nature of what we study*' (Smart and Shepherd 2009:156) and explains the difference to Berger's approach thus:

> [...] I did not suppose that 'reflections' about religion had to be neutral, but simply open and pluralist. My critique of Berger is important, for it deals with the whole problem of reductionism, the tendency to speak of a religious phenomenon as if it were the result of something other than religion itself, and hence not genuine. (Smart and Shepherd 2009:8–9)

Here it becomes clear in Smart's own words that his approach deliberately avoids explanatory accounts of religion. He takes religion(s) seriously in that he does not provide external explanations for the truth claims a religion makes. At the same time, as a religious studies scholar and not a theologian (a distinction the establishment of which is one of Smart's legacies, at least in the UK), he cannot endorse specific truth claims a particular religion may make. Hence, he stressed the practice of 'bracketing', or the withholding of judgement, in studying and understanding the believer's perspective. This practice of bracketing is often named epochē in the tradition of the classical academic and pyrrhonic Sceptics and, more recently, the philosopher Husserl.[204]

However, there is some ambiguity here, as one might wonder how much epochē is indeed applied if the approach in the end 'does not need to be neutral, but simply open and pluralist'? Donald Wiebe takes issue with Smart's methodological agnosticism because, as he says, it 'in fact implies endorsement, if not of a particular religion then of religion in general.' (Wiebe 2000:56–57). Wiebe's point is a valid one. Indeed, Smart's approach does endorse religion in general, but what does that mean? The problematic notion here is 'pluralist'. The terms 'pluralist' and

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[204] Some consider Smart's giving epochē new currency through his methodological agnosticism to be one of his main legacies. (Cox 2006:160)

'pluralism' have much currency in interfaith dialogue contexts and designate the belief that all religions are on an equal footing as far as truth is concerned (either all being true, or true in some respects and false in others). This view is certainly no instance of epochē, if it is presented as the result of one's study of religions. However, if it is used as a way to approach the study of religions, as a methodological device so to speak, it does not endorse specific religious truth claims of one or several religions, but religion as such as a valid means of sense-making of the world, oneself and one's place within the world. This kind of endorsement of religion may not be unproblematic, but it is indeed necessary for an interpretive approach to religion which, by definition, aims to explicate and translate the insider's perspective of his own religious practice and teaching to the outsider. Endorsing religions as valid means of sense-making is likewise also a necessary precondition for facilitating philosophical interfaith dialogue that takes the truth claims religious followers subscribe to seriously. Without it, the philosophical questions would not even come into view, as Wiebe himself admits (2000:57) or they would be rationalisations in the way of pluralists.

Still, Smart's critics accuse him of confusing the study of religion and the practice of religion. (L. P. Barnes 2007:166; Wiebe 2000:53–68)[205, 206] In some of his statements he has indeed actively supported a pluralistic view of religions in the sense that all religions are salvific and contain ultimate truth. This conception, as pointed out before (cf. 1.3; 2.4.5; 3.6), goes beyond the mere methodological attitude of affirming religions in general as valid instruments of sense-making in this world, or what I called the epistemological commitment to the form of theology, because it crosses a decisive border as explained in the methodological discussions in chapter 1.3: At the point where axiomatic beliefs are rationalised, the perspective has changed to that of an outsider – even if such an outside position is then re-framed in terms of a religious discourse itself, which pluralism does. My reproach to Smart would thus be that he did not exercise epochē sufficiently, but moved from an affirmation of the epistemological parity of religions to an affirmation of salvific potential, his conception of 'truth' transcending the limits of the respective frames of reference.

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[205] Sharpe sees the same confusion in all of phenomenology in religious studies: '*[P]henomenology was a religious as much as a scholarly exercise*'. (Sharpe 2005:36–37)

[206] For an example of a direct exchange of arguments see Wiebe (1992), and Smart and King (1993). For an account of the debate between them see Cox (2006:209–249).

However, even if Smart did personally cross that line, I do not see that this would be inherent in his conception of the seven dimensions. Thus Ninian Smart's definition of religion is based on an interpretive approach and eligible to be used for this project to assess whether philosophy and religion are compatible enterprises.

4.4.2 Are philosophy and religion compatible according to Ninian Smart's definition of religion?

The strategy to define religion not via an essence, but with the help of a grid of seven dimensions is a compelling one. The seven dimensions Smart posits are based on a tradition of thorough scholarship in the history of religions. Taken together, they allow for more variance within the phenomena studied and are thus less likely to impose an externalist notion onto a given religious tradition. At the same time they offer a number of parameters (seven instead of one, as in the case of an essentialist definition) along which religions can be related to each other. If, as it seems to happen following Smart, it turns out that world views normally not counted as religious offer themselves to be characterised through the seven dimensions as well,[207] then this need not put the definition of religion based on them at fault, but might rather count as an insight gained from it.

The obvious starting point for assessing the compatibility of religion and philosophy according to Smart's definition of religion is the doctrinal and philosophical dimension. Accordingly, a religious tradition might incorporate an element of systematic reasoning or a set of doctrines (what I called theology) among its teachings and the religious process it prescribes. (1992:16) Asian religions such as Buddhism or especially Advaita Vedanta are examples where the philosophical import is strong. Smart further explains that the philosophical, or doctrinal dimension underpins the narrative dimension. (1992:16) This is the case with Christianity, where primary scripture is the narrative of the gospels which is then underpinned by, or made sense of with the help of, largely Greek, philosophy. A different example is Native American religious traditions that often feature mythic creation stories. Even though it is debatable whether one can speak of a developed doctrinal dimension in these cases, there is undoubtedly rational reasoning and a notion of truth involved.

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[207] Or, negatively put: Worldviews normally not counted among the religions cannot be sharply separated from those which are, when using Smart's definition of religion (one example Smart himself gives is Marxism).

Perhaps empirical ideas of reality are not strongly present, but these myths nevertheless are intended to explain the nature of reality. Thus it is justified to speak of philosophy here as well and this situation reflects philosophy's own sphere spanning from a theory of science to literature. A similarly close relationship to philosophy can be claimed for the ethical dimension, which might on the surface manifest in prescriptive codes of behaviour, but these again may in some way be linked to particular justifications, i.e. reasoning, or lead to deductions as to how to apply them in life, which also is an act of philosophical reasoning. The same quasi-philosophical link is there to the ritual, institutional, experiential and even material dimension as well. We have arrived here at a kind of second order philosophy, i.e. not philosophy-as-religion, but philosophy-about-religion. Still, such reflection about religious practice, even if it is not strictly part of religious practice as such, is closely related to it. As Smart also points out, '*[t]here is no absolute taboo, upon his [the philosopher's] descending into the dusty arena of general apologetic*' and so '*one job a philosopher may do is general apologetics*' (Smart and Shepherd 2009:194 [81]) whereby apologetics refers to defending a religious position through the systematic use of reason.

To sum up the above, there are two slightly different but related notions of reasoning in relation to religion: in the narrow sense as a worked out system of causal explanations it is one of seven possible dimensions. Of course, not every religious tradition necessarily is developed in this dimension. Smart himself cautions against overestimating the role of the doctrinal and philosophical dimension despite its seeming prominence in discourse. He says:

> It happens that histories of religion have tended to exaggerate the importance of scriptures and doctrines; and this is not too surprising since so much of our knowledge of past religions must come from the documents which have been passed on by the scholarly elite. Also, and especially in the case of Christianity, doctrinal disputes have often been the overt expression of splits within the fabric of the community at large, so that frequently histories of a faith concentrate upon these hot issues. (Smart 1992:17)

However, there is philosophy in the broader sense, namely the act of relating the other parts and dimensions of a religious tradition to that system of causal explanations that form the doctrine and philosophy in the narrow sense. This is a hermeneutical process that is arguably always in place and ongoing, even if the doctrinal or philosophical dimension is otherwise not prominently developed. It

certainly manifests clearly when the religious practitioner is made to reflect on their practices. Such a situation arises on a larger scale for a religious community, as Smart also points out, when it has to adapt to changing circumstances that require a re-arrangement of religious institutions and social life, perhaps a new explication of ethical norms or adjustments in ritual. Smart remarks that the education of the leadership of a religious community will inspire an intellectual account of the religion. (1992:17) On a smaller scale, and relevant to the context of this thesis, young people having grown up in a particular faith, who come to study at a university, will very likely be made to reflect on their religious beliefs and practices through the very situation of being placed in a secular arena which offers explanations of its own kind for much of what can be experienced.

In conclusion, it seems justified to assume that there is philosophy present in religious traditions or can be drawn out under suitable circumstances. However the relationship between philosophy and religion is still not characterised in any final sense and it has been argued that looking at religion through the dimension of doctrine or philosophy is significantly distorting what religion is. Such an argument would have to assume an essence of religion that could, through the eyes of doctrine, be 'missed', 'distorted', or at least 'altered'. It would also not critique doctrine as such, but the concept of religion that is arrived at by way of it. Wilfred Cantwell Smith advances just such an argument in his classic *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Smith 1991[1962]). Therefore, the following section will deal with his thought as an example of an interpretive essentialist definition of religion. Aside from the fact that Smith's argument raises important issues about the relationship between philosophy and religion and is in this way relevant to this thesis, Smith has also been involved in the interfaith dialogue movement exerting considerable influence among its intellectual proponents.

4.4.3   An essentialist definition of religion: Wilfred Cantwell Smith

If one takes an essentialist definition of religion, then the question arises, whether philosophy, even if perhaps part of the extended context, can really touch or grasp that essence, or whether perhaps there is a danger that the essence of what religion is becomes distorted through the eyes of philosophy. Wilfred Cantwell Smith argues that this indeed is the case. He further makes the case that our

understanding of religion is too much focused on the doctrinal level (which is rather accessible to the philosophical approach), because our modern notion of religion has been shaped decisively by developments in Protestant Christianity. If this specific notion of religion is then imposed onto other phenomena deemed to be of the same kind, it highlights doctrinal aspects potentially making them appear more central to a religious tradition than they actually are.

Smith makes his argument in his classic *The Meaning and End of Religion.* (Smith 1991). Although it is not a recent text, its historical findings, its analysis and conclusion have not been invalidated or shown to be obsolete and scholars today still deal with the same issues though perhaps with different underlying motives. (Cf. Fitzgerald 2000) Like Smart, Smith was a scholar of the history of religions and involved in the debates of the academic representatives of the interfaith movement. Critiquing the common doctrine-, i.e. belief-, based understanding of religion, he offers an alternative understanding of what religion is that is essentialist, the essence being personal faith. However, this faith alone does not make a religious tradition yet, which consists of a continual dialectic of negotiation between personal faith in light of the inherited practices and doctrines.

Smith bases his reasoning on a historical analysis of the term 'religion'. He traces the change of meaning it has experienced from Roman times, when it first emerged, to modern day usage. The historical account he outlines runs as follows: The word 'religion' derives from Latin 'religio' and thus the development of its corresponding concept(s) took place within a Christian context. In Roman times 'religio' initially referred to the rigorously regulated ceremonies involved in the worship of gods. In Cicero's writings Smith discerns a tendency of 'religio' to connote something interior to persons. (1991:21) With the early Christians the term came to also refer to the institution of the Church and its structural organisation. In the middle ages, the key word for the Christian churches was 'faith', not 'religion' and the use of the term declined between 400 and 1500 CE. (Smith 1991:25) Modern usage starts with Ficino's 1474 *De Christiana Religione*, where 'religion' is used to refer to a divinely provided instinct unique to humans by which they are drawn to worship God. (Smith 1991:33) By and large, this understanding of the term continues through the reformation, where '*religio referred to something personal, inner, and transcendentally oriented. Probably the nearest equivalent concept in modern English is that of piety.*' (Smith 1991:36–37) A turning point occurred, however, in

the 17th century. With the Enlightenment grew the interest in '*the various intellectual constructs, systematic and abstract, that were to be elaborated in the religious realm. They gave the name of 'religion' to the system, first in general but increasingly to the system of ideas, in which men of faith were involved*'. (Smith 1991:38) Thus, Smith argues, a change of focus takes place away from 'inner piety' and toward a 'schematic externalization' (Smith 1991:44). This move is propelled by the conflict of now multiple religious parties[208] that are in competition with each other following a period of fairly comprehensive homogeneity in the Christian west. The next step in the development of the concept is Schleiermacher who, in the 19th century, reifies religion into something abstract of which positive religions are inadequate and particularized opinions. (Smith 1991:45) Although with Schleiermacher 'religion' comes to include again non-intellectual and intellectual content together, his reification of the term is akin to a Platonist idea and from there naturally follows the thought that there exists a single, albeit unrealised, ideal of religion. Feuerbach's 1851 *The Essence of Religion* is therefore only the logical next step and, Smith concludes, '*ever since, the hunt has been on*' as to what this essence is. (Smith 1991:47)

The decisive turn of events from Smith's perspective was when the concept of religion rose to prominence during the Enlightenment while at the same time undergoing a change of meaning from 'piety' to 'a system of beliefs.' 'To be religious' now did not any longer mean to be in a state of wilful submission, but to affirm the truth of the beliefs that form the doctrinal system. Previously faith had been the central concept in religious[209] life and discourse. Smith describes faith as the individual's 'present awareness of eternity,' (Smith 1991:192) as the inner life relating to piety. Although faith finds its expression in various ways like art and importantly in community, it still is a highly individual response to the perception of transcendence. Thus faith, according to Smith, is a personal, inner attitude which he sees to have been central to religious life up to the Enlightenment, when the concept of religion became dominant and in many ways replaced it. As opposed to faith,

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[208] The now multiple religious parties at the time consisted of the various Christian denominations that emerged in the course of the Reformation, but included also the religions of the people native to the newly discovered continent of America who challenged the until then more or less undisputed universality of the Christian faith. (Strenski 2006:13) (Harrison 1990:3)

[209] I retain the adjective 'religious' here, despite the fact that the term 'religion' is under scrutiny. In that I follow Smith who eventually rejects the noun 'religion', but also holds on to the adjective. It is meant to embrace both connotations, faith and religion, that are being weighed against each other here.

religion is an intellectualised system of beliefs. Virtue in religious matters shifted from personal piety and a state of surrender to God (he contrasts personal piety with rebellion) to affirming the truth of a set of beliefs. Harrison confirms this shift with his very detailed study of the English Enlightenment. (Harrison 1990)

How does Smith further characterise the notion of faith he sees at the core of being religious? Here, no precise definition or exhaustive description is possible, because faith is '*unfathomable*', it '*cannot be precisely delineated or verbalized*' and is '*too profound, too personal, and too divine for public exposition.*' (Smith 1991:170) Although it almost seems beyond any possible description, Smith, in a later book, formulates more precisely:

> [Faith] is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing the world and of handling it; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension. (Smith 1981:113–114)

To have a faith, here, does not mean to have an additional set of beliefs that one holds to be true besides other, non-religious beliefs. Rather, to have a faith means both a fundamental way of looking at the world and oneself and a way of being or behaving as a result of it. So fundamental is the 'orientation', as Smith calls it, that it shapes all aspects of life and the way how one relates to all other questions of world view and direction in life.

Two things become immediately clear from such a conception of faith: that it encompasses both ethical and cognitive (and hence epistemological) dimensions and that it is impossible not to have a faith in this sense (at least if we disregard the unclear concept of 'transcendence'). This latter feature mirrors Smart's acknowledgment that a religious worldview is not principally different from a non-religious one. The former characteristic, the fundamental influence to shape our perception of and response to the world, has important consequences for the question of whether philosophical treatment is possible. As it involves cognitive issues as well, there is the possibility of philosophical treatment, even though it is still doubtful that it will be able to touch on the essence of faith, as that is seemingly beyond words. But it is necessary to consider the entire picture Smith presents. Besides personal faith, the other ingredient in the situation of a religious believer is the cumulative tradition.

The cumulative tradition comprises the context of the religious person and their personal faith. It is the historically observable expressions of the personal faith of previous generations of believers, the cumulative inheritance of a faith community that is passed on through time: practices, rituals, doctrines, norms, community structures, myths. (1991:157) Smith says the cumulative tradition is '*the mundane result of the faith of men in the past*'. (Smith 1991:186) Importantly, he also acknowledges that the relationship between personal faith and cumulative tradition works dialectically, when he says that, vice versa, the cumulative tradition '*is the mundane cause of the faith of men in the present.*' The cumulative tradition is thus not stable. Rather, it is '*ever changing, ever accumulating, ever fresh*' as the faith of newer generations add to it. (1991:186)

Thus although Smith suggests what he sees as a return to a more appropriate understanding of what the essence of religion is – personal faith and piety - he does not negate the communal and materially more tangible aspects involved in the life of a religious believer.

How is Smith's suggestion to refocus on personal faith instead of religion to be evaluated? His critique of the concept of religion as a belief system is certainly revealing – however the advocacy of faith to (re-)replace it is problematic. As with all essentialist definitions, his definition of faith as the central element in religious life suffers from the fact that it is impossible to consider all empirical data theoretically available in forming such a definition. Since it is arrived at from a limited empirical pool of data, it ends up being prescriptive rather than descriptive and serves at least as much to exclude things from being true religion (for instance belief systems) as it does to include others (here, personal faith).

As a result, Smith's definition creates a, in some respects, patronising attitude towards the subject of his study. Religious traditions are dynamic, and if in Protestant Christianity a shift has occurred from personal faith to religious belief, then Smith, as a religious studies scholar, is not in a position to 'correct the mistake'.[210] This situation exemplifies the difficulties to separate doing religion from studying

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[210] The perhaps implicit argument that an older exegesis of a religion is more genuine than a newer one is there in the interfaith movement and its historical antecedents as well. (Cf. Strenski 2006:68 on Max Müller) It is a theological rather than a philosophical or even scientific argument. It is not scientific, because it is prescriptive rather than descriptive. It could perhaps count as a philosophical argument, but as it is concerned with a specific religious tradition, Christianity, it ends up being theological, if Smith is speaking as a Christian and thus moves within this specific frame of reference. If he is not speaking as a Christian, the argument becomes explanatory in nature (giving an explanation based on reasoning, which is external to the frame of reference that the religious tradition represents) and this is problematic, too for reasons discussed above in section 3.2.1. and 3.2.2.

religion, or perhaps a lack of sensitivity that it should be necessary to do so. Potentially, Smith also leaves the boundaries of an interpretive approach in imposing a point of view that is alien to the religious tradition he is applying it to. To Smith's defence one can argue that what he tries to do is not to return to an original religious state, but to point out and describe what is still the reality of religious life today and across traditions. Although his view would then not be in such sharp opposition to the theology of some traditions, it would still not completely lose its patronising edge, as his concept of faith, even though abstract, is not purely structural or entirely without content.

Smith's advocacy of personal faith over religious belief systems as central to religious life also sits suspiciously well with the zeitgeist of individualism. Religious belief systems, though they may be open to interpretation within certain limits, are on the whole communal, or potentially societal, determinants that impact on the role the individual can play within a larger group of believers. Personal faith, on the other hand, being *too profound, too personal, and too divine for public exposition'* (Smith 1991:170) empowers the believer as an individual, first in his ability to access God or the Divine, but then also vis-à-vis his social group. This in itself is certainly a particular theological stand rather than a general description of what religious life is like for a believer. As an emphasis on faith is also characteristic for Protestant Christianity (and its history of conflict with the Catholic Church mirrors the effect of individual empowerment in the face of a hierarchically organised religious community), Smith may be indebted to his own religious roots more than he realised.

Another issue to consider is that Smith's definition of faith as 'a total response [...] a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension' (Smith 1981:113–114) reads rather like an ideal case scenario. What about people who are less then ardent followers of their religious tradition? Who have doubts and are lukewarm followers quite uncertain of any transcendent dimension or maybe just unable to act in accordance with it? Have they lost the essence of religion – personal faith – at least to some degree? Are we still justified in calling them 'religious'?

This leads to another aspect worth critical attention: Smith's use of the rather unclear notion of 'transcendence' in defining faith. The difficulties with the ineffability of what faith is are thus passed on to the notion of 'transcendent dimension'. It seems, however, that structurally the notion of a transcendent

dimension is able to encompass within it more generally the idea of 'certainties not in need of (empirical) justification' or what I have called axiomatic beliefs of theology. Thus understood 'transcendence' would encompass not content, but just the form of theology.

Despite all these points of concern, I will argue in the following section that Smith's conceptualisation of the religious situation as a relationship between the cumulative tradition and personal faith offers valuable structural insights, which elucidate the role philosophy might play in this situation.

4.4.4 Tradition-to life negotiation

Philosophy in the narrow sense of a worked out system of causal explanations laying out the true picture of reality (in the sense of a 'philosophical system') has its likely place in the cumulative tradition. Here again may be stated what was said when discussing Smart: Not all religious traditions will incorporate a developed philosophical system and even if they do, it may not be easily accessible to lay-believers, as it were, nor be very virulent in their religious lives.

Yet, Smith considers not the cumulative tradition but faith to be the essence of religious life. What, then, is the relation of faith to the cumulative tradition and does this relationship involve an element of philosophical reasoning?

Smith conceives of the concept of the cumulative tradition in relation to personal faith, namely firstly as the material cause of the personal faith of believers. (Smith 1991:186) As such the cumulative tradition is relevant to the personal faith of the believer. But personal faith is anchored in a specific personal situation. Except perhaps for very fundamentalist interpretations, the cumulative tradition will not become meaningful to the believer, unless its application takes that specific personal situation into account. Thus personal faith is *negotiated* through and perhaps sometimes also against the cumulative tradition, i.e. the cumulative tradition gets appropriated (slightly or dramatically) by each believer and each successive generation of believers in light of the then present circumstances and their own experiences. Nye calls this 'religioning': '*Religioning is a form of practice, like other cultural practices, that is done and performed by actors with their own agency (rather than being subsumed by their religions), who have their own particular ways and experiences of making their religiosities manifest.*' (Nye 2000b:467)

Smith accounts for this process through conceiving of the relationship between cumulative tradition and personal faith as a two-way-street. Not only is the cumulative tradition the material cause of the personal faith of believers, but, secondly, the cumulative tradition is the manifestation of the expressions of faith of previous generations of believers. Smith even locates revelation within the arena of personal faith. Revelation becomes part of the cumulative tradition only via the expressions of faith of those individuals who received it.[211] (1991:128) (Methodologically, it is also in line with a strictly interpretive account of religion that allows for individual believers to contribute something of their own.) Thus appropriations made through the negotiation of personal faith can potentially become part of the cumulative tradition as they lead to changed expressions of faith and thus contribute to the cumulative tradition of the future.[212]

This dialectical relationship Smith perceives between the cumulative tradition and personal faith makes for a compelling description of the *structure* of the situation of a believer. This is true despite the problematic aspects of Smith's notion of faith, namely the patronising aspect that is inherent in all essentialist definitions, the relatively unclear notion of transcendence and the idealisation of faith that goes along with it. Irrespective of whether faith has a transcendental component and how such a component is defined (what to speak of whether or not one lives up to it), and regardless of whether one agrees that personal faith thus defined is truly the essence of religious life or not – the followers of a religion or faith will universally find themselves in a situation where they have to negotiate their place vis-à-vis a collective other that demands recognition – be it in the form of a social group like a religious community, or in the shape of a philosophical system or a ritual practice that such a social group upholds. Such negotiation, if done consciously, will be a continuous process of (re-)examining given standards (be they codes of behaviour or conceptual categories) in light of one's experience in life, applying them to one's experience and evaluating the results, leading perhaps to appropriations.

Part of what is being examined and evaluated, and possibly appropriated is the philosophical, i.e. rational, account of reality the respective religious doctrine

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[211] According to Smith, the notion of a 'revealed religion' is part of the misleading development of the term religion. Rather it is God who reveals himself to believers. (1991:40)

[212] These changes are not necessarily theological changes in the strict sense, because they need not concern the doctrine on an abstract level. Not all appropriations of an individual member of a faith community makes for him- or herself will become part of the faith's legacy and many of these appropriations will be on a level that could be termed 'folk religion'. (Cf. Bowman 2004)

incorporates. This is what I called in relation to Smart 'philosophy in the narrow sense': the rather abstract, maybe technical discussions of first principles. The process itself of examining, applying and appropriating not only the philosophical element but all aspects of the cumulative tradition, i.e. negotiating one's place vis-à-vis the collective other, is equivalent to what I called 'philosophy in the broader sense' or the act of making sense of the cumulative tradition in light of personal experiences, both mundane and transcendent.[213] While philosophy in the former, fairly technical sense can require a certain intellectual education and skill, philosophy in the latter sense of applying doctrine to life is enhanced by character traits like lack of self-importance, honesty, power of judgement, wit – all of which is perhaps best described as practical wisdom. Whereas the technical philosophy in the narrow sense might not be fully accessible and thus relevant to every lay person of the tradition, philosophy in the broader sense, tradition-to-life philosophy, is not only open to every believer whatever situation they might be in, but it is in fact inescapable: one cannot possibly do without. There is, undoubtedly, good and bad or successful and unsuccessful tradition-to-life philosophy taking place in people's life, but in any case this kind of reasoning will inevitably be present in some way, simply for structural reasons.

Students in higher education, the target group of the philosophical interfaith dialogue the possibility of which this thesis examines, are in a stage in their life where the issue of negotiating one's place vis-à-vis the collective other – their faith community, perhaps chiefly represented by their parents – plays an especially important role. Entering university for many young people coincides with moving into a sphere where their religious beliefs are challenged through academia or the plurality of world views represented on campus. At the same time the university represents a collective other that demands allegiance from the student and so a negotiation of membership in groups with at least superficially conflicting standards and values will inevitably ensue for the student. This is true in modified form of course for all young people moving from the protected territory of having inherited a

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[213] Clearly, the distinction between mundane and transcendent will itself be constructed through reflection on the cumulative tradition, just as the concept of the cumulative tradition itself is a construct, as Smith himself recognises: "*[The Cumulative tradition] is a device by which the human mind may rewardingly and without distortion introduce intelligibility into the vast flux of human history or any given part of it.*" (1991:169) Creating such concepts, or at least evaluating their usefulness, is also an act of philosophy.

faith to now having to own – or lose – it. For this target group, this philosophical reasoning in the sense of tradition-to-life philosophizing is relevant and accessible.

4.5 Chapter summary and conclusion: from reasoning about doctrine to tradition-to-life philosophising

This fourth chapter has explored whether philosophy, as the discussion of the questions of validity and truth by rational means, is an appropriate tool in dealing with religion, and if so how. In determining whether religion can be dealt with philosophically, the notion of religion needed clarification. Interpretive accounts of religion recommended themselves over explanatory ones, for they are more likely to grasp the insider's perspective and they conform to the methodological commitments of this thesis in subordinating philosophy to the form of theology. Thus an evaluation of the compatibility of a philosophical approach to religion based on such a definition ensures results acceptable to potential participants in interfaith dialogue. Two such interpretive accounts were then discussed: Ninian Smart's definition of religion by way of a seven-parameter grid of dimensions and Wilfred Cantwell Smith's conceptualization of personal faith and the cumulative tradition.

The first distinguished itself by offering a relatively open description by which to characterize a given religious tradition. One of the possible dimensions a religion can manifest in is the doctrinal or philosophical dimension that usually relates strongly to the narrative and ethical dimensions as well. This led to the introduction of two notions of philosophy discernible: firstly philosophy in the purely doctrinal sense dealing perhaps with abstract concepts and the more 'technical' issues. Secondly philosophy in a broader sense as the act of relating the doctrinal dimension to the other ones, i.e. the aspect of applying the doctrine.

The second, Smith's account stood out by further giving shape to the notion of philosophy as applying doctrine. Despite its problematic aspects, the conceptualization of the cumulative tradition and personal faith offers insight into the structure of the situation of a believer, vis-à-vis a collective other against which personal faith is negotiated.

In comparing both notions of philosophy in light of the intended target group of religious lay people, it is clear that not only are members of that target group more

apt at the second kind, the tradition-to-life philosophy, but it is also more relevant to their own religious life and character formation than purely doctrinal questions. Thus this chapter not only answers the question whether a philosophical treatment of religion is possible from an interpretive point of view affirmatively, but also delineates what conception of philosophy is most appropriate for the project of the thesis.

Relating the finding of this chapter back to those of the previous one, it becomes clear that a shift has taken place: The original question to be answered by this chapter was: Is there an element of theology or religious doctrine present in all religions? The notion of theology was defined to consist of two key elements (cf. 1.2), systematic rational reasoning and axiomatic beliefs that determine the shape (the frame of reference) that the reasoning can take.[214] Theology as understood in the narrow (traditionally) Christian sense of a set of doctrines is not necessarily part of every religion or cumulative tradition. However, the relationship between cumulative tradition and personal faith does involve reasoning in a systematic way: inherited conceptual categories of a given religious tradition (such as 'sin' , 'prayer', 'worship', 'good deeds') have to be applied to real world occurrences that the practitioner experiences.

Evaluating such application will be subject to criteria of consistency, coherency, plausibility, freedom from contradiction - all the hallmarks of rational reasoning. The cumulative tradition, reversely, is made sense of, and possibly re-negotiated in light of, the experiences of the believer. Here again consistency, coherence, plausibility etc. are important – the criteria of sound philosophical reasoning. The cumulative tradition will not be completely re-negotiable; some element may not be up for reinterpretation. Such inflexible aspects, whether they are a doctrine in the propositional sense, a story, a ritual etc. function like axiomatic beliefs in that they limit and give shape to the process of reasoning that takes place. The whole process, I suggest, is aptly termed tradition-to-life negotiation. 'Tradition' here is a much

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[214] Although I argued for this understanding of theology using Wittgenstein's concept of language game and his remarks on religion, a frame-of-reference view is also shared by Smith, whose definition of religion as cumulative tradition and personal faith serves here as the basis for making the shift plausible: 'Each [religious] statement is made within a total world view; the meaning of each term, as well as of each whole derives from the total complex of which it is a more or less coherent part; the function of religious statements within each system is itself particular, the totality within which it obtains not only confers the meaning upon each term within the statement, and upon the statement as a whole, but determines also 'the meaning of the meaning' for such statements.' (Smith 1974:158)

broader category than doctrines, encompassing not just doctrinal propositions, but the entire received tradition with all its aspects, be they social, legal, ritual, or ethical.

Thus although theology as a set of doctrines is not necessarily part of every religion, tradition-to-life negotiation is, and such tradition-to-life negotiations exhibit the same epistemological, structural features that theology as a set of doctrines does. This means that all insights gained from chapter 3 about how different religions related to each other in terms of doctrine, map seamlessly unto the activity of negotiating the tradition, i.e. all inherited aspects, of one's religion in light of one's life experiences.

Thus we may conclude that philosophical interfaith dialogue as negotiating one's personal experiences in light of the conceptual categories of one's cumulative tradition is possible and impossible in the same ways that philosophical interfaith dialogue as reasoning about doctrine is: It is impossible to do across the borders of religious, cumulative, traditions, but it is possible in the sense that it can be done by people of different religious belongings in the presence of each other, when each stays epistemologically within their traditions or participates hypothetically in the tradition of the other by projecting themselves into the frame of reference that is their partner's cumulative tradition.

This shift from doctrinal reasoning to tradition-to-life reasoning also solves the problem of elitism. Although the latter can also be enhanced by expert knowledge of one's tradition, there is still a general competence each believer has to engage in this activity. This competence stems on the one hand from their own experiences that are an essential constituent of the process, but also because one cannot be a believer without engaging in this kind of reasoning.

The next chapter will discuss how these insights are to be transformed into a practical interfaith programme for students in higher education, as is the goal of this thesis.

5 Designing a programme for philosophical interfaith dialogue

5.1 Introduction

The theoretical investigation of chapter 3 revealed the impossibility to argue for the truth and validity of religious teachings across the boundaries of religious traditions. By way of doing so, the analysis also established that it is possible for believers of different religious traditions to discuss such matters with each other within the framework of one particular religious tradition, when those who are foreign to it, project themselves into the conceptual framework it constitutes. Chapter 4 has established that a philosophical approach to religion is possible for believers of any kind of religious tradition (and potentially non-believers as well), if 'philosophical' is understood as a negotiation of conceptual categories received from a religious tradition of some sort (involving a community of some kind) in the light of one's own experiences of being in the world. I have called such negotiation 'tradition-to-life negotiation.' Not only is this kind of philosophical approach appropriate to religious traditions of any kind, but it is also open to non-specialists, i.e. people who are neither philosophically educated nor theologically trained. In fact, this form of philosophising is inescapable (although it may be poorly done), as an application of conceptual categories to experiences in the world is necessary in order for such categories to have any meaning. This chapter is then dedicated to suggest how tradition-to-life philosophising can be applied to the situation of interfaith dialogue. In doing so it will draw furthermore on the insights of the analysis of the history of interfaith dialogue by formulating five principles of philosophical interfaith dialogue gleaned from the five problematic aspects identified there with the intention to prevent them from occurring.

In the following, I will not only argue from the point of view of developing the thesis' argument, but I will also offer a detailed account of the drafting process which falls into two parts: The Interfaith Tandem Learning project executed by the Chaplaincy Service of the University of Sheffield with the support of the Modern Languages Teaching Centre; and the Walk in my Shoes programme for which I was solely responsible and which was executed at the University of Leeds. I find this a necessary way to proceed for three reasons: Firstly, I want to make clear for each aspect how the design of the programme reflects the insights of the theoretical and historical investigation of the last three chapters. Secondly, the implementation of

theoretical insights in given practical circumstances requires taking account of the specificity of that situation. The programme for philosophical interfaith dialogue could have been realised differently, if the situation had been different. Therefore it appears to me that a good account of the circumstances is necessary. Thirdly, I want to acknowledge the contributions others have made in the process of designing the programme. These contributions have not come in the form of books or journal articles I could quote and give a reference for, but they have come in the form of discussions, informal conversations and official meetings.

5.2   Principles of philosophical interfaith dialogue

Putting the theoretical insights of chapter 3 into practice, the **first principle** philosophical interfaith dialogue has to adhere to is that participation in it must not in any way suggest an implicit acceptance of a pluralist point of view nor should its practical set-up manipulate in any way the result of the dialogue to move towards such an ideology. In the extreme, this also means that the desire to proselytise is an acceptable motivation to take part in the dialogue. It is often an implicit or explicit convention in interfaith dialogue that one may not come to the table with the desire to convert the other, as this is considered disrespectful. However, from a philosophical point of view, it must be possible to affirm the truth of one's own position and consider it valid also for the other without being labelled disrespectful or even offensive. There really only is no point in disagreeing if one was to take a pluralist stand, in the context of which conversion is superfluous and to attempt one is thus an attack on cultural heritage or personal taste and as such rather bad manners.

Thus, as a **second principle**, intentions are not to be censored to allow for motivations such as proselytising. Of course if the desire to proselytise results in rude or impolite behaviour, this is not at all acceptable, and although the intentions should not be censored, it may in certain situations be sensible to set a code of conduct, agreement to which is a pre-requisite for participation in dialogue.

But what about the problems described in chapter 2 in regard to ulterior motives? One problem created by ulterior motives in interfaith dialogue, as described in chapter 2, was that participants with their own agenda, often of a nationalist and political nature (cf. 2.3.4), wrongly inflated the apparent support of the more explicit

goals of the dialogue, such as universalism or pluralism (cf. 2.3.5 and 2.4.5 respectively). As per the first principle above the promotion of pre-conceived outcomes is to be avoided, so there should be no danger in philosophical interfaith dialogue that ulterior motives give the wrong impression of supporting universalism or pluralism. More importantly however, ulterior motives in dialogue have contributed to the confusion of discourses that need to be kept separate (cf. introduction to chapter 3, section 3.1). Since intentions should not be censored to enable open dialogue without pre-conceived outcomes, it is up to the practical set up of the dialogue situation to ensure the purity of discourse, which is broadly ultimate truth discourse, and more specifically tradition-to-life philosophising.

As a **third principle**, drawing on further insights from chapter 2, the issue of representation is to be avoided as any attempts to properly achieve it are unrealistic and misguided, given the heterogeneity of hierarchical structures in religious communities worldwide. To avoid the issue of representation does not, of course, mean to avoid addressing it, but to create a dialogue set-up that neither requires nor suggests that the participants in any way speak on behalf of anybody else but themselves. For this thesis, the target group are students in higher education in general, most of whom will not be theological specialists of their faith tradition and are unlikely to hold a position within their religious community that would authorise them to speak on its behalf. Thus to relinquish the idea of representation is not only helpful for creating a programme of interfaith dialogue, but makes this specific one possible in the first place. Furthermore it seems most advisable to include only one participant of a given religious tradition in any group of people to engage in dialogue, so as to avoid any latent social pressure from fellow believers to conform to a representative presentation of the respective religious tradition. To maximise the personal nature of the dialogue, groups of just two students each are ideal.

The **fourth principle** derived from considerations earlier in the thesis is that academic discourse is to be avoided.[215] This does not mean that students are not to use knowledge acquired at university or make use of their academic skills and knowledge. It does mean that participants are not to study interfaith dialogue, but to engage in it. More importantly, however, it also means that participants are not objects of someone else's investigation, but autonomous authorities on their own tradition-to-life philosophy.

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[215] Not in the drafting of the programme, obviously, as this thesis is part of academic discourse.

Finally, the **fifth principle**: in order to avoid any kind of bias, the interfaith dialogue programme cannot be facilitated theologically. That means that no specific theological features of any one religion should be taken into account when designing the programme as this will inevitably create a bias that potentially forces other religious traditions to cast themselves in ways not entirely their own. That is why this thesis does not seek to develop a theology of interfaith dialogue, neither from a meta-point of view that would encompass all, or at least a significant number of, religions, nor from the point of view of any one religious tradition. Though I do think my own religious tradition has important theological contributions to make to the conversation among people of different religions, (cf. Knott 1993) this contribution can only be made with integrity as a participant in dialogue. In drafting the programme I take the role of a facilitator and thus I cannot take recourse to the theology of religions of my own tradition (although that originally had been my intention) lest I precondition the forum within which dialogue is to take place and hence create a bias. Consequently I decided to use a philosophical approach, which, when applied to religion, could only gain universality by being narrowed down to tradition-to-life philosophizing, as explained in chapter 4.

The development of the interfaith programme according to the theoretical findings laid out thus far went through two principle stages of practical work: the Interfaith Tandem Learning Project of the Chaplaincy Service of the University of Sheffield in 2008, led by a five member project board, to which I served as a research assistant; and the Walk in my Shoes programme run at the University of Leeds from January to March 2009, where I was the sole person responsible, although I did have the active support and advice of two people associated with the university and the endorsement of several university related organisations. It was not the case that the theoretical conclusions developed in chapters 3 and 4 were available to me at the time I started to work on the Sheffield project. Rather, the work on the Interfaith Tandem Learning project helped me to sharpen my understanding of the interfaith dialogue situation, which I then was able to implement to a fuller degree and in congruence with the findings of chapters 3 and 4 in the Walk in my Shoes programme at the University of Leeds.

5.3   The Interfaith Tandem Learning Project[216]

This review of the Interfaith Tandem Learning project focuses on a study of the documents involved in the project, because the empirical data set collected in relation to its trial run was small and did not engage deeply with the issues I am interested as a result of the theoretical considerations. The following analysis of the Walk in my Shoes project (cf. chapter 6) was based on a study of data gathered from and about participants, providing a more detailed and nuanced account of the processes involved in engagement in such a project. (Cf. 6.2)

5.3.1   The context of the Interfaith Tandem Learning Project

a.   Institutional context

In an attempt to foster extra-curricular student activities the University of Sheffield created the Sheffield Graduate Award, open to all students (except PhD students) from October 2007.[217] Students need to register their participation in the award programme and over the course of their studies demonstrate their activities in four of the following six areas: Enterprise, Student Jobs and Work Experience, Volunteering, Cultural and Social, Internationalisation, and the University and its Community. Participation in the award programme is then acknowledged on the student record and an award certificate is handed out at the conclusion of one's studies.[218] This is not meant to balance an educational system that has more and more focused on marketable skill rather than holistic character development. The University of Sheffield advertises the award as '*substantially boosting your employment prospects*,' because recognition through the award programme '*proves that you are not only academically competent, but someone whose mature, outward looking and positive outlook will be a real asset to any organisation.*'[219] Hence there are no feelings of awkwardness in charging students £25 administration fee for a compulsory induction session.

The Interfaith Tandem Learning Project was conceived of as part of the Sheffield Graduate Award offering students an opportunity to engage in

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[216] I co-authored an article about the Interfaith Tandem Learning Project with my fellow research assistant Jon Gilbert. Most of the information contained in this section 5.2. can be found in more detail in that article. (Gilbert and Kaestner 2009)

[217] Cf. http://www.shef.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward (Retrieved 09/09/2012)

[218] Cf. http://www.shef.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward/how (Retrieved 09/09/2012)

[219] http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward (Retrieved 10/09/2012)

extracurricular activities in the field of Cultural and Social Awareness,[220] facilitated through the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Service of the University. The Chaplaincy Service is staffed by three Chaplains, three Associate Chaplains, and currently nine Religious Advisors,[221] the difference between the categories being the degree to which the chaplaincy work forms part of their professional life. The Chaplains are employees of their respective communities deputed to the Chaplaincy Service at a substantial ratio of their workload, whereas the Advisors are typically volunteers with jobs elsewhere in the university. The Chaplaincy Service is located on campus and offers space for religious observances and socialising. Through Chaplains and Advisors, the Chaplaincy maintains contact to religious communities in Sheffield; student religious societies are also linked into the Chaplaincy. Personal appointments can be made and there is also the opportunity to drop in during weekdays and use the facilities or speak to a chaplain on duty.

b. *Pedagogical context*

Tandem learning is a traditional form of language learning where two people of different native languages meet to help each other to improve their language skills, to learn about the culture of the other, and often also to share knowledge, for instance from a professional field. (Little and Brammerts 1996:2) Typically, tandem learning does not act as a substitute for structured language instruction, but is an open form of learning to supplement a language course. It is based on the principles of autonomy and reciprocity: each learner is responsible for their own learning process; and tandem partners have to negotiate the help they expect to receive from each other and contribute their share to the process. (Brammerts 2003:28–29; Little and Brammerts 1996:2–3) The distinguishing characteristics of tandem learning are the authenticity of the communication situation and the fact that although both tandem partners are 'practicing experts' of their language and culture, typically neither of them are 'theoretical' experts on a meta-level: they are not trained language teachers and may

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[220] The phrasing of these areas has somewhat changed as 'Internationalisation' was called 'Extending International Horizons' in 2008 and 'The University and its Community' was called 'Activities Supporting the Institution.' (Gilbert and Kaestner 2009:56) Also, what the current website lists as 'Social and Cultural' used to be 'Social and Cultural Awareness' which improves the comprehension as to what is meant by it so much that I am inclined to think that the current version is a typographical mistake, which I will not reproduce.

[221] http://www.shef.ac.uk/ssid/chaplaincy/staff (Retrieved 10/09/2012)

not be able to provide systematic information like grammatical rules or evaluate professionally the skill of their partner.

Tandem Learning as such has a long history that dates back to the 1960s. (Little and Brammerts 1996:4) In the mid-1990s the European Union funded the project *International E-Mail Tandem Network* in which eleven universities from nine countries participated as official project partners, among them the University of Sheffield. The results of the on-going collaborations were first published in English in 2003 in a book discussing in detail the facilitation of independent language learning through tandem learning and offering practical strategies for executing such programmes. The book entitled *Autonomous language learning* is edited by Tim Lewis and Lesley Walker. Lewis is the founding director of the Modern Languages Teaching Centre (MLTC) within the School of Modern Language and Linguistics of the University of Sheffield and Walker is member of staff there. Both also authored chapters of the book, as did Jane Woodin and Liz White, also members, or former members respectively, of staff at MLTC. (Lewis and Stickler 2003; Lewis and Walker 2003; Lewis 2003a, 2003b; St John and White 2003; Walker 2003; Woodin 2003) These developments have allowed for a formerly unsupervised activity to be integrated into a credit-earning university course programme. Evaluation – essential for awarding credits within a degree programme – is through attendance at induction sessions, personal meetings with tutors and the use of a learner diary (which, besides providing evidence of the learner's progress is primarily meant to facilitate reflection on the learning process by the learner).

5.3.2   The project development

A project board was established in October 2007 whose members were the Anglican Chaplain Canon Will Lamb, the Jewish Religious Advisor, Debora Green, the Head of the Biblical Studies department, Hugh Pyper, the Muslim Religious Advisor Zak Bougara, and the President of the Student Union, Mark Willoughby. Canon. Lamb chaired the board. In late 2007 two research assistant were appointed, Jon Gilbert and myself. It was agreed with the project board that my theoretical research for the PhD thesis would feed into the development of the programme, and I would be able to use the results of the trial run of the programme to evaluate my theoretical conclusions. However, in the course of the development it became clear

that the board's and my views diverged to a degree that made it plausible for me to develop and run my own programme, which became the Walk in my Shoes programme to be discussed later in this chapter. Points where we disagreed were how strictly interfaith tandem learning should be modelled on language tandem learning, the approach to the topics and how much potential unsettlement students could be expected to endure. Nevertheless, working on the project and receiving feedback from the project board helped me significantly to develop my theoretical understanding of the interfaith dialogue situation, as laid out in chapters 3 and 4.

a. *The first draft curriculum*

The development started with researching current practice of interfaith dialogue in the UK '*with a view to reviewing potential options for development.*' (Lamb 2007:2) Nothing specific emerged from this. The second objective we two research assistants were charged with was to '*develop appropriate learning resources [...] (including appropriate guidelines for interfaith engagement).*' (Lamb 2007:3) Initially we were able to convince the board that no explicit guidelines should be established (as per principle two above), but that the learning material would have to do the job to direct the engagement in appropriate channels. Later on, however, after our work for the project had ended, a 'listening skills session' was introduced to precede the actual dialogue meetings.

As for the learning resources, they would have to facilitate the situation in which interfaith dialogue was to take place, which was adopted from language tandem learning: it would be two people of different religious backgrounds conversing with each other about their faiths. It would be clear that although both of them were members of their respective religious communities and practicing their faith to some degree, neither of them would represent their faith in any official capacity. Despite these qualifications on the position of the participants, we felt we encountered a significant difference between language tandem learning and interfaith tandem learning. In language tandem learning, although participants are not theoretical experts on their language, they are practicing experts in using their native tongue correctly. In interfaith tandem learning, participants may be neither theoretical experts nor necessarily 'correct' in their practice of religion in the sense that it would be approved of by many people who shared their faith. To offset what appeared to be

an inordinate degree of subjectivity we[222] conceived of regular group sessions that would convene all tandem pairs together in larger groups and would provide some 'objective,' i.e. academic input on certain topics that would correspond to the topics of the tandem dialogue in that week. The project board, however, wanted to model the programme more closely on the language tandem learning programme MLTC had established and felt the proposed group sessions would infringe on the autonomy of participants too much. More convincingly, the board also argued that it would be next to impossible to find experts to deliver these group sessions, because they would have to be able to speak on a certain topic covering a range of religions. Consequently, the group sessions were dropped from the curriculum of the programme.

dates / week	group meeting topics	tandem modules	task	journal question 1	journal question 2
week 1	getting to know each other, finding a tandem partner, introduction and explanation of curriculum and first tandem task	religious profile questionaire	discussion based on the profile: prayer, worship, spiritual practice	What is religion/faith for me? What is religious truth?	I in the world and in relation to God
week 2	Self-learn material: essential teachings / basic tenets of my tandem partner's religion	space	visit a place of worship / personal sacred space	How is sacredness of space/body/text/food created/maintained/violated?	Spiritual failure

What constitutes spiritual failure? How do you deal with it? In others? In yourself? |
| | | food | plan an interfaith dinner (food, seating & buffet arrangements, etc.) | | |
| | | text / scripture | read passages of scriptures, discuss personal favourite passages | | |
| week 3 | religious community

(constructing communities: ingroup/outgroup mechanisms) | religion, politics and the state: religion in the public square | issue in the news e.g. Sharia law in Britain | Functions of religion in state community individual life | Doubt

What are instances of doubt you have experienced? How did you deal with it? How should one deal with it? |
| | | inside my community (membership, structures, institutions, activities inside & to the outside) | interview a community-person/leader about structure of community and how it works | | |
| | | the religious other (respect, mission) | theological resources of dealing with the religious other | | |
| week 4 | identity

(modern, postmodern identity, fundamentalism) | Identity in context | exploring different aspects of my identity (different identities?) and how they relate to each other | What are the benefits of finding one's identity? What is helpful in finding my identity? My religious identity? | I in the world and in relation to God II |
| | | the concept of self-transcendence | | | |
| | | the embodied nature of religious truth | the saint: exploring religious perfection | | |
| week 5 | tandem task: reflecting on previous four weeks discussing the journal | group discussion:

patterns in 'I in the world and in relation to God' | | What do you expect from a person in interfaith dialogue? What makes interfaith dialogue possible? | What is religious truth? |

The first draft of a curriculum of the Interfaith Tandem Learning project submitted to the first board meeting, drafted by Jon Gilbert and the author.

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[222] Whenever I talk of 'we' in the following description of the Sheffield Interfaith Tandem Learning I refer to Jon Gilbert, my fellow research assistant to the project, and myself.

b. *The task sheets and their topics*

For the tandem meetings, there were two things to consider: which shape should the learning material take and what topics should it cover? The learning material was to only set the frame within which the conversation was to take place. Indeed, to maximise the autonomy of the learner, the board wanted the learning material to act as a suggestion only or maybe as a starting point for the conversation, which then was to be free to move to wherever learners wanted. We decided the material should be a sheet with questions which were to guide the conversation. It was decided to call them task sheets. There were to be about a dozen such task sheets from which participants would be able to choose the ones they wanted to use for their tandem meetings.

We decided that the task sheets should have a uniform structure with the following subheadings:

Suggested Task: This section either contains a task to do in preparation for the meetings (i.e. do some reading, select a passage from a sacred text or a newspaper clipping to discuss, etc.).

Aim: This is a one sentence statement of the purpose of the particular task sheet.

Objectives: Originally, this was to be a more detailed explanation of the significance of the topic and what a discussion could yield for the conversation partners. It was thus giving a sense of direction to the task sheet. However, in the process of modelling interfaith tandem learning closer on language tandem learning, this section was changed to the generic imperative which every task sheet contains: '*On your own and with your partner define your objectives for this tandem exercise. What do you want to learn?*'

Consider asking yourself: A number of lead question are offered here which are to guide the conversation partners not only to exchange factual knowledge, but to consider how certain religious teachings manifest in practical day-to-day life. This in turn, is meant to bring about self-reflection.

Consider asking your tandem partner: Similar to the previous section, some lead questions are placed here. There is no compelling reason for a question to be sorted either under this or the previous section, except that they are phrased either in the 'you'- or in the 'I'-form?

Things to reflect on together: This again contains generic content that is the same for all task sheets. It reads: What are our similarities? Why? Where do we

differ? Why? The 'Why' is problematic in light of the analysis of chapter 3 using Wittgensteinian concepts, because a causal relationship through eternal regress tends to point beyond the limits of a religion as a frame of reference. The better question would be 'How?'.

This structure of the task sheets has not been changed during the further developments of the material and thus the task sheets presently downloadable from the web pages of the Chaplaincy Service of the University of Sheffield still follow that same outline.

The next step was to decide on the topics. In the task sheets we wanted as much as possible to do justice to the wide spectrum of what is involved in religious life and also cater to differing interests and so we were looking for ways to map aspects of religious life. Previously, during my research for this thesis, I had experimented with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1970) to try to map the different religious and interreligious discourses in an effort to disentangle them and I had even prepared and delivered a conference paper where I explored this to some degree. (Kästner 2008) I reasoned for an 'aspect of religious life' to correspond to each of the needs Maslow identifies. Safety needs, I argued, are characteristic of the political aspect, where religious communities negotiated their interest in society vis-à-vis the state and other communities and interest groups. Social needs manifest in a discourse around group membership, for instance when a believer has to negotiate being a member of his religious community with being a member of other groups, like a neighbourhood, a team at work, or a sports club. Esteem needs are again at stake in a discourse about recognition as when religious communities are recognised by their environment as genuine, for instance when a religious community forms in Diaspora. Finally, self-actualisation needs come (properly) into play when questions of ultimate truth are concerned. My suggestion then was to select topics for the task sheets from each of the spheres, or discourses to represent the spectrum of religious reality in life and society.

The project board was sceptical about the validity of the appropriation of Maslow's work, a concern I came to share and which led me to eventually give up on it. Nevertheless, thinking about different 'aspects' of religious life was helpful in identifying topics for the task sheets. We drafted task sheets with the following topics:

Religious Identity

This was to start the tandem meetings by facilitating reflection about one's own religiousness, or way of being religious. Participants are asked to complete the online questionnaire of the Religionsmonitor,[223] a survey created by German religious studies scholars, sociologists, psychologists and theologians and launched in 2007. The monitor covers various fields of being religious such as childhood influences, religious practices, distance to traditional religious authority, religious experiences, religious feelings, attitudes to other religions etc. After completing the survey, the Religionsmonitor creates a profile which can be downloaded as a pdf-file from the site. Originally we had discussed whether the survey would be useful in pairing students into tandem partners, because there is a common truism that conservative and a liberal religious persons make a bad match for conversation partners no matter to which religion they belong. We agreed however that the programme should be able to accommodate a liberal-conservative pairing, but that the profiling exercise was still a good basis to reflect on how one's being religious played out in life.

Feasting and Fasting

Sacred Space (later renamed Exploring Profound Space)

Sacred Texts (later renamed Studying Significant Texts)

These three topics relate to what according to the attempted appropriation of Maslow might be called physical aspects. Raising awareness for how the sacred is usually set apart from the profane in modern society, three 'visible' aspects of religious practice are offered for exploration: religious space, spiritual diets and sacred texts. The task sheets suggest to visit together each other's places of worship (sacred space), to plan and, if desired, to hold an interfaith dinner (spiritual diets) and to read favourite passages from scripture to each other (sacred texts).

Faith in the Media

This is a topic that explores how religion is portrayed in the media and how it is perceived in society. It relates to the political aspect corresponding to need for safety according to Maslow. The basis of the conversation is to be a newspaper article that each participant brings to the tandem meeting and which deals with religion. The

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[223] (http://www.religionsmonitor.com/index.php?lang=EN&sid=33511717213-0f0beef0; retrieved 19/09/2012)

suggested questions to address are leading the tandem partners to reflect on the place of religion in society, and its role in the public sphere.

Believing Belonging Behaving

This is a topic relating to the social need of belonging according to Maslow. The task sheet aims at facilitating some knowledge exchange about how a religious community is structured, but also reflection on membership conditions and expected standards. Students are encouraged to reflect about their relationship to their religious community.

Death and Immortality

This is a topic we created independently of our thinking about needs according to Maslow. After we had dropped the idea of the group meetings and the provision of more objective input, we were left with the subjective authority of each student which in its fullness was limited to their own faith identity. We thus naturally arrived at a position more in tune with what I described in chapter 4 as a tradition-to-life philosophizing. The topic of death as the limit of our biological lives is an obvious topic in the context of identity as it not only challenges the notion of 'meaning of life,' but indeed seems to condition it. Bauman acutely observes:

> Whatever task we embrace [as our life's project] seems to possess the same vexing quality: it sticks beyond the probable reach of our biological lives - of our task-performing, things-doing capacity. To make the plight still worse, this irritating feature of the tasks that give 'true content' to our lives cannot be cured. *It is, after all, precisely because of that feature* that the tasks in question are capable of giving life meaning which transcends life's biological limitations and allows us to live. (Bauman 1992:5; my emphasis)

The task sheet suggested to reflect on how there being death influences one's religious practice, how death contributes to meaning in life, what teachings in relation to death there are in one's tradition and how viable these teachings are for oneself.

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Similar to the previous task sheet, this one came about after we had dropped the group sessions and was conceived of not because it corresponded to a particular aspect of religious life, but because of its obvious centrality to any believer's faith.

The task sheet requires tandem partners to do some reading in preparation for the meeting, something that was added after my and my colleague's work for the project had ended.

Sacrifice

This topic sheet deals with having to forgo pleasurable things in order to keep certain ethical standards or keep up a particular religious practice. The focus is not so much on control of sensual urges, but rather the conflict religious observance can create within one's social context, i.e. in the case of students the environment of the university and student life.

Violence and Religion

This topic was prompted by the contested relationship between terrorism and religion which we thought to likely occupy in some way or another many people of faith. The task sheet asked the conversation partners to explore where, within their religious community, the use of violence was legitimised (for instance in regard to capital punishment); how this could be negotiated within the framework of British law; and where religious teachings were abused to justify violence.

Three more task sheets were added after Jon Gilbert and I had finished our work as research assistants on the project and before the material went online on the web pages of the Chaplaincy Services of Sheffield University. They are entitled:

Religion and the Politics of Gender

The Environment

Festivals[224]

It is easy to see why these topics would be relevant and thus their addition as topics does not need specific justification; as I was not part of the drafting process I will, in any case, refrain from offering rationales for and descriptions of them. Also, I did not use these topics for the Walk in my Shoes programme I developed later, based on the work I contributed to the Sheffield programme.

In summary, the task sheets were designed so as to facilitate *'a) the acquisition of knowledge, while offering b) the opportunity for authentic understanding and c) personal self-reflection.'* (Gilbert and Kaestner 2009:61) In other words, the task

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[224] These task sheets are available, as are all others, at
http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/chaplaincy/tandemlearning. (Retrieved 04/10/2012)

sheets were to utilise and to amplify the advantages the tandem situation offers: not only would there be the opportunity to learn facts about the other's religion, but an understanding of an authentic instantiation of that religion in the life of the conversation partner would be made possible. In such understanding knowledge becomes operational: it '*can be applied to predict, foresee and gauge the consequences of circumstances and actions.*' (Gilbert and Kaestner 2009:61) However, the task sheets and the tandem set up not only aim at creating an understanding in these terms of the situation of the other, but also of one's own. In the process of making oneself intelligible to the tandem partner, the participants are likely to gain a better understanding of their own religious situation and the teachings of their own religious tradition. Furthermore, the process of making sense of one's religious teachings in light of one's life experiences facilitates a (re-)negotiation of religious identity. In summary, the task sheets were meant to facilitate a move from knowledge acquisition towards understanding and on to self-reflection.

c. The journal

This same move from knowledge to understanding to self-reflection was to be supported by the journal questions, which originally consisted of two questions: one relating to the tandem meeting and thus giving space to reflect on the encounter, and a second question of a more abstract, philosophical nature to further facilitate self-reflection and learning about one's own religious situation. (Cf. Table 'first draft proposal for a curriculum' above.) After Jon Gilbert's and my work on the project had ended, the shape of the journal was changed and it is now called 'Learner Diary.' This learner diary is still meant '*to provide tandem partners with an opportunity for personal reflection [...] on your experience of dialogue between different belief systems and intercultural communication, and it invites further reflection on the way in which questions of faith shape your understanding of your identity.*'[225] However, the learner diary is also used to facilitate assessment. For this reason, and also to widen the scope of autonomy for the participants, the particular questions have been dropped and instead general ones are now suggested for all topics, such as:

Did I fully achieve today's objectives or not?

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[225] Cf. CHA111 Religion and Belief Tandem Learning: Learner Diary and Report, p. 8 at http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.152702!/file/CHA111-Identity-Learner-Diary.pdf

> What did I learn?
> About my partner's faith?
> About my own faith? [...]
> How well did I communicate my beliefs? [...]
> How, if at all, did the task affect me?[226]

The learner diary is also meant to help plan the next tandem meeting with suggested questions such as these:

> What do I need to learn more about?
> Where, when and how do I plan to do this?[227]

Besides the learner diary, there is now the requirement to write a 500 word tandem report after the completion of all tandem meetings. This report is to reflect not on what one has gained from the meetings in terms of understanding and self-reflection, but to report on how one's autonomous learning organisation has worked and improved over the course of the programme.

d. The trial run

Due to deadline stipulations relating to the funding of the project, the trial run had to take place in April of 2008, after only about 3 months of work on the project. This presented a difficulty not only in relation to the preparation time, but also in regard to finding students who would be willing to participate, as the semester was drawing to a close and examinations were coming up. Consequently, the project board decided that a 'light' version of the programme should be piloted, not to test the materials, but to test whether tandem learning as a method would work for the interfaith situation. The trial run thus consisted only of an initial meeting during which the concept of tandem learning was introduced and the programme presented. The tandem partnerships formed there then met one time to do task sheet 1and came then together for a focus group meeting and to fill in a feedback questionnaire. The feedback given was positive and the programme has run several times since then. Certain alterations were made after Jon Gilbert and I had finished our work on the project; for instance the matching process has been refined and additional task sheets were created.

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[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.

5.3.3 Issues

Although the trial run of the programme in its light version was successful, I disagreed with some of the aspects of the Sheffield programme. This led me to create the Walk in my Shoes Programme, which was then executed at Leeds University. These aspects are a) the concern not to offend, and b) the issue of autonomy and assessment. I will deal with them one after the other in the following:

a. *The concern not to offend*

The concern not to offend was a very real worry for the board of the Interfaith Tandem Learning project. I am aware that there may be cultural differences at play in my perception of this issue. I am German and the style of communication in Germany is in general very much focused on the subject at hand and takes relatively little account of the sensitivities of the people involved. (Schroll-Machl 2002:45–57) Such 'directness' is positively cast as 'objectivity' and as such valued in professional contexts and not considered rude. Thus too much consideration for the sensitivities of other people may come across as patronising rather than respectful. The English style of communication, on the other hand, is less direct and more considerate of people's feelings. However, the concern not to offend which was operative in the Interfaith Tandem Learning project is, I believe, real and goes beyond what might be attributed to either the 'Englishness' of the project board, or my culturally (differently) conditioned perception.

This concern manifested mainly in relation to the task sheets. Thus the title of the task sheet 'Violence and Religion' was changed by the project board into the rather grotesque 'Reconciliation: Handling Conflict, Resisting Violence', while the rest of the task sheet remained unchanged. Probably because this is such an obvious rebranding without a change in substance, the title has been changed again between September 2008 and February 2009 to read just 'Violence' thus avoiding the association of religion with violence in the title (although the task sheet is about just that). The title now (September 2012) reads 'Violence and Non-Violence' thus balancing its concepts out, so to speak. This time, the concept of 'non-violence' has been worked into the suggested questions of the task sheets as well. Additionally the reading task that was set for the task sheet has been changed as well. To provide some context for the conversation, my fellow research assistant Jon Gilbert had suggested asking participants to read the introduction of Juergensmeyer's book

Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence. (Juergensmeyer 2003:3–18) This has been replaced by a reading of Tina Beattie's *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion,* chapter 4 entitled 'Science, Religion and War.' (Beattie 2008:76–98) This change of reading assignments evidences a 'softening' of the topic's potential stimulus. Juergensmeyer approaches the issue of violence and religion by stating that:

> [a]lthough some observers try to explain away religion's recent ties to violence as an aberration, a result of political ideology, or the characteristic of a mutant form of religion – fundamentalism – these are not my views. Rather I look for explanations in the current forces of geopolitics and in a strain of violence that may be found at the deepest levels of religious imaginations. (Juergensmeyer 2003:6)

In other words, Juergensmeyer thinks that there is an inherent component in religion that makes it susceptible to the use of violence to achieve certain ends. He further emphasises the role of the religious community in acts of terrorism and dismisses the picture of the lone, socially maladjusted religious terrorist. He says '*the line is very thin between "terrorists" and their "non-terrorist" supporters*' (Juergensmeyer 2003:8) and that in many cases of terrorism '*religion has supplied not only the ideology, but also the motivation and the organizational structure for the perpetrators.*' (Juergensmeyer 2003:5) Taking this piece of his writing as a starting point of a conversation about religion and violence thus confronts the issue head-on: the participants are led to reflect on how violence is placed within their religious tradition and community and where things go wrong when acts of terror are committed in its name. Beattie's chapter, which is now assigned instead, reads like a piece of apologetics. The chapter starts by saying that some of the most genocidal regimes in history have been the atheist and post-Christian regimes of the twentieth century (Beattie 2008:77) and it continues to exonerate religion from the charges made by popular atheists. It thus is a much more comforting and less provocative starting point for a conversation about religion and violence.

Another example of the concern not to offend is the task sheet 'Death and Immortality'. The apprehension was voiced that this was too difficult a subject, which might unsettle students in its bluntness. The title was thus changed into Mortality and Immortality (again without change to the rest of the task sheet). Between September 2008 and February 2009 the task sheet was deleted from the programme and substituted for by the task sheet 'Festivals'.

There were more changes to task sheets titles, and those also reveal a concern perhaps not so much for not offending people, but for not alienating them. Thus the task sheets Exploring Sacred Space and Studying Sacred Texts were renamed Exploring Profound Space and Studying Significant Texts, respectively. This is of course a much less problematic issue than the previous re-brandings and may even be considered a commendable effort to avoid a potentially Christian bias or to eliminate a religious disposition altogether in order to open the topic, and the programme, to non-believers. However, in the light of the re-brandings discussed above, the somewhat ungainly substitution of the word 'sacred' smacks of awkwardness that I think every user will detect. Are people so narrow-minded that they would take issue with the term 'sacred'? And are they really not capable of making the transition from 'sacred' to 'profound' or 'significant' for themselves, if they happen to be non-religious? It seems to me the simple question 'Which spaces are sacred to you personally?' would have sufficed to induce such an adaptation. It is not only here that such an exaggerated concern for the sensibilities of others betrays a paternalistic attitude toward them. Another instance of safeguarding to the point of paternalism I sense in the listening workshop which has been introduced to precede the actual tandem meetings.

One of the learning outcomes defined for the programme is to '*develop a capacity to listen with empathy, sensitivity and understanding*'[228] and presumably the listening workshop is to facilitate that. Perhaps it is because of my philosophical background that I find this rather pastoral language questionable. After all, tandem meetings are not therapeutic sessions. To suggest that participants are unable to observe basic social etiquette or are unable to see the other person's point of view unless specifically trained is a fairly presumptuous position to take. To be fair, Will Lamb, the project board chair, assured me that the feedback to the listening skills workshop has been very positive. However, this might be a self-fulfilling prophecy, as only such persons will be willing to subject themselves to a workshop like this who respond positively to such pastoral propositions in the first place.

Another similar case are some questions suggested in the task sheets. The task sheet 'Religion and the Politics of Gender,' designed by a member of the project board, reads: '*Does my religious tradition affirm the fundamental equality of men and*

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[228] Cf. Document CHA 111 'Religion and Belief Tandem Learning: Learner Diary & Report' p. 3: http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.152702!/file/CHA111-Identity-Learner-Diary.pdf (Retrieved 11/10/2012)

women?' The question, on the surface, appears to be an open question. Yet is it possible to deny that by the very social context in which it is placed - a secular university in the UK - the question implies a certain answer as correct? Similarly, the task sheet 'The Environment', also added to the programme after Jon Gilbert's and my research assistantship had ended, contains the following question: *'Should every technological advance be applauded?'* Such a blatantly rhetorical question is certainly patronising in its suggestiveness.[229]

The boundary between 'meaning well' and 'patronising' is somewhat blurred and there might be disagreement into which of the two categories specific instances fall. It is clear however that patronising on the basis of good intentions is structurally similar to the position of religious pluralists as described in chapter 2, section 2.3.5, who also, in an attempt to treat all religions fairly, end up putting themselves in a position of supposed superiority.[230,231]

In summary, as interfaith dialogue is often suspected to infringe on the integrity of the religious identity of its participants, it seems advisable, in case of doubt, to rather be too straightforward than to engage in a potentially patronising attitude of cushioning controversial topics. Whether students are too immature to deal with topics like death or violence is something I was willing to try out in the Walk in my Shoes programme I designed after my research assistantship to the Sheffield programme had ended and the results will be presented in the next chapter. These topics are, in any case, philosophically meaningful and for that reason I did not want

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[229] Another example of patronising, even though unconnected to the concern not to offend, is the use of the pronoun 'I' and the possessive article 'my' in the 'Consider asking yourself'-section of the task sheets as in 'Does violence play a role in my religion?' (Cf. task sheet 'Violence and Non-violence'). This implies that the question is really the participant's questions, even if they did not realise it, whereas in reality, it is the facilitators of the project who pose that question to the participant. It would be better, in my judgement, to reflect that situations more honestly through the use of the pronoun 'you' throughout the task sheets and leave it up to the readers to either accept and use that question for themselves or to leave it out. I pass this judgement in hindsight as I have myself been co-responsible for the phrasing of the task sheet questions and did not object to the use of 'I' and 'my' at the time we drafted them.

[230] There are essential differences too, of course. Pluralism is an epistemological position to take, whereas the concern not to offend is a social impulse.

[231] Yet another example of good intentions going awry is the notion of 'religious tolerance' and, less obviously 'celebrating diversity', all not too far from interfaith dialogue discourse (although not explicitly in evidence in the Sheffield project). Tolerance, although usually thought of as a positive concept, far from acknowledging equality implies a position of power from which one is in a position to tolerate the other who is thus cast in the role of the recipient of goodwill and the helpless dependant. 'Celebrating diversity' more subtly suggests that diversity could be a problem. By affirming that religious diversity is a reason for celebration, it is implied that such diversity could also be unwelcome. But people of minority religions (belonging to a minority faith myself) do not want to see themselves even subjected to the category pairs of 'good' and 'bad' or 'welcome' and 'unwelcome'. Their very existence implies their right to exist and any insinuation that there is a need to pass a value judgement on this existence is misplaced.

to sacrifice them on account of premonitions of conflict. Taking students seriously as self-dependent believers, it seems to me, requires taking that risk.

b. *Autonomy and assessment*

The notion of autonomy played a large role in the design of the Tandem Interfaith Learning Programme, because it was adapted from language tandem learning, the point of which is precisely the autonomy of the language learner, as opposed to the relative dependence on structured input from outside in a regular language course. Usually such tandem learning is a private affair: two people of different mother tongues meet, do things together and in the process teach each other their respective native languages. Tandem language learning as developed, among others, by the MLTC (cf. 5.2.1 b above) as part of a credit earning academic programme thus represents an appropriation of the original idea. The necessary modification was to make the progress of the learners measureable so their learning could be assessed. Tandem learners are hence required to document through a rather complex set of reports and self-reflections the efforts they have undertaken and the progress they have made. But it is not only language learning as such that is the subject of the MLTC's tandem learning programme. Additionally, tandem learning is employed to teach people to organise and monitor their own learning processes. Thus the required documentation includes aims defined in advance of the tandem meetings, a plan to achieve these aims including time scale, and self-assessment on how these aims were realised and if they were not how to ensure that they would be in the future.

Arguably, such an intense monitoring exercise takes not only some of the fun, but also a good deal of authenticity out of the tandem situation, the unique character of which consisted in the social, free-floating nature of the conversations. Whereas before tandem partners were free to follow the leads that would spontaneously arise from the conversation situation, they now have to negotiate each other's learning goals and then act as service suppliers and receivers in turn. In other words: learning autonomy is not necessarily an autonomous affair itself.

Admittedly, such a purposive approach to language learning can be very effective, as speaking a foreign language well is to quite a large degree (though by no means exclusively) a matter of accumulating information and practicing skill in

applying it. However, when such an approach is imposed onto the idea of faith conversations, the issue is more problematic.

As outlined above, Jon Gilbert and I saw the unique value of the interfaith tandem conversations in that they facilitated not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also a practical understanding of the religious situation of the other and an increased self-reflection about one's own religious situation up to a re-negotiation of aspects of one's own faith identity. Thus to some measure it is the whole point of tandem faith conversations *not* to know where the journey goes. This is rather incompatible with defining learning goals beforehand and being focused on achieving these predefined goals during the conversation.

SECTION 4   Set your objectives

Now that you have identified your priorities, what do you hope to achieve by the end of this programme? Be as realistic as possible. You will need to discuss these objectives with your tutor and your tandem partner.

What do I want to learn?	By when?	Where?	Day and Time?

When you have completed this form, please give it to the tutor, who will then discuss your objectives with you. Once your objectives have been agreed, this form will be returned to you. Please note that you will need to transfer the information in Section 4 to the equivalent box in the Learner Diary.

Extract from 'Setting Objectives' document.
http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.152709!/file/CHA111-Setting-Objectives.pdf
(Retrieved 06/10/2012)

Because of the nature of the subject, progress in interfaith tandem learning is harder to measure than advancement in the skill of using a foreign language. As the institutional setting of the programme within the Sheffield Graduate Award required a form of assessment, the project board opted for taking over the additional aspect of learning autonomous learning from the MLTC's tandem language learning

programme and laid a lot of emphasis on this aspect in order to award academic credits for the participation in the programme. Although the manual of the programme states that '*the journal is the chance for individual reflection*' including '*reflection on the way in which questions of faith shape your understanding of your identity*',[232] almost all the suggested questions offered as prompts relate to the aspect of monitoring learning (and thus learning autonomous learning) instead of insights in terms of content.

Review of the Last Session

- Did I complete the task?
- Did I fully achieve today's objectives or not?
- What did I learn? About my partner's faith? About my own faith? Was it useful, interesting, enjoyable?
- How well did I communicate my beliefs? How well did I understand what my partner tried to communicate? Were there any difficulties? What made the conversation easier?
- How, if at all, did the task affect me?

Objectives for the Next Session

- If I have not achieved my current objective(s), what will help me to do this?
- What do I need to learn more about?
- Where, when and how do I plan to do this?

Extract from 'Learner Diary Entries: Some Helpful Tips'
http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.152709!/file/CHA111-Setting-Objectives.pdf
(Retrieved 06/10/2012)

There are four such learner diary entries to be written by participants. At the end of the programme, the participant has to write a 'tandem report' of 500 words on his experience of interfaith tandem learning. Again, the manual offers some questions as prompts. Although the lead question is supposed to be '*How has your social and cultural awareness changed in the course of this exercise?*' 9 of the 11 questions offered (not counting the general 'What else?') are concerned with learning autonomous learning and only two relate to content:

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[232] http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.152709!/file/CHA111-Setting-Objectives.pdf
(Retrieved 06/10/2012)

Tandem Report

Once you have completed your tandem conversations, you should write an account of your experience of Interfaith Tandem Learning in about 500 words. How has your social and cultural awareness changed in the course of this exercise?

You may wish to start with:

- Why you decided to participate
- How you analysed your needs
- Which objectives you set

You may find it helps to analyse the process if you look back over your learner diary entries and:

- Detail the task sheets used and why you chose them
- Include any learning techniques you acquired or developed, or any insight you gained into the way you learn
- Explain how you organised your time
- Examine how you monitored your progress and decided on next steps
- Reflect on the following questions:
  - Did you achieve your objectives? Give Details.
  - Which objectives did you not achieve? Why not?
  - How did your listening skills develop?
  - Are you more able to organise your own learning?
  - What else?

Extract from 'Learner Diary Entries: Some Helpful Tips'
http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.152709!/file/CHA111-Setting-Objectives.pdf
(Retrieved 06/10/2012)

Of course students are autonomous in how they fill the tandem meetings. They need not even use the task sheets at all. But whatever participants decide to pursue, in the end it has to fit the framework of self monitoring one's learning processes. What is true of learning autonomous language learning applies here as well: learning autonomous learning may be a fairly restricting experience.

But it is not only the free movement of the conversation that is being undercut. With the heavy emphasis on monitoring the process of learning, a certain kind of learning is privileged and it is not self-reflection about the construction of one's religious identity, but knowledge acquisition in terms of facts and describable data. This is because self-reflection about the construction of one's identity and the pursuit of philosophical questions are, in themselves, discourses already characterised by a mental stepping back and bringing oneself onto a theoretical meta-level. The learning monitoring then, if applied to self-reflection, would add another meta-level of a completely different kind. The philosophical meta-level requires the use of non-actual speech and figurative expressions because it has to rely on words that are 'meant' for first-level usage. In Wittgensteinian terms, the latter represents the proper use of language, the former employs words in a 'senseless' manner. (TLP 4.003). Monitoring your own learning processes, on the other hand requires again 'proper' statements. It is much easier to make proper statements about facts in the world than

about things cast in non-actual speech. Thus, in my estimation, participants will be far more likely to focus on data knowledge, like observable facts relating to their partner's religion than tackling the difficult task of planning, and reflecting on, the progress on their reflecting on the construction of religious identity, even more so as the participants are usually not trained at all in the field of theology or philosophy.

In summary, I feel that this additional element of learning autonomous learning (and proving it to the programme supervisors) is a distraction and hindrance that interferes with the process of personal inquiry and reflection to an unacceptable degree. Thus for the Leeds Walk in my Shoes programme I did not include this feature at all, but instead tried to foster a different kind of autonomy: not becoming autonomous learners with a focus on first level data, but gaining autonomy through becoming conscious of our identity construction and thus being enabled to consciously influence who we are and want to be.

5.3.4 Summary

To apply the five principles of philosophical interfaith dialogue as laid out above (cf. 5.2.) to the Sheffield Interfaith Tandem Learning programme is only partially justified. Neither did the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies of the Higher Education Academy in its funding regulations stipulate a philosophical approach to interfaith dialogue, nor did the project board conceive of the programme in such terms. But it was my intention as a research assistant to contribute this idea to the programme. I was only partially successful in doing so.

It is fair to say that the Interfaith Tandem Learning programme has succeeded in avoiding any suggestion of representation. From the way the conversations were set up it has been clear that no participant is in any capacity to represent their faith community or theological systems, but that all took part in the conversations as private adherents of a faith which they practiced to varying degrees in their lives. Neither has there been an implicit pluralist position: there was no intention to arrive at any kind of conclusion as a result of the conversations that would be shared by all participants. There has also been no suggestion that any one particular faith would hold better answers than any other. Even more so, some of the modifications discussed above (Cf. 5.3.3 a) bear witness to a concern not to offend, which, as I argued, is exaggerated to the point of paternalism. Ironically, this paternalism, is

structurally similar to that of pluralist interfaith theology and thus there is a slight flavour of traditional pluralist interfaith dialogue, as described in chapter 2 (Cf. 2.4). Although this structural parallel may only be discernible for someone familiar with that history, the paternalistic flavour is noticeable to even the uninformed participant who will more likely associate it with a concern for political correctness in relation to religion, which may well be the origin of it indeed.

There was also no explicit prescription as to the motivation participants brought to the programme. The set up was to ensure an amicable and respectful atmosphere for tandem meetings, although the project board felt it necessary to supplement it with a mandatory listening skills session.

Finally, one of the principles outlined above (cf. 5.2.) related to the nature of discourse. Studying a religion as an outsider is a different discourse than engaging in inner-religious debate and the two should not be mixed, as I have argued in chapter 2 (cf. 2.3.3 and 2.4.3). There is little danger of such inappropriate mixing of discourses in the Tandem Interfaith Learning programme. However, the element of assessing participants' performance in the programme and the related emphasis on learning autonomous learning tends to privilege an outsider's, fact-based approach. Even if there is no emic authority derived from this, it simply is the wrong kind of discourse when a philosophical discussion, as defined in chapter 4 (cf. 4.4.4) is intended through the projection and hypothetical participation in the other's frame of reference (cf. chapter 3, section 3.7)[233]. The philosophical discourse is also hampered if the Socratic element of holding each other responsible to our views (albeit within our own frame of reference or religion) is diluted by the excessive cushioning of potentially controversial or difficult topics.

5.4   The Walk in my Shoes programme

The theoretical considerations of chapter 3 suggested that typically it is not possible to reason across the boundaries of religious traditions. However, understanding a foreign religious tradition and the reasoning that takes place within it is possible for outsiders, if such persons are willing to project themselves into the

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[233] As mentioned earlier, the project board had not such intention, but it was I who brought it to the project. Thus the project, on its own terms, was successful.

epistemological frame of reference that the given religion forms. Such persons thus become hypothetical participants of that foreign religion's frame of reference: without committing to the validity of the inner-religious reasoning of that tradition for themselves, they can comprehend the logic of it. (Such comprehension is possible, because the definition of reasoning universally includes values like coherence, freedom from contradiction, relevance and plausibility. It is only the application of such values to different frames of references that produces incompatible, and in fact incommensurable truth claims.)

Continuing this line of thought, the possibility of understanding the religious other, i.e. the possibility to hypothetically participate in a foreign frame of reference, encompasses the ability to hold the religious other responsible for the soundness of their reasoning within their own frame of reference. In other words, it is philosophically possible for an outsider to demand intellectual integrity of a person of (another) faith.

This was, perhaps in a less developed form, the basic view I brought to the Interfaith Tandem Learning project in Sheffield. Through the work on the project and the input of the other people involved, my understanding became fuller and clearer. As a result, however, I felt that the Tandem Interfaith Learning programme did not fully realise the potential of the tandem conversation setup in practically implementing this understanding. This was partly due to the restrictions placed onto the programme by its institutional context and the project board, i.e. the need to assess the participants' performance in the programme and the decision to realise this through the inclusion of the aspect of learning autonomous learning. But it was also due to the tight time frame within which the project had to be realised as prescribed by the funding stipulations of the Higher Education's Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies. There was not enough time to fully develop the topics and the various aspects of the programme. Many of the things I find to be problematic, like the deletion of the task sheet 'Mortality and Immortality,' some of the softening in language, the suggestiveness of some questions, and the extensive self-documentation process. took place or were added after the official end of the research and trial phase. Not only must, for instance, the drafting of the manual documents have been quite a lot of work for the project board's chair, Will Lamb, which in terms of fair distribution of work should have fallen on us research

assistants, but their design could have profited from a greater forum of discussion, as is my view, in regard to the heavy emphasis on learning autonomous learning.

These were the reasons why I decided to create the Walk in my Shoes programme, which was first tested in a trial run from January to March 2009. This programme builds on the Sheffield Interfaith Tandem Learning programme (and is therefore indebted to everyone who participated in the development there) but seeks to implement more fully the insights of the theoretical chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis as summarised above.

Whereas Jon Gilbert and I phrased the value of the Interfaith Tandem Learning programme in terms of a move from knowledge to understanding to self-reflection and whereas this latter dimension was somewhat hampered in the Sheffield programme, for the Leeds programme I wanted to focus more exclusively on this aspect of self-reflection. I believe the idea of self-reflection is more clearly defined as a tradition-to-life philosophising, or a (re-)negotiation of inherited religious categories in light of one's own experiences in the world as explained in chapter 4 (cf. 4.4.4). Such negotiation reflects the dialectic relationship between the cumulative tradition and personal faith, as conceived by Smith (Smith [1962] 1991). Thus the philosophising to be facilitated through the programme was to, on the one hand, philosophically emancipate the individual from their religious community and tradition, and on the other hand, counteract excessive subjectivism by demanding philosophical soundness, i.e. coherence and freedom from contradiction, etc, through constantly referring back to the frame of reference that their religion represents.

Furthermore, following such a philosophical approach to interfaith dialogue, I did not want to shy away from potentially difficult topics or unduly tone down the language with which issues were presented. Rather, a frank and direct style of presentation seemed to best promote and facilitate this truly Socratic element of dialogue of pursuing rational soundness and demanding intellectual accountability. Because assessment was not an issue, I was able to take on topics that probably would not have worked if someone else was 'reading in,' such as the issue of doubt, personal atonement, and personal communication with God or the Transcendent. Furthermore the absence of assessment eliminate the potential leaning towards a fact-focused approach with the participants.

5.4.1 Topics

The Sheffield Walk in my Shoes programme used the idea of a set of topics presented on paper that would give structure to the tandem meeting conversations. I called them not task sheet, but topic sheets, since there was no task as such to fulfil in regard to which the performance of the participant would be assessed. Their outline followed a common pattern with some variations: Each topic sheet features after its title a short paragraph that briefly introduces the topic and contextualises it cautiously. The following are this introductory paragraph from the topic sheet 'Talking to God' and 'Keeping the Faith' respectively offered as examples:

Communication with the Divine is essential for many believers. There are different forms of communication, some **communal**, often ritualised, some very **personal** and free in the form they take. A lot of religious authority is built on the claim to successful communication with the Divine.

From the topic sheet 'Talking to God'

Although faith is usually taken to be beyond material proof (or disproof), maintaining one's faith is something that requires 'nurture' of some kind. Despite such nurture, most believers have experienced doubt. This doubt can relate to relatively minor things, but can also be fairly existential. Sometimes doubt is a catalyst to open up new horizons of faith.

From the topic sheet 'Keeping the Faith'

A second, visually distinct, paragraph elaborates briefly on the significance of the topic and the benefits of discussing it.

What this topic can do for you:

A vast part of religious life and practice has to do with communication and interaction with the Divine. To explore this area is to truly get to know the other as a person of faith and to make yourself intelligible as a religious practitioner.

From the topic sheet 'Talking to God'

> **What this topic can do for you:**
>
> To speak about the **essentials** of your faith and your strategies to nurture them. To reflect on ways of dealing with **doubt**, perhaps to share how your faith has developed.

From the topic sheet 'Keeping the Faith'

What follows under the heading 'Consider' are suggested questions that are meant to focus the participants on the negotiation of personal faith in light of the cumulative tradition and one's own life experiences. I did not keep the somewhat contrived division between 'consider asking yourself' and 'consider asking your tandem partner'. Some topic sheets contain a section 'For further reflection' similar to the journal questions of the first draft curriculum. They are more complex in nature and often also more abstract and perhaps only suited for the more philosophically minded participants. They are visually set apart from the actual suggested questions of the respective topic sheet and thus clearly marked as additional material which does not need to be covered. The topic sheets also contain empty space to invite note taking in preparation for and also during the meeting in order to enhance the quality of reflection. I only adapted task sheets from the Interfaith Tandem Learning programme I was involved in creating. Others I created especially for the Walk in my Shoes programme. All of them can be found in appendix 9.3 of this thesis. The sequence in which they appear in the booklet is meant to signify a progressively more personal and confidential nature of the topics. There are the following topic sheets in the following order:

Things Sacred

This topic sheet combines the three task sheets 'Feasting and Fasting,' 'Sacred Space' and 'Sacred Texts.' All three of the topics appeared to me to be relatively inviting of an exchange of fact-knowledge, something I wanted to go beyond. At the same time these topics seemed to provide an easy entrance into the tandem conversations with a person that one does not know very well or not at all. In order to gain space for more philosophical topics while still offering such an entrance, I

combined the three topics into one topic sheet and included besides the fact-aiming questions an equal number of questions inviting self-reflection.

Making Sacrifices

This is another topic we originally created a task sheet for in Sheffield. As mentioned above, it deals with the difficulties of 'living against the grain' of mainstream society as a result of keeping certain standards of religious practice. It thus not only deals with standards of religious practice, but also how one negotiates one's place as a religious person in wider, secular society.

Talking to God

This is a new topic I introduced and placed rather at the beginning of the topic sheet booklet, because it appears to be a very universal aspect of religious life. As the quotes I offered above show, it starts with a question regarding communal practice of communion with the divine – thus referencing the cumulative tradition – and moves on to suggest reflection about how one relates to such ritualised forms of communication and on to personal ways of communicating with the divine. It also points the readers back to their frame of reference by asking for philosophical soundness as for instance in: '*How do you interpret signs? What are your guidelines for such interpretation?*'

Why do bad things happen to good people?

This is a topic for which Jon Gilbert and I had drafted a task sheet in Sheffield. I tried to make the issue more tangible by including a picture of a woman whose husband was a fire fighter and had died in the collapsing towers of the World Trade Centre in New York on 9/11 in 2001. The caption of the picture contained a quote where this woman says that she had lost her faith, because God had not saved her husband's life despite her prayers. The topic sheet then asks the readers how they would console the woman and encourage her not to lose faith, despite the tragedy that had befallen her. The topic is thus firmly anchored within the practical realm of everyday life of concrete persons, thus preventing abstract reasoning but facilitating doctrine-to-.life philosophising. It also offers space for 'emancipation' from the cumulative tradition by asking: '*Have you yourself experienced something painful and how did your faith help you (or not) in dealing with it?*'

Tolerance and Limits

This is a topic newly included for the Walk in my Shoes programme in Leeds. It arose out of the experience of the concern not to offend discussed above (cf. 5.3.3.a), which demonstrated that interfaith dialogue is a field heavily patrolled by the notion of political correctness and the fear of religious conflict. This leaves little room to express discomfort and disagreement, both important components in any relationship and most certainly when different religions are involved. Thus this topic sheet was to create a space to voice such concerns, not by criticising the tandem partner or their religion, but by reflecting on and expressing the extent of one's own willingness to forbear and likewise the limits at which such willingness stops. The suggested questions ask first for examples of an ideal standard of tolerance – pointing to the cumulative tradition – and then about how these ideals map onto one's own life as a religious person in wider society and vis-à-vis people of other religions. It also asks readers to think about how they would communicate that a certain behaviour is unacceptable to them, about what blasphemy constitutes and how they would respond to an act they consider as such.

Urgency and Hope

This topic was newly created for the Walk in my Shoes programme. It arose from a personal experience of witnessing a Christian speak about the belief in rebirth saying that if she knew she had more than one life she would become spiritually lazy and not endeavour earnestly enough to achieve salvation. She thus thought the notion of reincarnation to be corrupting the urgency with which a religious believer should strive for spiritual perfection. Closely related to such a feeling of urgency is, I would argue, the idea of hope: hope, that one could thus escape eternal damnation (as might have been the fear of the Christian woman I listened to). I realised that for me being somewhat at home in what could be termed Hindu thought, urgency arises from the perception of the inherent defects of life in the material world and the idea of reincarnation, rather than being harmful for spiritual practice, provided hope that spiritual perfection is indeed achievable and that there was enough time to learn from mistakes. Thus, while urgency and hope were universally operative notions, they might play out rather differently in different religious traditions and to learn how exactly they did in a person's life would offer a lot of insight into the inner logic of

the belief structure. Thus the first questions suggested are: '*Where does a sense of urgency arise within the teachings of your religion and your own beliefs? Why is it important to practice today rather than later in life?*' The next step is again to relate this rather theoretical question to the concrete life of the believer: '*How does this sense of urgency inform your own religious practice?*' And the same for hope: '*How does hope or reward your religion promises inform your attitude to life? Your actions?*' There is also the aspect of situating oneself in relation to the cumulative tradition and the demands it exerts: '*How do you deal with the high demands connected to this sense of urgency in your daily life? Is it easy to keep it up or do you need a break every once in a while?*' Many topic sheets also contain a question to induce reflection about the epistemological situatedness of a believer and how his reasoning within a closed frame of reference produces different results from those of a believer of another religion. In the case of this topic sheet this question reads: '*How do urgency and hope shape your perception of others? How do they inform your behaviour toward people of other faiths or people of no faith?*'

Religion and Violence

This is a topic for which Jon Gilbert and I had already created a task sheet for the Sheffield programme and which has gone through multiple transmutations since then, as described above (cf. 5.3.3 a). For the Walk in my Shoes programme in Leeds I also adapted it somewhat. The introductory paragraph provided the opportunity to frame the topic such that violence and non-violence are first an issue for theological reflection and only in a second step comes their manifestation or application in the political realm into view. To again start out from cumulative tradition the following questions were included to precede all others: '*Where in the narratives of your faith tradition does violence play a role?*' '*How is violence viewed in these circumstances?*' By pointing to a religious narrative not only is the participant asked to refer to the frame of reference his religious tradition sets, but there is also some concrete setting established from which a mapping onto the life of the religious believer today is then the second step: '*Where in today's world is violence justified or even necessary according to the understanding of your faith tradition? (E.g. the death penalty?)*'. The rules that govern such mapping from one concrete situation onto another are more obvious than those which control the application of abstract theorems onto a concrete situation. Not only is such a mapping more comprehensible

to the outsider or tandem partner therefore, but it is also easier for the tandem partner to insist on philosophical soundness. The next question is meant to give the reader again the opportunity to express how committed they are to those specific teachings and thus the chance to fully embrace or to partially distance themselves from them: '*How do you relate to these aspects of your faith?*' As the usual narrowing of the concept of violence down to physical violence is due to the now ubiquitous connection between religious violence and terrorism, the following question is to expand this restricted focus and to broaden the concept: '*We usually think of violence in physical terms. What other forms of violence might there be in regard to faith?*' The last question is, as before, intended to point the reader towards the fact that they are reasoning from within a closed frame of reference: '*How does the issue of violence impact on your relationship with people of other faiths? How does it impact on how you view them?*'

Thus most of the original questions were substituted or rephrased. I deleted the original questions of how religiously prescribed violence could be negotiated within the framework of British law, because this opens another field that is less philosophical and rather more political. I felt that this was perhaps not the time to extract a statement of loyalty to the British rule of law from the tandem partners, because the insinuation of disloyalty is presumptuous and where indeed there is disloyalty, the conflict is unlikely to be resolved or even lessened through the tandem meetings. I furthermore deleted the question 'Who carries out acts of violence in your religion' because this again seemed too focused on political debates on terrorism and too demanding of an apologetic response.

Belonging to a Religious Community

I took this topic over from one of the task sheets we created for the Sheffield programme. I only added the introductory paragraphs and left the rest unchanged, except for the addition of two sets of questions that were to facilitate a distancing from the cumulative tradition, if so desired: '*What behaviour is expected of a community member? How does it affect your daily life?*' and '*What hierarchies are in place? How does it affect your religious practice?*'

Death and Immortality

This is a topic for which there was originally a task sheet created by Jon Gilbert and myself for the Interfaith Tandem Learning programme in Sheffield. Later on, the task sheet was deleted from the selection (cf. 5.3.3 a). I changed the questions and their sequence somewhat to draw out all the necessary elements: starting with a concrete situation ('*Think of a situation in which you encountered death. What impact has that experience had on your outlook on life and your religious beliefs and practices?*') the questions then move on to a pointer toward the cumulative tradition ('*What does your religion say why there is death in the world? What does it teach about afterlife?*') and then open up the opportunity to situate oneself in relation to the cumulative tradition ('*How tangible are these teachings for you? Do they help you to face your own mortality? How do they impact on your daily life? How do they affect your religious practice?*'). It ends with returning to the cumulative tradition: '*What rituals are there in your faith tradition connected to the situation of death?*' thus inviting further negotiation of personal faith in light of inherited practices.

Keeping the Faith

The topic here is 'doubt'. It was not represented in the task sheets of the Sheffield project. I had always thought this to be a very important subject, virtually the pure embodiment of the issue of negotiating religious identity within a field of tension created by the two poles of inherited tradition and one's own life experiences. I had suggested the topic in Sheffield as well and it was included in the original draft of the curriculum as one of the more abstract journal questions. But since the journal took a different shape, the topic was not included in Sheffield. To give substance to a topic as abstract as this, I focused on the key concepts' nurture of faith, faith essentials, and strategies of dealing with doubt. In the introductory paragraph I tried to portray doubt as something common and potentially enriching so as to remove, as best as possible, a possibly perceived stigma. The questions also start on a positive note: '*What do you consider essential practice that nurtures your faith?*' In the next question, the focus is more firmly placed on the participants' own daily life: '*How do you maintain such nurture in your daily life? Can you think of specific examples?*' Then the religious tradition as the epistemological frame of reference is highlighted: '*What ways of dealing with doubt are recommended in your tradition? Who do you go to? What do you do?*' Such questions may not be easy to answer for the participants. If this prompts an inquiry with someone of authority

within the religious community of the participant then this will also be a valuable contribution to the formation of religious identity. The next questions are again focused on how the individual situates themselves in relation to those 'official' strategies: '*Can you think of a personal example where this worked for you?*' and '*In the course of your religious practice or your life as a believer, have you developed personal strategies for dealing with doubts? What are they?*'

Falling Short of God's ideal (?)

This is another topic specifically included in the Walk in my Shoes programme and one which is closely related to the previous one. Where doubt is the failure to fully embrace the belief system of the inherited tradition, a 'downfall' from some moral standard represents the practical failure to live up to ideals one has accepted as one's own. The questions this topic sheet addresses are that of standards that are difficult to keep, authorised ways of atonement, and the criterion to decide which standards to follow in the first place. To gain a measure of concreteness, the first question asks for an example of a standard that is difficult to keep and why it is difficult to keep. Then, there is the reference to the inherited tradition: '*In your religious tradition, are there established ways of dealing with the inability to maintain a given standard? What are they?*' The next set of questions ask for an example of successful atonement leaving it to the reader to use a personal or a hypothetical one. In hindsight I realise that there is now a gap in the logical sequence of the questions. Next I should have included a question about personal atonement strategies and whether and how they have worked for the individual. The final question that is there then relates to the issue of deciding which standards to follow: '*How do you decide which standards are set by God?*' This question is meant to be foreshadowed in the bracketed question mark of the title.

God, the World and Me

This is the last topic sheet and the most abstract one. It is placed at the end of the topic sheet booklet not because it was a particularly personal topic, but because it represents a kind of summary of one's religious perspective or philosophy. The focus here is not so much on the personal negotiation of faith vis-à-vis the inherited cumulative tradition, but on an explication of principles which underlie one's religious perspective and that of one's faith tradition.

The impetus to create this topic sheet came from a theology of religions by William Deadwyler (Ravindra Svarupa dasa), a leading theologian of the Hare Krishna movement. (It was this theology that prompted me to take up the topic of interfaith dialogue and the work on this thesis.) Deadwyler has presented this theology of religion in recorded lectures, but, to my knowledge, it has not appeared in print. There exists a report by Knott on a lecture he gave which outlines the system he introduces. (Knott 1993) To give a brief summary, Deadwyler's theology of religions basically consists of an application of the Hegelian concepts of thesis, antithesis and synthesis to a typology of religions that originates within the teachings of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition to which the modern Hare Krishna movement belongs. There, religions, or religious attitudes, are classified as *karma* (activity for some material gain), *jnana* (cultivation of knowledge) and *bhakti* (love for and devotion to God). The Hegelian concepts are applied thus that thesis is represented by *karma* or the idea that the world is there to be enjoyed by the living entities, their relationship to God being that of petitioners to a supplier: good deeds are performed to harness favourable results in this world and in afterlife. God, in this view, is usually seen as a person. The antithesis, *jnana*, negates this outlook: the world is seen as inherently unenjoyable and is therefore to be rejected and renounced. Along with this view goes the conception that God is impersonal and that salvation consists in becoming one with the Divine and losing individuality and personhood. The synthesis, Deadwhiler argues, lies in *bhakti*, or unconditional and loving service to God which, in the manner of the Hegelian synthesis, transcends the contradictions between thesis and antithesis while preserving their basic ingredients: God has an impersonal aspect, but is ultimately personal. The world is there to be employed in His service and not offered up for the living entity's enjoyment or rejection.

The first compelling feature of this theology is that it offers a typology not of religions as such but of ways of being religious that cuts across the boundaries of religious traditions. Thus it would class for instance Christian karma types (*'karmi*-s') with Hindu *karmi*-s, whose way of being religious is focused on the upkeep of certain commandments with the expectation of some kind of reward. Likewise, this typology would classify Christian *jnana* types (*'jnani*-s') with their Muslim or Hindu counterparts, such as Meister Eckart and Shankaracharya, who understand ultimate reality to be impersonal and the world to be illusory. And finally, *bhakta* types of all traditions (*'bhakta*-s') would form the third group, for whom devotion to a personal

God is the ultimate spiritual truth. It seems to achieve what I argued in chapter 3 is impossible: to reason across boundaries of religious traditions. It does so by focusing on structural elements, although these structures condition certain, abstract, content as well. There is also an article by Pfändtner who draws on the same typology of *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti*, which Pfändtner describes as 'moods' and which he establishes as a Heideggerian notion. He offers three such moods: exploitation, renunciation and dedication, which clearly correspond to the *karma/jnana/bhakti* typology explicated by Deadwyler, although Pfändtner curiously neither references Deadwyler nor points to the Gaudiya Vaisnava school of thought. (Pfändtner 2010:89–90)[234]

The second enticing feature of Deadwyler's theology of religions is that the application of the Hegelian categories of thesis, antithesis and synthesis seems to offer an impartial way of evaluating each of the types of religiousness. This is of course not unproblematic and predictably people labeled as karma and jnana types will not be easily convinced. Deadwyler's theology of religions would only then *not* be internal to a specific tradition, if it truly managed to gain significant assent from people of other religious traditions, or at least of those in other religions that would be classed 'bhakta-s'. While, in my view, Deadwyler's theology of religions is by far the most likely candidate to indeed achieve such a feat, and even though to further explore this field would have been a very worthwhile project for a PhD thesis, I abandoned the idea after some consideration, because I wanted firstly to deliver a practical programme of interfaith dialogue and not a theoretical piece of writing that would be read, it at all, by specialist experts in the field. Secondly, I wanted to facilitate interfaith dialogue from a non-biased position in order to show maximum respect to potential participants and to produce as little paternalism as possible toward them. Doing so will also be more in tune with the setting of the proposed interfaith dialogue programme Walk in my Shoes within a secular university.

What I wanted to do with this last topic sheet was to point people in the direction of Deadwyler's insight, without prescribing it. The topic sheet is perhaps the most philosophical one of all in the traditional sense (not as tradition-to-life negotiation). It is suitable to foster reflection upon issues that are, although abstract, very pertinent.

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[234] It can be safely assumed that Pfändtner is aware of the Gaudiya Vaishnava typology of karma, jnana and bhakti, because he himself belonged to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) movement, its contemporary western branch, for 15 years. Cf.
http://www.sasnet.lu.se/institutions/study-religions-school-gender-culture-and-history-s%C3%B6dert%C3%B6rn-university ; retrieved 24/10/2012)

Examples of suggested questions are: '*If you consider God to be a person, what does that mean?*', '*What is your relation to God or the Divine? Are you created? Separate? One?*' Despite the abstract level of discussion, the topic sheet still attempts to link those discussions to the participant's practical religious life by asking: '*Given your relationship to God discussed above, what do you see to be the goal of your religious practice?*' It ends on a rather grand note, which is perhaps excusable considering that it is last question of the entire collection: '*What is the goal of your life?*'

The design of content of the topic sheets was thus meant to overall facilitate a tradition-to-life philosophising that adequately took into account the dynamic relationship between the cumulative tradition and personal faith, as argued by Smith (Smith 1991:145–192) and discussed in detail in chapter 4 (cf. especially 4.4.4). This meant two things: On the one hand, to provide the participants with a forum through which they were able to philosophically emancipate themselves from the teachings of their religious tradition, and on the other, to prevent excessive subjectivism by continually requiring them to refer back to their religious tradition as the frame of reference from within which they were reasoning.

5.4.2   Organisational setting and framing

For the trial run of the Walk in my Shoes programme at the University of Leeds I secured the support of a number of institutions. Of course, the University itself supported the programme through my supervisor Dr Seán McLoughlin. Additionally, the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies of the Higher Education Academy endorsed the programme, both through my second supervisor Dr Simon Smith and through letting me use the material that we had developed for the Sheffield Interfaith Tandem Learning programme the development of which had also been funded by them. The Subject Centre's logo was displayed on the posters and flyers which I distributed throughout the campus of the University of Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan University. I furthermore gained the support of the University Chaplaincy who provided not only catering for the starting event, but in the person of Catherine Lewis-Smith, who was the Fresh Expressions Worker of the Chaplaincy, also advice during the organisational stage and support in running the starting event.

The Student Union was also involved in the person of Kay Morrison, the Faith, Culture and Political & Campaigning Development Coordinator, who similarly helped in running the starting event and gave valuable counsel during the run-up to the programme. In some sense, the programme was furthermore endorsed by many student faith societies. I had met with either the presidents of the societies or their public relations officers and presented the programme to them. They then agreed to circulate the information about the upcoming programme through their mailing list with an invitation to their members to participate. The following student faith societies were involved in this way: the Jewish Society, the Hindu Students Forum, the Sikh Society, the Catholic Society, the Christian Union, the Buddhist Meditation Society, the Islamic Society, and the ISKCON society.

During the advertisement of the programme, I carefully avoided the term 'interfaith dialogue'. This was not an attempt to deceive, but an endeavour to avoid misconceptions about what the programme would be like. 'Interfaith dialogue' is hardly a neutral term anymore that denotes what the constituent words convey. Rather, it has become a label for gatherings of little consequence at which people of different religious backgrounds but with unclear mandate assure each other of their mutual goodwill. Often pluralist philosophy lurks in the back, and the suspicion of political instrumentalisation is not far.[235] On flyers and posters advertising the programme, I avoided an alternative designation and simply employed the name *Walk in my Shoes* instead. In the description I used the phrase 'conversations between people of different faith.'[236] Furthermore, in presenting the programme I put a focus on making yourself understood rather than on understanding the other. Thus the first two questions on the poster were '*Want people to understand your faith? Want to learn how to express your faith?*' and only the third question switches perspectives: '*Interested in how other people of faith think?*' and even then the focus is on 'other people' and not on 'other faiths.' I did this to signal that participants were given an active role, that they had a part in shaping the conversations which were thus to be free from restrictions posed by a distorting attitude of consideration. I also hoped that this would draw in more religiously conservative students (as interfaith dialogue often is a religiously very liberal affair).

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[235] The Chaplaincy at Sheffield University must have come to a similar conclusion, for it first called the programme 'Identity' and now ' Religion and Belief Tandem Learning'.
[236] The flyer and poster are included as appendices 9.1 and 9.2 to this thesis.

Poster used in advertising the Walk in my Shoes programme

Overall this strategy worked well as I managed to recruit 47 participants in total of which 35 completed the programme plus the research related requirements. Information on their religious self-understanding and their motivations to attend will be given and discussed in chapter 6 (cf. 6.3.) .

5.4.3   Execution

The programme ran from 27/01/2009 through 20/03/2009. It consisted of three phases: an initial meeting at which the programme was explained and tandem partnerships were formed; the eight weeks in which the tandem meetings took place; and the final focus group meeting that was not conceived of as part of the programme proper but was rather to serve research purposes, although it turned out to be a welcome concluding event for the participants.

a.   *Initial meeting and pairing*

The initial meeting consisted of a presentation that explained the programme and the research context in which it took place. Next came an icebreaker activity, where people were handed a sheet of paper displaying a set of concentric circles set within each other from large to small giving the appearance of target. They were asked to

think of this picture as a map of their identity and to place the category of 'faith' or 'religion' within the map corresponding to how central it was to their identity. Then they were asked to add other factors that played a part in their identity like family, university, sports, music, etc. After that people moved around the room and compared their identity maps and discussed it with each other. While they were doing so, an announcement was made that the buffet is open and everyone is invited to help themselves to some food. After some time, when people were sitting and talking over food, some tandem partnerships had formed naturally. Thus the pairing process more or less organised itself. I participated in the chats with various people and was thus able to introduce them to each other and sometimes outright suggest a tandem partnership. This helped people who were less outgoing.

There were also some people who could not make it to that event and I met with them in person after prior arrangement by email. I paired them with a conversation partner on the basis of the preference they had expressed as to the faith of their conversation partner.

b. Tandem meetings and private blogs

In the following 8 weeks 4 to 6 tandem meetings took place for each tandem partners, each time picking a topic sheet they wanted to work with during the conversation from the booklet they had received during the initial meeting. These meetings were designed to last roughly an hour each. They took place in spaces of the participants' choosing and from the feedback I conclude that most of them took place on campus, in places like cafeterias. Some of those meetings also took place in public spaces (cafes, parks) and in the home of one of the conversation partners. During the two months of the programme, the participants were also asked to keep a private (online) blog and write one entry for each meeting they had had, reflecting on the experience.

c. Focus group meetings

Although the focus group meetings were not properly part of the programme, but rather intended to facilitate the research into the results of the programme, participants considered them a concluding event and were happy to end the programme in a group setting. The entire programme was to facilitate self-reflection,

and to reflect on the process together as a group seemed to the participants to be a appropriate and welcome way to end the programme.

5.4.4   Summary

The Walk in my Shoes programme tried to implement to the fullest degree what I described above as the principles for philosophical interfaith dialogue (cf. 5.2.).

The Sheffield Interfaith Tandem Learning programme (now 'Religion and Belief Tandem Learning programme') has already shown the format of tandem conversations to be a suitable tool to avoid any suggestions of pluralist philosophy. The Leeds Walk in my Shoes programme adopted this format with the additional precaution not to associate the programme with the traditional notion of 'interfaith' by avoiding the term as such.

Also as in Sheffield, the Leeds programme avoided the idea that participants would in any way be representing their religious community. It did so through the tandem format, the way the programme was advertised, and the selection of topics and their presentation. Because the focus was decidedly on a tradition-to-life philosophising, the individual was even more in the centre of the discourse as when a more encyclopaedic approach had been taken (which, in my estimation, the Sheffield programme tends to do; cf. 5.3.4) which would rather solidify the notion of 'religion' and 'religious community.'

The Walk in my Shoes programme furthermore did not censor any motivations to take part in the programme. I chose not to educate participants in listening skills or to cushion potential disagreements or challenges. The only concern was to keep the discourse pure, i.e. not to mix the intended philosophical truth discourse with political or academic discourse. The programme set up, the topics and their presentation all seemed to achieve this goal, with the unavoidable gap in provision being closed by the participants' own social instinct and sense of respect for each other.

The programme avoided any theological bias by facilitating a universally valid negotiation of applying inherited conceptual categories to the life experiences of the individual. Arguably, there is still a certain bias of some kind: namely that it is a good thing to rationally think about the way we perceive and judge ourselves, the world around us and others in it. But this bias is not surprising, because it in fact the

premise from which I started when I decided to aim for *philosophical* interfaith dialogue.

Another important aspect was to avoid what I have called academic discourse: impartial, objective observation, the gathering of data and their interpretation from an outsider's perspective. Instead, the participants were to actively engage with the reasoning of their tandem partner. Through projecting themselves into each other's frame of reference by witnessing their partner making sense of their religious teachings in the light of personal experiences, they each functioned as an authority to hold the other responsible for their tradition-to-life negotiation in regard to rational truth criteria of coherence, plausibility, freedom from contradiction, etc. These are quite stringent demands to be put on self-reflection, which will likely lead to a fairly deep level of awareness of how we construct our identity, thus enabling us to consciously influence who we are and who we want to be. Thus, the Walk in my Shoes programme has the potential to contribute to the formation of character and personality and in this way add meaningfully to the education of students by supplementing the learning experience higher education institutions offer.[237]

Not only did the Walk in my Shoes project seek to observe the five principles of philosophical interfaith dialogue, but it also embraced the philosophical method of rational enquiry into the fundamentals of being in the world emphatically by not sparing participants the challenge to take on difficult and personal topics. As far as can be judged from the results, the programme was successful in these terms, as will be presented in detail in chapter 6.

By way of conclusion, the purpose of this chapter has been to lay open the drafting process and the many ways in which the theoretical conclusions arrived at in chapters 2, 3 and 4, influenced the shape and setting, which the Walk in my Shoes programme acquired. The next chapter will present and interpret empirical data collected from the participants during and after the trial run of the programme. It will thus examine whether the theoretical insights and the way they have been adapted into practical arrangements find their justification in the actual experience of programme participants.

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[237] The German word for education 'Bildung' literally means 'formation' and still conveys both aspects, that of knowledge acquisition and formation of character, although in Germany as in the UK, formation of character is arguably much less a part of the agenda of universities then it used to be during the time the notion rose to prominence, at least in Germany, through Alexander Humboldt.

6 Results of the Walk in my Shoes programme

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to presenting and evaluating the results of the test run of the Walk in my Shoes programme at Leeds University from January through March 2009. In the following I will first discuss the research methods that I used to collect the data and to evaluate it. I then present some data regarding the participants so as to give a picture of the group of people who took part. I will then discuss which topics were chosen by the tandem pairs and how they evaluated the topics in the booklet generally. Next, some reflections on the structure of the programme will be presented. I will then address the related issue of 'getting along' between participants during the conversation meetings. Finally I will relate some key findings from the blog entries and the focus group meetings as to the validity of the theoretical assumptions I made when designing the programme. The final section is then devoted to the general benefits that the tandem partners drew from their participation. Because the design of the programme was developed from the point of view of sound performance, rather than achieving desired results, there were relatively few design-inherent expectations in regard to outcomes. For instance, participants could be expected to gain a better understanding of their own religious tradition, that of their conversation partner and their respective situatedness in relation to both. This was indeed the case, as the findings confirm. But beyond that participants reported of benefits that were less predictable, although having become manifest those benefits can be explained from the theoretical assumptions on which the programme was designed. These benefits are made possible by the structural similarity of the epistemological situation of the conversation partners and indeed seem to hinge on the fact that they did not also share the same content, or the same religious tradition.

There are both quantitative and qualitative data that I will present in combination as appropriate in the following text. I will quote participants rather extensively to support my evaluation of the programme and in interpreting the statements quoted I will refer to quantitative material and my own experience both as a participant and facilitator. The various sources will always be made clear so that there is some measure of independence for the reader to assess and check my interpretation of the data.

6.2   Fieldwork methodology

This section contains a description of how the empirical data was collected and a discussion of the methodology used in analysing it. This is meant to give an account of the procedures I used and the decisions I made so 'that other researcher can 'see' and evaluate [them] in terms of how far they constitute *reputable procedures* and *reasonable decisions*.' (Denscombe 2010:300)

6.2.1   Research objectives

The theoretical considerations upon which the Walk in my Shoes programme design is based are twofold: firstly that typically no reasoning or agreement across the boundaries of religious traditions is possible; and secondly that a tradition-to-life negotiation of inherited religious categories is possible within all religions. Such negotiation has to do with the truth of religious teachings and how the individual relates to them.

The trial run of the Walk in my Shoes programme was not to test whether my conclusions about the impossibility of reasoning across religious boundaries were correct. As the set-up of the programme and the design of the topic sheets observed this restriction, the trial run was unlikely to reveal evidence that a going-beyond these limits would have been possible. Instead, the trial run was to test on the one hand whether tradition-to-life negotiation of inherited religious categories was indeed a feasible enterprise for participants to exercise in the presence of somebody of another religion; and on the other hand to ascertain if the programme designed as described in chapter 5, was indeed capable of facilitating such negotiation. The trial run was furthermore to reveal whether the experience of philosophical interfaith dialogue thus defined and facilitated would be enjoyable and enriching or perhaps simply trivial and boring.

6.2.2   Purposive sampling

Tandem partnerships were primarily formed during the initial event. The flyers, posters and the Facebook group gave the date for this event, but no time and place. Instead, people were asked to register their interest in taking part by email. To monitor what the composition of the group would be, I asked everyone who emailed

me for their faith background and the desired faith background for the conversation partner. This was important in order to assure that there would be enough possibilities for interfaith rather than same faith partnerships. This information enabled me to detect an disproportionate distribution of faith backgrounds in the group, and as a result I engaged in purposive sampling in that I approached certain student faith societies with the request of re-sending the announcement of the programme through their mailing list. I also contacted people of a certain faith that was underrepresented in the group, who I knew through personal acquaintance, in order to introduce the programme to them and sound out potential interest.

Purposive sampling '*can also be used as a way of getting the best information by selecting items or people most likely to have the experience or expertise to provide quality information and valuable insights on the research topic'* and is thus '*particularly well suited for creating an 'exploratory sample'.* (Denscombe 2010:35) I created such exploratory samples when I suggested partnerships for participants who came late to the programme, did not attend the initial event, and were thus partnered by me. Of course I respected a desire for a specific faith background in a conversation partner as far as possible, but there were a number of students who did not voice any preference in this regard and who I was thus free to match as I saw fit. In this way a Muslim-Jewish partnership was created, which I felt would be particularly suited to test whether the programme would manage to prevent political discourse from entering the discourse of tradition-to-faith negotiation.

6.2.3   Participant observation

I participated in a conversation partnership myself. This was not strictly a tandem, as there were five partners including myself. Although the dynamics in a group of five people would not be identical to those in a group of two, participant observation would still yield interesting insights as to how people engaged with the topic sheets and with each other. The greater size of the group also meant that my participation could be toned done, while still yielding all the benefits of full involvement. Thus, in Denscombe's classification, my role moved away from total participation and towards participation as observer (Denscombe 2010:207). Thus the balance between the '*passion associated with full participation and the cool detachment associated with research observation*' (Denscombe 2010:212) was

relatively easy to strike.[238] My role as a observer was unobtrusive as I came to a group at the stage of its formation. In this way I was able to witness the reflection participants engaged in in the natural setting of complex social processes.

My observation during the meetings as a 'restrained participant' so to speak, allowed me to better understand the blog entries and how they reflected the conversations (first of all of the people in my group, but by reverse deduction also the relationship between blog posts and conversation meetings generally). The observation also fed into preparing questions for the focus group meetings and the questionnaires, because it made me aware of issues that I would have missed otherwise and which the unreflecting agents within the situation take for granted or consider irrelevant and which therefore receive no mention in interviews.

Of course, the field notes I kept in the process are not reliable data by themselves. They contain a subjective element despite best efforts to withhold premature judgement and they are partially constructed from memory. Therefore they are not verifiable in the usual sense and are not representative. (Denscombe 2010:214; Silverman 2005:205) However, in combination with the other research methods, my participation in the conversation partnership proved to be a valuable tool in assessing the success of the Walk in my Shoes programme.

6.2.4   Diaries in the form of blog entries

As part of their participation in the Walk in my Shoes programme the participants were asked to keep a blog for which they would write one entry for every conversation meeting they had. This served a double purpose: on the one hand the writing was to facilitate further reflection on the exchange during the conversation meetings. On the other hand, they were to be what Walliman calls diaries:

> Asking people to relate their account of a situation or getting them to keep diaries is perhaps the most open form of a questionnaire. These qualitative data collection methods are used to find information on people's action and feelings by asking them to give their own interpretation, or account, of what they experience. (Walliman 2010:98)

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[238] For an in-depth discussion of the apparently oxymoron nature of participant observation between emotional involvement and emotional detachment, see DeWalt. (K. M. DeWalt and B. R. DeWalt 2010:28–29)

My success with the blogs was limited, however. The blog entry writing turned out to be an unwelcome task for nearly all participants. I had wanted to keep the assignment fairly unspecific and open, both because I thought this would facilitate reflection the best, and also because I did not want to unduly shape and influence such reflection, possibly invalidating any conclusions I could draw from them. The lead questions I offered were the following:

• What were the issues you addressed, what did you talk about?

• How did the topic sheet shape your conversation?

• What do you feel you were able to give in the conversation?

• What did you gain from the conversation?

Participants found writing a rather artificial way of reflection and they would not have done this if it had not been part of the programme, as the focus group interviews revealed. The lead questions did not help them and by default participants therefore provided rather unreflective reports about who said what. This was true too, for the blog entries of people in my group, although the discussions I witnessed had clearly shown vivid tradition-to-life negotiation. It stands to conclude that second-order reflection, i.e. reflecting on the process of making sense of one's cumulative tradition, is not an automatic concomitant of first order reflection. Thus writing the blog entries did facilitate second-order reflection only for some of the participants who were either thus inclined or had a positive attitude toward writing.

However, even if second-order reflection was not strongly present, the blog entries provided useful data. Denscombe distinguishes between three kinds of data that can be collected via diary: factual data about things that happened, significant incidents, i.e. events that were seen as important, and personal interpretation, only the latter of which corresponds to the reflection I had aimed at. (Denscombe 2010:219) The report-like accounts many participants produced consisted largely of factual data, but also contained significant incidents, for instance when they wrote about what they had liked best about a particular meeting. Thus those accounts as well allowed insight into how the participants interacted.

6.2.5 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was group-administered and collected immediately. In character it was mixed structured and semi-structured as it contain a combination of closed questions, multiple choice, and open questions. (Gillham 2000:3)

Its purpose was twofold: Firstly, to gather feedback on the individual topic sheets, to profile the religiousness of participants through self-descriptions and to assess how participants got along with each other. In this way the questionnaire collected statistical data (closed questions and multiple choice) as well as qualitative data (open questions). It would have taken inordinately long to ask for this information during the focus groups and it would have been a considerable extra effort to turn the responses into a written format. As the questions related to the very specific situation of the tandem meetings, there was little chance that the questions were irrelevant, or distortive through the lack of flexibility that a questionnaire brings with it as a method of collecting data. (Gillham 2000:13, esp. section 11 and 12)

Secondly, the questionnaire was to 'set people thinking' about the programme and the conversation meetings so that the focus group interview immediately following the administration of the questionnaire would benefit from that mental preparedness of the participants.

Of the 49 participants who started the programme, 40 completed at least 4 tandem meetings, but only 35 attended a focus group meeting and thus filled in the questionnaire. Those 35 participants represented 14 complete partnerships, 2 participants of a three-person partnership and three participants whose partner did not attend a focus group.

6.2.6 Focus group interviews

After eight weeks 40 participants had completed at least four tandem meetings. They were then asked to take part in one of four focus groups. Each meeting lasted around an hour[239] and there were eight to ten participants present. This represents the recommended group size, which was important to stick to as the topic to be discussed - the experience of the conversation meetings - was emotionally involving for the participants and the goal of the research was to glean participants' personal accounts

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[239] While Gillham maintains that a focus group should not last longer 20 or 30 minutes (Gillham 2000:21), Denscombe gives the typical time as 1.5 to 2 hours. (Denscombe 177)

(Bryman 2012:507; Denscombe 2010:177) I arranged the focus groups such that no tandem partners were in the same group to assure that participants felt free to express themselves about their conversation experience.

The format the focus group interview took was semi-structured, as I brought a set of open-ended questions to the focus group. (Cf. appendix 9.5) These questions were created from a consideration of the research objectives as detailed above (cf. 6.2.1) as well as the experience of participant observation and the reading of the blog entries. Open-ended questions carry the advantage of allowing for more detailed and complex responses while at same time the interviewer and the respondents have shared control during the interview. Thus I had the chance to ask for clarification or to pursue interesting points that arose. (Denscombe 2010:175)

Conducting the interviews as group interviews was not only an efficient way of collecting data from a number of participants at the same time, but, they might also feel more comfortable to be part of a group rather than facing the researcher in a one-on-one situation. Yet another step is to conduct the group interview as a focus group, because this takes into account and makes use of the group dynamics present. The interview thus addresses the respondents as a group who can inspire and regulate each other, while the researcher takes the role of a facilitator rather than conductor. To draw on the dynamics in the group, respondents can thus discuss with each other, 'spark each other off' (Gillham 2000:20) and affirm or balance the individual views presented. (Denscombe 2010:177–178)

6.2.7   Evaluating the data

The data collected through the questionnaires was in part quantitative and in part qualitative. As the sample of 35 was not too large, the analysis proceeded 'by hand'. I not only grouped the data in various ways and made a tally of frequencies, but I also used cross-tabulations extensively in order to correlate various parameters. Where significant correlations were found, they are included in the presentation of the research findings below. (Cf. 6.3.2; 6.3.3; 6.4; 6.6.2; and 6.6.3)

The blog entries were grouped together according to tandem pairs, in order to allow for a comparison of the different accounts of the same meeting and to reconstruct, if possible, some of the exchanges that took place. The focus group interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. Together, the blog entries

and the focus group transcripts comprise a body of 120,000 words. According to Gillham, studies with fewer than 200 subjects are small-scale research projects and analysis, he contends, may be quicker done by pen and paper than by using computing software. (Gillham 2000:60) However, 120,000 words represent arguably a rather large data pool, and although I did not have access to NVivo or similar software, I did use text processing programmes to collate the material according to eleven codes. I arrived at these eleven codes in three principal ways: through the theoretical conclusions of chapters 3 and 4; through my experience of the Sheffield Interfaith Tandem Learning programme; and through a study of the material itself.

The codes I brought to the material from the theoretical work were the following: 'tradition-to-life negotiation'; 'reasoning in the frame of the other'; and 'no crossing of boundaries'.

Because the Sheffield programme had highlighted the aspect of learning and framed the programme thus, I expected to see evidence of learning in the research material gathered from the Walk in my Shoes programme as well. Despite this background these codes are not strictly preconceived, I would argue, but rather fairly predictable.[240] They were: 'learning about the other' and 'learning about oneself'.

One code emerged from my participant observation and found resonance in the blog entries: 'learning from the other'. The remaining five codes emerged from a repeated reading of blog entries and the focus group transcripts with some of them foreboding somewhat in the participant observation I conducted. These were: 'getting deep fast'; 'not being judged'; 'sense of communion with people of another faith'; 'recognising structural similarities'; and 'performing faith'.

Out of the five approaches Denscombe lists for textual analysis, the one I took most resembles that of grounded theory, because my focus was on the meaning of the content of the text and my goal was its interpretation.[241] (Denscombe 2010:280) However, I did not seek to develop concepts or even a theory from the data, but more modestly I was looking for evidence of my theoretical conclusions (thus the approach is, at best, 'semi-grounded') and for the benefits that the participants drew from their involvement in the programme. According to Morse's classification, the

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[240] Maxwell calls codes that have been anticipated 'organisational categories.' (Maxwell 2005:97)
[241] Denscombe describes content analysis as concerned with looking for hidden messages; discourse analysis with showing how power is exercised through language; conversation analysis with revealing the underlying rules and structure of the talk and interaction; and narrative analysis with depicting constructions of personal identity and social worlds. (Denscombe 2010:280)

coding I did was 'topic coding' both of the descriptive and the interpretive kind. (Morse 2002:117)

The field notes from my participant observation were not extensive enough to warrant coding, although I consulted them, too, in the process of creating the codes from the research material. Another benefit of the participant observation was that they gave me a 'feel' of the tandem conversation situation and fed into the drafting of the questions which semi-structured the focus groups.

As with all qualitative research, the question of validity, reliability and generalisability arises. The sample is naturally statistically not significant and more positivistic standards of science are ill-placed in this context. To achieve validity[242] I used triangulation, but not in the sense of using contrasting data sources (although all 40 participants could be considered different data sources), but by employing principally three different methods of collecting data. Respondent validation would have been another tool to achieve greater validity, however this was not feasible, because firstly, there was a large time gap between research and analysis on the one hand, and the write up of the research on the other due to private circumstances. More importantly, however, the respondents are not familiar with the theoretical argument I am putting forth. To reasonably apply respondent validation required '*explanation that would be beyond something that would be immediately recognizable to the respondent.*' (Denscombe 2010:298) A body of 120,000 words gathered from 40 different people on at least 5 occasions (four tandem meetings, one focus group) as the basis of the research presents, I would argue, sufficient 'grounded data' (Denscombe 2010:299) to justify cautious affirmation of the credibility, if not validity, of the research findings.

I also think that generalisation is possible to some degree. All qualitative research is conducted in very specific circumstances and engages with the individual situation of the research subjects. However, there is no reason to assume that there would be no similarity between these individuals and others. In fact, the Walk in my Shoes programme, since its trial run, has been replicated in London several times under the title of *Conversations for the Soul* with, among others, adult participants from disprivileged communities from Southwark, and women groups. The programme there was executed by the St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation and they undertook to print a modified version of the booklet for

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[242] Some social science researchers prefer, instead of speaking of validity, the somewhat weaker notion 'credibility'. (Denscombe 2010:299)

distribution. I was able to be present at the concluding event of one of the programme runs, but I did not have the opportunity for recording or shaping the event. The feedback people volunteered was similarly positive to the one in Leeds, if less detailed and less specific. The Walk in my Shoes programme has also seen another run at Leeds University, administered jointly by the Chaplaincy and the LUU. From my conversations with Kay Morrison, the responsible person from the LUU, the feedback there was as with the trial run.[243] Although there is no telling whether the specific codes I derived from my theoretical investigations would find instantiations during these programmes, it is safe to say that participants derived some benefits from the programme (otherwise their feedback would not have been positive) and the specificity of the programme set-up and the material makes it likely that these benefits were similar to the ones described in this chapter. Thus, there is also an element of repetition in different circumstances, which constitutes reliability, that this research can lay claim to.

6.2.8   Ethical considerations

All participants were granted full anonymity. They received information sheets detailing the research, their potential part in it, and details on how to withdraw from the research at any time. All participants signed consent sheets authorising me to conduct the research. The blogs were completely private and access was password protected. Only the writer of the blog and I as the researcher had access to it. The participation in the programme was not conditional on taking part in the research. A detailed account of the precautions taken to ensure ethical integrity was submitted to the Chair of the Arts and PVAC (PVAR) Faculty Research Ethics Committee at Leeds University. Because I had not been aware of the procedure at the time of research, the application for approval took place retrospectively. Approval was granted on 23 July 2012.

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[243] There is yet another run of the programme scheduled from January to March 2013, executed through the Chaplaincy at Leeds University.

6.2.9 Reflexivity

In this section I will give an account of circumstances and factors that might have influenced the research and its results so as to question their validity. A flaw in the execution of the research methodology is that neither the questionnaire nor the focus group questions were piloted with a set of participants whose responses would then have to be excluded from the analysis. (Hopf 2004:204)

More subtly, the research setting itself might have influenced the outcome of the research. Participants might have felt more obliged to carry through with the programme, when otherwise they would have not. Also, the programme being part of a PhD research granted the project some academic authority which might have made people more willing to engage with it.[244] Similarly, after about two thirds of the programme's time period had elapsed I announced by email that I had secured funding to reward those who would follow through with the programme (at least 4 tandem meetings plus blog entries and attendance of a focus group) with a 25 GBP amazon.co.uk voucher. These were paid for through funding received from the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies of the Higher Education Academy and the Research and Postgraduate Committee of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds University. Again, this might have led people to follow through, when otherwise they might have given up. On the other hand, the research requirements added to the programme work load. Had there been no research attached to the programme, no focus group would have been necessary, and nobody would have checked whether participants were writing blog entries or not. Thus participation in the programme would also have required less commitment than taking part in the research as well.

While introducing the programme and the research project during of the initial event I identified myself as a person of faith, as a Hare Krishna, so as to give potential participants full control of the situation of deciding to take part in the programme or not. Some people who I had spoken to earlier were surprised by this, as they told me after the initial event. However, I do not feel that this fact influenced the programme or the participants in any way. My faith identity is fairly individualistic. I do not consider myself to be strongly bound to my community and although I consider myself culturally ISKCON, I prefer to identify myself more
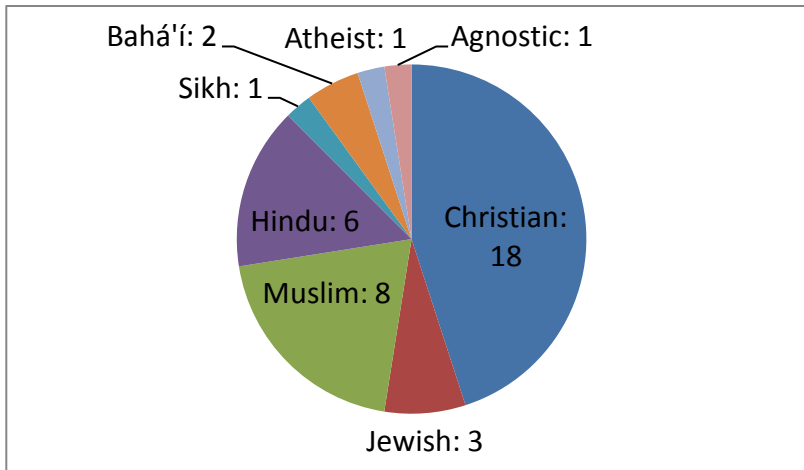
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[244] The programme was not advertised as a research project so that the people attending the initial event would have been there generally without this knowledge. I did tell some people I spoke to personally that the programme was part of my PhD research.

broadly as 'Hare Krishna' (Gaudiya Vaisnavism being an unknown designation to most people). My academic identity is fairly well defined and I saw myself facilitating the Walk in my Shoes programme from this perspective, which I believe participants sensed. As stated in the introduction, this thesis is located in the field of religious studies with no commitment to any religious beliefs and I want to affirm this in regard to this field work. As a participant observer in a conversation partnership of five, I took part, to a good measure, as a Hare Krishna. But instead of obstructing the research, this role as a person of faith rather facilitated it - it would have been far more disruptive had I assumed the role of an observing academic. Although I did take some notes during the conversations (as did the others), the writing of the field notes took place afterwards. It was thus not too difficult to maintain a balance between my faith and my academic identity.

6.3 Participants

6.3.1 Some statistics

There were 49 people who started the programme of which 9 people dropped out without completing at least 4 tandem partner meetings. One person did not inform me about dropping out, five emailed me and cited time constraints as their reasons for not continuing; three were partners of those who dropped out and were thus left without a tandem partner relatively late in the programme. Of the 40 people who completed the programme 18 were male and 22 female which represents a ratio of 45% to 55%. I had asked about their religious backgrounds when they registered interest in the programme. The following chart gives a distribution of religious belonging of the participants:

The large group of 18 Christians subdivides further as follows:

- unspecified: 5
- Mormon: 5
- Anglican: 3
- Catholic: 1
- Evangelical Baptist: 1
- Reformed: 1
- Quaker: 1
- Post-evangelical: 1
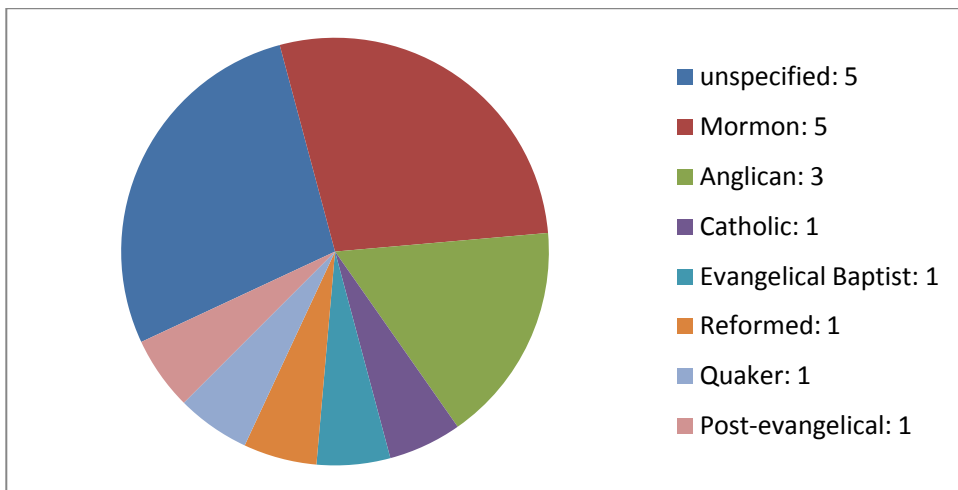
As I had provided no categories to select from when specifying one's religious background, the categories used in the chart are self-descriptions of the participants.

The following pairings occurred (Ananda Marga and Hare Krishna are included in 'Hindu'):

faith combinations occurring multiple times:	unique faith combination:
- 6 x Christian – Muslim (1 x didn't finish) - 5 x Christian – Christian (Mormon) (2 x didn't finish) - 4 x Christian – Hindu (1 x didn't finish) - 2 x Atheist – Muslim (2 x didn't finish) - 2 x Jewish – Muslim	- Atheist – Christian – Christian – Hindu – Hindu - Bahá'í – Christian - Bahá'í – Muslim - Christian – Jewish - Hindu – Sikh - Agnostic – Christian

6.3.2 Religious profiling of the participants

a. The introspective view

Through the questionnaire I sought to grasp what type of religious person the participants were. I therefore included a self-description of the participants' faith, beliefs, and religious practice. To this end, descriptions were offered and there was also the opportunity to add descriptions of one's own. Also, multiple selections were possible.

'Beliefs' referred to content of religious teachings the participants held to be true and the options offered were *traditional*, *open*, *secular*, *well-defined*, and *negotiable*.

By 'faith' I tried to capture the persons mode of holding these beliefs. The options offered here were *exploring*, *self-assured* and *it's not faith, it's fact*.

'Practice' was to elicit how strictly participants enact their beliefs with the options *strict*, *regular*, *occasional*, and *don't really have a set practice*.

In regard to faith, all three options found the participants' agreement, with *self-assured* being the one most often mentioned (21 times), followed by *exploring* (17 times) and *it's not faith, it's fact* (13 times).

For 'beliefs', three characterizations are prominent: well-defined (18 times), open (16 times), and traditional (14 times). With noticeably less agreement met *negotiable* (8 times), and *secular* (3 times).

The picture is more distinct in regard to practice, where two-thirds of the participants described their practice as *regular* (24 times). Less than half that number said their practice was *strict*, and even fewer participants described their practice as *occasional* (3 times) or stated they *don't really have a set practice* (5 times).

Thus *self-assured* faith, *well-defined* beliefs, and *regular* practice are the most frequently ticked self-characterisations and may perhaps count as a description of the prototypical participant in the *Walk in my Shoes* programme.

Participants often ticked more than one box, sometimes even more than two. This reveals that they did not perceive contradictions between two options that I had designed to be fairly exclusive of each other. Thus among those who selected multiple options, four described their beliefs as both *traditional* and *open* and five chose both *exploring* and *self-assured* as characterisations of their faith. One participant exemplified this attitude by writing 'in some respects' before one ticked box and 'in other respects' in front of another ticked box. Yet another participant ticked all three boxes for descriptions of faith and added the remark 'kind of feel it all at different times!'.

From these results it is safe to conclude that the average participant of Walk in my Shoes was by common standards a quite intensely religious person, who nevertheless was not up-tight, closed off or defensive about their faith and beliefs.

b. *Practical religiousness*

In comparison to the first part of the religious profiling section, this second part tries to capture the religiousness of the participants from a less introspective perspective. Rather, it is concerned with what can perhaps be described as the 'visibility' of the participants' faith in their social context and wants to locate them within the grid of the related spectrums of 'traditional' vs. '(post)modern', 'conservative' vs. 'liberal', 'public' vs. 'private', and 'community-oriented' vs. 'individualistic.'

The questionnaire asked the participants to locate themselves on a continuum of how much the description offered corresponded to their self-perception. Thus only one tick per question was possible.

My faith	impacts on all spheres of my life	→ →	impacts on some spheres of my life	→ →	doesn't really impact on the way I live my life
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Others would probably consider my beliefs to be	conservative				liberal
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
For my religious life, community is	very important		important		not very important
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
For my religious life, family is	very important		important		not very important
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How important is a private exploration of your beliefs to you?	very important		important		not very important
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The results are surprisingly homogeneous. 75 % of the participants stated that their faith impacted on all spheres of their lives.

An only slightly more balanced distribution emerges in terms of how the participants think others would judge their faith on a spectrum from conservative to liberal. 60 % said that others would consider their beliefs to be conservative or fairly conservative, while 30 % opted for liberal or fairly liberal.

Again a more unequivocal picture presents itself in terms of how important community and family are for the religious lives of the participants. In both instances 80% state that community and family are very important or quite important; less than 10 % say they are not very important to them.

The clearest result, however, is in regard to the question of how important private exploration is to the beliefs of the participants. Here, over 90 % state that private exploration is very important or quite important to them, and even for the remaining less than 10% it is still important. From this, it follows quite clearly that for people who are drawn to a programme like *Walk in my Shoes*, private exploration of their beliefs is important.

The characterization of the average *Walk in my Shoes* participant as a quite intensely religious person (see *The introspective view* 6.3.2a above) is confirmed in regard to the more visible, or practical, aspects of religious life. For the vast majority of participants, faith impacts on all spheres of their lives, their environment considers their beliefs to be fairly conservative, and both family and community play an important role in their religious lives. However, although being part of a religious group is central to their religious identity, this does not keep them from an individual

exploration of their beliefs. The latter is the one feature that all participants share. It can thus be confidently linked to their taking part in the *Walk in my Shoes* programme.

6.3.3 Main motivation for taking part in the programme

The questionnaire asked about the main motivation for taking part in the Walk in my Shoes programme by presenting participants with three options:

> What was your main motivation for taking part in Walk in my Shoes?
>
> ☐ make my faith better understood
>
> ☐ learn about another faith
>
> ☐ exploring issues of faith in general

The intention was to elicit one answer from each participant. However, many put their ticks in more than one box leading to a total of 53 answers between 35 participants who returned the form. Apparently, most students found that more than one or all three reasons where equally important for them in participating in the Walk in my Shoes programme.

Six participants marked only the first option 'make my faith better understood' as their main reason for taking part in the programme. Of these, four were from a Mormon background, one described his background as Evangelical Baptist and one was a Muslim student from Turkey who also holds the rank of an Imam.

It would seem likely that students whose main motivation in taking part in the Walk in my Shoes programme is to make their own faith better understood are also the ones most prone to proselytising their conversation partner. Indeed, out of the three times the issue of proselytising arose during the run of the programme, one was in relation to the Evangelical Baptist and one in relation to the Muslim student who is an Imam. (The third time it arose was with a Muslim student who dropped out after one conversation meeting with his Catholic partner).

It might also seem like Mormon students would be prone to proselytising as this is what Mormons are seen doing whenever easily recognizable as Mormons in public. A further indication in this direction seems to be the fact that there were only four Mormon students taking part in the programme, and thus *all* Mormon students on the programme chose 'making my own faith better understood' as their main

motivation for taking part. However, none of the partners the Mormon students were in conversation with reported being subjected to any such proselytising and in fact all were very positive about their experience with them. It therefore stands to conclude that the Mormon students were genuinely interested in clearing up misunderstandings their conversation partners might have had about the Mormon faith. Due to the distinctive appearance of the members of the Mormon faith in public, it is safe to say that people in general have fairly stereotyped conceptions of them. The majority of Mormon believers, and certainly the four Mormon students taking part in Walk in my Shoes, did not fit this conception. Mormon students are members of both their religious community and the 'general public' or perhaps the 'community of students'. As part of negotiating their own identity as members of both social groups, it is to be expected that they will be eager to broaden the rather narrow conception their fellow students are likely to have of the Mormon religious community.[245]

Nine students ticked only option two 'learn about another faith' as their main motivation for taking part in the Walk in my Shoes programme, and another 9 students chose only option 3 'exploring issues of faith in general'. No distinctive patterns emerged in this regard. The same is true for the remaining combination of answers: 1 student ticked both option one and two, 6 ticked options two and three, and 4 ticked all three options. The combination of option one and three did not occur.

In interfaith circles, proselytising is often considered the one cardinal sin when engaging in dialogue. Furthermore, most people in most situations see proselytising in general as an inappropriate intrusion on the autonomy of another person. Out of the three options, the first 'making my faith better understood' comes closest to the notion of proselytising. This may have prevented some participants from ticking this option or maybe from ticking only this option. Ticking other options besides the first might be a strategy to dilute the notion of proselytising without being untruthful about one's motivation for participating in the programme. There are five people who might have used this strategy, as they ticked option one and at least one other option: two Muslim students, two Hindu students and one Jewish student. No pattern is discernable here except perhaps that no Christian students are in this category although they form the majority of the participants.

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[245] This is similar for the Hare Krishna faith of which I am a member of sorts. In making these statements about Mormons, I'm drawing on my experiences as a Hare Krishna.

6.4 Topics

6.4.1 Average duration of conversations

The majority of students reported that their conversation meetings had lasted an hour (11 students) or between an hour and two (14 students). Only three students reported an average duration of 45 minutes. Six students said their meetings lasted over two hours. However, four out of these six were members of a conversation group of five. Since five people take a lot longer to cover the same amount of content than do a pair of two, it is not surprising that their meetings should have lasted unusually long in comparison to the others. The focus groups confirmed that a duration of 1 ½ hours is realistic to cover the questions given on a topic sheet for a conversation partnership of two.

6.4.2 Topic sheets – approval

The best insight into how the topic sheets worked is afforded by a reading of the blog entries which the participants wrote and they reveal a depth of reflection that is astonishing. I will offer some quotes from the blogs in support of the programme's design in the sections below. Here I will draw on the questionnaire which participants filled in at the beginning of the focus group, as it had a section that was concerned with the topic sheets. The first section of the questionnaire was concerned with the topic sheets. Participants were asked to indicate which topic sheets they had used during their conversations and which ones they would have liked to use (perhaps in subsequent conversations). The purpose here was to get a sense of what topics and topic sheets participants found interesting and worthwhile. The analysis of the feedback forms reveals that the topic sheets in general enjoyed a very broad acceptance among the participants of the programme. The best-liked topics were

 03 Talking to God

 04 Why do bad things happen to good people?

 09 Death and Immortality, and

 05 Tolerance and Limits.

with 30 and 29 people respectively out of 35 stating they used the topic sheet or would have liked to. In the second group of topics, slightly lower in popularity, are

01 Things Sacred

06 Urgency and Hope

08 Belonging to a faith community

12 God, the world, and me, and

10 Keeping the faith

with 24 or 23 positive votes each. In a third group with again just slightly lower approval rates are

02 Making Sacrifices

07 Violence and Religion, and

11 Falling Short of God's Ideal (?)

with 21 votes each. The questionnaire did not ask for reasons why a given topic was rated positively. Some participants volunteered a few remarks nevertheless. Those remarks indicate that among the reasons for choosing a certain topic was that it was considered an easy and comfortable way to start a conversation (for topic sheet 01 Things Sacred), that the topic was 'interesting', 'hot', 'central to one's faith', 'relevant', 'topical', 'important', 'fascinating', 'challenging', or 'promised to reveal differences' between the conversation partners.

6.4.3   Topic sheets – reservations

The questionnaire also asked what topic sheets participants would not want to use and explicitly requested them to give the reason for their reservations. A total of 40 times a reservation against a topic sheet was voiced with 35 times a reason being specified. 23 times the reason given was that the topic was not relevant, i.e. did not appeal, or was not something the participants felt they could contribute to. Thus, rather than a reservation as such, the negative rating of the topic sheet in those cases seemed to indicate disinterest. Other reasons given for not wanting to use a topic sheet were 'lack of knowledge' (1x re 06), the topic being too controversial (1x re 07) or based on false assumptions (2x re 07). In one case the participant felt he could not give answers representative of his faith community (1x re 10) and five times students stated they felt uncomfortable to talk about a topic, because it was too personal or they were not sure of their own standpoint yet (1x re 07, 1x re 09, 1x re

10, 2x re 11). It is not surprising that the issue of topics being too personal came up, as the topic sheets were in fact intended to facilitate such personal exchange to various degrees. I attempted to build into the topic sheet booklet a progression that would also be one of increasing confidentiality, the rationale being that as conversation partners would grow more acquainted with each other, they would feel more and more comfortable to discuss increasingly personal issues. This, of course, cannot be expected to be automatic and considering the highly personal nature of topics 10 (*Keeping the Faith*) and 11 (*Falling Short of God's Ideal(?)*) it is rather surprising that reservations were not voiced more often. One participant, VE[246], who did not mark any topics off under the 'I would not want to use' heading, added the following remark stressing the point of a trusting relationship:

> Although I would happily have discussed any of these issues with FF [her conversation partner – CK], the very personal nature of the approach we developed means that I am not sure I would be comfortable discussing the more personal topics in a less accepting interaction.[247]

As regards the distribution of the 40 reservations registered, 18 participants did not voice a reservation to any of the topic sheets, while 6 stated that they would rather not do one out of the 12 topic sheets and another 6 would rather not do two of the topic sheets. 2 participants voiced reservations in regard to 3 topic sheets; another 2 in regard to four, and finally 1 participant stated he would rather not do 6 out of the 12 topic sheets.

Overall it is safe to say that the topic sheets enjoyed high approval rates. This is also confirmed by the focus group interviews.

6.4.4 Difficult topics

Topics can be considered 'difficult' when they are challenging the participant either because they are very personal or perhaps in some way upsetting. During my

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[246] When quoting from the data, I will use a two-letter code to identity the participant I am quoting. This code is random in that it does not relate to the participant's name etc. in any way. Obviously, the same code will be used for the same participant throughout thus enabling the reader to know when I quote someone repeatedly. I will not use code for myself when quoting from the field notes I wrote. Rather I will include personal reflections in the running text where fitting, and mark them as such.

[247] She goes on to mention three topics she considers very personal:
- 08 (Belonging to a faith community)
- 11 (Falling short of God's ideal (?))
- 12 (God, the World, and Me).

work for the Interfaith Tandem Learning project at the University of Sheffield, where I was a member of a team of two that developed similar topic sheets, the project board objected to our suggestion to include the topic of death. (cf. 5.3.3a) First it was argued that the word 'death' in the title was too shocking for students and we were asked to change the title to 'Mortality and Immortality'. Later the topic sheet was deleted from the programme altogether. I decided to include the topic in the Walk in my Shoes programme and to be straightforward about it by using the word 'death' in the title. Not only did it not seem to offend the sensibilities of the participants, but the topic sheet had, together with three other ones, the highest approval rate by the participants, and, calculating in the negative votes, was the second-best liked topic sheet of the programme, just after the *03 Talking to God* one.

Rather than fear of controversy, there seems to be a suspicion towards a harmony that is based on the avoidance of difficult issues. One person remarked he would have liked to use topic 05 (Tolerance and Limits), '*because of the opportunity to ridicule political correctness'*. Another participant added the remark that he was '*generally more interested in topics that would show divergence, so we could learn rather than just agree*' and again in regard to topic sheet 05 (Tolerance and Limits) another remarked: '*I find tolerance not such an interesting issue. I prefer dialogue and attempts to properly engage with differing opinions.*'

One participant is concerned that ulterior agendas are manifesting themselves in the topic sheets and explains in the following way why she would not want to use topic sheet 07 (Religion and Violence): '*The UK government are trying to use the interfaith agenda as a means of info gathering and social control + this now often underpins conversations about religion, communities and violence/faith.*'

From the data presented here, there is no indication that students are reluctant to take on difficult topics. Rather, some of the responses seem to reveal wariness about harmony that is perceived as inauthentic.

6.4.5   Further topics suggested by participants

The questionnaire further asked about suggestions for other topics that could usefully be included in the topic sheet booklet. In answer to that, participants offered 31 remarks in total, giving general comments and suggesting various topics or topic

areas. 12 of the proposed topics clearly exhibit just the kind of interface between personal experiences in the world on the one hand side and one's personal faith on the other that the Walk in my Shoes booklet aimed for. It seems that the participants understood the idea and concept behind Walk in my Shoes and expanded on it intuitively. Noticeably, many of the topics suggested dealt with family relations, e.g. growing up in a faith, the faith journey from childhood to adult life, love and faith, marriage and teaching your faith to your children. Another large proportion of the topics suggested, namely 8, were more theoretical-philosophical in focus. They dealt with the relationship of faith and the world, but the aspect of personal involvement was less obvious. Another 8 suggestions proposed topics whose character was more theological, i.e. topics that seemed prompted by religious teachings and their internal coherence, where the aspect of relating concepts to the realities of day-to-day life was less obvious, e.g. the nature of God or the issue of salvation. Only very few topics were topics with a more 'knowledge-about' character, i.e. things that could also be learned from reading encyclopaedic entries.

6.4.6   Suggestions for improving the topic sheet booklet

Out of the 35 questionnaires 21 contained remarks regarding the topic sheet booklet. About half of them suggested improvements to the layout. Some of them requested more guidance in taking notes through the layout, i.e. space provided for note taking should be divided such that notes could be more easily matched to the question they are dealing with. Also, one participant suggested that the space be more clearly divided between the notes taken before the meeting and those during the meeting. Other suggestions dealt with the wording of the questions and the relationship of the topics to each other. Seven remarks were positive appraisals without further suggestions.

6.5   Progamme set-up and structure

6.5.1   Pairing

Tandem partnerships had been created in two ways: those who attended the starting event had paired themselves during informal socialising time; and those who had come late to the programme were paired by me on the basis of what faith they preferred their conversation partner to be. I also asked those who registered interest in the programme after it had started and who thus were to be paired by me, if they wanted to stipulate what gender their conversation partner should be. If a specific request was made, this was fully taken into account in the matching of the tandem partners.

Besides the interest of the partners there are also concerns regarding the social situation of meeting a stranger and the potential awkwardness involved. When asked during the focus group meetings what they thought was the better way of creating tandem pairs – self-pairing during a social event or being paired by the facilitator – the group of participants who had paired themselves considered this to be the better way, whereas the group who had been paired by me afterwards said they would again prefer to be matched by the facilitator (with very few exceptions). Asked about how comfortable they felt meeting their tandem partner, both groups agreed that there simply was a certain degree of awkwardness involved that was a) not possible to eliminate by any pairing process and that was b) something participants could be expected to deal with. Situations of meeting new people are common in university life and the respondents were aware that they would meet somebody they did not know before they decided to take part in the programme.

6.5.2   Conversations

As with the small trial run of the Interfaith Tandem Learning project I had witnessed in Sheffield, the tandem format worked really well for the participants. Virtually everyone mentioned the personal nature of the conversation, the insight into the lived-reality of a faith, and/or the relaxed atmosphere during the conversations when asked about what they thought was the best thing about Walk in my Shoes, or in some other context during the focus group meetings. Participants unequivocally stated that they had enjoyed the tandem meetings and rated the

programme positively, even those few who reported to have encountered uncomfortable situations (cf. 6.6.1). In regard to the five principles of philosophical interfaith dialogue laid out in chapter 5.2, the following can be said about the conversations:

Although some participants mentioned in the focus groups how they tried to give accurate knowledge about their faith and in this way properly represent their faith, the understanding was clear that no one was to be an exemplary member of their faith community, much less an authorised representative. One participant contrasted the experience of taking part in the Walk in my Shoes programme with traditional interfaith events, where the set-up intends representativeness, *which might mean that you end up defending ideas that personally I don't hold.* […] *but this* [Walk in my Shoes programme] *was much more personal and actually allowed you to talk about where I am, where each person in my group was within their faith and how it worked out in practice, not the general principle.*(EV)[248]

As regards the avoidance of a bias, one needs to look at how the topic sheets were received. The topics sheets enjoyed a high approval rate (cf. 6.4.2) and were found to be helpful in structuring the conversation. One participant observed:

> The structure was pretty useful in keeping the discussion focused. It was also helpful for making sure we both discussed our own religious perspective on any issue to the full - it's quite easy to try to give an overall outline of what a religion says on a particular topic and then work off any questions the other person gives. This structure pushed us to try to explain things in detail. Which made for some interesting discussion. (KS)

Some responses indicate that the flow of the suggested questions was natural, and when participants had drifted off pursuing a certain idea and came back to the topic sheet found that they had covered the points the topic sheet suggested: *By the time we got onto the topic sheets we had already done A LOT of talking - altogether we chatted for about two hours! And it meant that a lot of the questions on the sheet had already been discussed.* (VE)

Others found some of the suggested questions restraining or based on wrong assumptions. This indicates that I did not achieve the universality I had aimed for and

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[248] Pauses in speaking are denoted by '…'. When I leave out parts of the quote this is marked by '[…]'. I will cut pauses and unfinished half-sentences from the focus group interviews to ensure easy readability only if no change of meaning occurs as a result. When quoting from the blogs, I will correct obvious typing and spelling mistakes.

some kind of bias must have entered the design. Participant CG comments on the topic sheet 12 God, the world, and me: '*We felt the first question was a false dichotomy. To be 'personal', neither of us felt that the divine had to be a 'person'.* (CG) It is perhaps not surprising that such a complaint should come in relation to precisely this topic sheet, as this is based on the categories of a theology of religions from my own religious tradition. (cf. 5.4.1) Fortunately, people seemed quite able to appropriate the questions to suit their reality. The following is an example of such an negotiation:

> Also, "expected behaviour" I believe that I have been shown standards of excellence in human behaviour - standards that I should strive towards. But I make mistakes - to me that it part of being human, so I don't know that it is fair to say that the behaviour is expected so much as encouraged. (VE)

Most tandem pairs seemed to have taken all liberties in wandering off and pursuing certain threads in the conversation and only coming back to the topic sheets sporadically and sometimes not at all. Some participants reported that the introduction to the topic was enough to set them off. On the one hand, this openness was intended and in the presentation of the programme at the starting event I did say that the topic sheets were not to constrain but to inspire and, if needed, steer the conversation. On the other hand, people not using the topic sheets much could become a problem, in that the suggested questions were an important instrument to inject the element of tradition-to-life negotiation into the conversations. I witnessed in my own tandem group of five, there were 4 philosophically inclined participants (including myself) and it was easy for us to move into abstract realms and discuss concepts rather than how they applied to our lives.

Moving on to the principle of not censoring motivations to participate, there was no element in Walk in my Shoes that would suggest any limitations in this regard. That this openness was real is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that situations occurred which are typically considered problematic, such as when a person tries to convert their dialogue partner, and which are supposed to be avoided by stipulating 'ground rules' or 'guidelines'. How these situations occurred in the Walk in my Shoes programme and how they affected the participants' experience is discussed in section 6.6.1.

In regard to the principle of not basing the programme on assumptions of pluralist ideology, success is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that many

participants described themselves as conservative in their religious attitude. (Cf. 6.3.2) As religiously conservative believers are likely to reject pluralist assumptions, it is fair to say that their participation in such large numbers indicates that they did not perceive any suggestion of a pluralist ideology to be in the background of Walk in my Shoes.

Lastly, the principle of keeping the discourse purely religious, i.e. not mixing it with political or academic discourse, was to be implemented by the tandem set-up and the topic sheets. Some participants were students at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies and in their blogs they mentioned how the conversations were interesting to them from an academic point of view. The conversations themselves were still religious and personal, not academic, as the blog entries reveal. One participant explicitly drew the distinction during the focus group meetings when asked what she liked about the programme: '[...] *I think just talking to someone from a different faith in a non-academic sense ... because I used to do Religious Studies and I feel I know things from a textbook, but it was interesting to talk to someone on a personal level.*' (ZG) Political discourse did not seem to enter the conversations of any of the tandem pairs either. One participant remarked during the focus groups:

> I think for me personally, often, particularly between Jewish people and Muslim people often gets hijacked by politics and in this instance it wasn't allowed to be hijacked by politics, because that wasn't in any way the shape and because it was just the two people who where there who were only interested in religion, it was solely focus on that and that was really important to me, actually, it was quite, it made a nice, like, nice change, really, that it was solely on religion, so. (PX)

Thus it can be concluded with confidence that the five principles of philosophical interfaith dialogue (cf. 5.2) were not only considered when designing the programme (cf. 5.4), but that the execution of the programme shows the design succeeded in implementing them.

On the practical side, I found from my own experience in taking part in the programme that 5 people in a partnership are too many, because when discussing topics in reasonable depth with five instead of two people contributing, meetings either take longer than can be expected to fit into a student's timetable, or the topic cannot be covered to a satisfactory degree. There was a conversation partnership of three, all members of which were positive about the size of their group, so perhaps that is still a viable alternative to the one-to-one meetings. One tandem partnership

held a couple of meetings via an Internet chat. They saw the advantage in being better able to choose one's words carefully; the disadvantage was not knowing whether the other had 'really heard.' The personal component that is so important seems to get somewhat lost in this way, but in certain circumstances, holding the tandem conversation via Internet chat may be a feasible option.

6.5.3   Blogs

While participants unanimously and fairly emphatically stated that they had enjoyed the tandem meetings, the writing of the blog entries met with considerably less enthusiasm. I had been unsure how to guide participants in writing the blogs, because I did not want to be too prescriptive so as not to 'prescribe into' the entries what in the end I would conclude from them.

Some participants felt obliged to write rather lengthy reports about who had said what and even though this still made for valuable research material, it was very time consuming for them, not necessarily conducive to self-reflection and understandably not very enjoyable. In a sense, I re-created here the stultifying experience I had been so critical of in the Sheffield Interfaith Tandem Learning programme with its prescription for extensive self-documentation.[249] When we discussed this aspect during the focus groups, participants did agree that writing is a good means of self-reflection. In one of the focus groups someone suggested the idea of a video or audio blog and others agreed that this could be an alternative, as it would be less time consuming and less formal. Also, an online forum was suggested as a possible alternative to the blogs. This forum would be open only for participants, where they could share their thoughts and reflections, if they wanted.

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[249] On the issue of finding the time for the tandem meetings, more or less all participants agreed that this has been difficult because of their study commitments. During the focus groups I posed the question whether they would have preferred to have the Walk in my Shoes programme be part of their credit-earning degree programme (possibly as an elective – although I have not investigated whether there would realistically be any scope for the programme to be incorporated like this) and thus being able to use 'proper' study time to do it, instead of it being an additional obligation. I pointed out that this would, however, entail some kind of assessment process of the kind incorporated in the Sheffield Tandem Learning programme, where the definition of learning goals and the process of documenting their fulfilment featured rather prominently. (The credit awarded there, of course, was extra-curricular, so people there have to still do it on top of their regular study requirements.) The participants showed themselves to be wary of the notion of learning goals' in relation to the tandem conversations. Two people perceptively suggested that the idea of learning goals was related to the idea of autonomous learning, not to assessment as such and that there could be other ways of assessing participation, such as writing essays. Focus group respondents in general, however, said that the nature of the programme and the conversations did not really fit an academic course format and they would not have participated if it had been framed in this way.

In a future run of the programme, if there was to be a blog again, I would refrain from giving any guidance about writing the entries and leave it completely up to the participants, as long as they wrote something (one could perhaps stipulate a minimum word count of 80 to 100 words). Another possibility would be to foster self-reflection not through writing a blog parallel to the conversation meetings, but by hosting a suitable end event at the conclusion of the programme.

6.5.4   Missing end event

For the Walk in my Shoes programme, the focus group meetings represented 'end events' of sorts. Participants knew they were taking part in a pilot project based on somebody's research and there clearly was some eagerness to find out how the programme had worked for others. When discussing the programme structure during the focus groups the idea was voiced (and met with general approval) that there should be a proper end event at the conclusion of the programme where all participants would come together. Such an event could be a celebration, it was suggested, but one that contained some element of presenting some results or reflections from the process. I had not considered this option, because I did not want to create a false 'community,' the implication being that everyone had something in common with everyone else as is typical of pluralist ideology. I wanted to absolutely avoid the notion of a 'result' coming from the tandem meetings. But I found the participants to be intuitively aware of the nature of the conversations and their epistemological restrictions. Participants bonded with each other, often very strongly so (cf. 6.8.2), without assuming any pluralist convergence into one religious reality, thus leaving the epistemological situation completely intact. Considering this, an end event that in some way facilitated reflection on the tandem conversations, could be a feasible option, although I cannot, at this point, offer an outline of how that would be facilitated.

6.6   Working together and getting along

As explained in chapter 5 (cf. 5.4) I felt that respecting participants as autonomous, self-dependent believers would also mean to abstain from adding

protective, but potentially patronising, measures to the programme. This section is to present some results of leaving people to self-regulate themselves in regard to the situation of tandem dialogue.

6.6.1 Handling uncomfortable situations

I will discuss how participants handled uncomfortable situations by a) looking at two Jewish-Muslim tandem pairs as examples, as I had been warned against matching people from these religions; and b) by examining instances where one tandem partner felt proselytised by the other.

In the run up of the programme I was strongly warned by the Chaplaincy and Student Union workers who had supported me with Walk in my Shoes against forming Muslim-Jewish partnerships as the political situation between Israel and Palestine had apparently caused heated exchanges between students of Jewish and Muslim faith on campus. I was undecided, but when, after the initial event was over, a Jewish student coming late to the programme asked for a Muslim partner and a Muslim student accepted the proposal of pairing up with a Jewish conversation partner, I decided to go along with it. Later on, another Muslim-Jewish tandem partnership was formed. When I first introduced the first set of Jewish-Muslim tandem partners (IE & KS) to each other and mentioned that I had been warned against a pairing like this, eye-rolling was the only response from them. In the second Jewish-Muslim pairing (PX & NW) there was an instance where the Jewish participant felt she had been told by her Muslim conversation partner '*people of my faith had been wrong about certain things.*' (PX) She responded like this: '*And I was, like, well you'd like to make this more like dialogue […] than rather you just telling me […] that I'm wrong about a certain thing.*'(PX) I failed to ask precisely what 'I was like' meant –whether she actually told him so or whether this was just her mental reaction to the words of her partner.

Interestingly (or tellingly?) her partner did not perceive his attitude like this. He commented during the focus group meeting on the value of the Walk in my Shoes conversations like this: '*you are on the same level, mentally, you accept each other, you know, for who you are, what you say instead of saying 'I'm right, you're wrong'. Or them saying 'I'm right, you're wrong'.*'(NW)

Despite the perceived violation of dialogue rules by her Muslim conversation partner, the Jewish participant had a very positive appraisal of the conversations in general:

> It was actually interesting for me to know the differences, 'cause I know a lot about the similarities between Islam and Judaism […] that has always been thrown at us, like when we are learning 'Oh we should all be friends and everything should be up, because of these similarities …' [focus group participants laughing] … and … but it was very interesting to see the differences and actually to discuss them and I find that … I personally find that really fascinating and I think I got on with him better, because of the fact that we were there discussing differences and how different so many aspects were. (PX)

From all the focus group interviews it is surprisingly clear that people were happy to be able to address differences. One participant commented: '*But isn't that more honest than the usual interfaith dialogue where everyone is, you know, being really nice to each other and stuff, […]*' (TO)

The other Jewish-Muslim pairing went well without disruptions and the Jewish participant commented: '*We must've spent more than eight hours talking and you talk and talk and talk, so you get to know people better.*' (IE) Another kind of uncomfortable feeling, however, emerged in that pairing. IE reports in his blog:

> We spoke at length about how strict we are about what we do and do not do in relation to dietary laws. Out of the two of us KS was definitely the more religious and I felt slightly guilty and ashamed that I do not follow the dietary laws that are set down for me as rigorously as he does his. This stemmed from my own insecurities.

But this experience of feeling 'slightly guilty and ashamed' does not impact negatively on his evaluation of the conversation experience at all. He continues:

> I felt the conversation went extremely well, as I became a lot more educated about the different dietary laws outlined by Islam. On a more personal level, this session allowed me to investigate my own faith more, especially looking at the reasons why I follow certain things and not others. I felt like this meeting was definitely more personal than our previous one as we discussed topics that were very clearly quite personal. (IE)

IE's conversation partner's appraisal of the tandem experience was also positive. In his blog he writes for instance: '*... we didn't get to finish the topics on this sheet sadly, time flies when you're having fun!*' (KS)

There were two instances, where one conversation partner felt proselytised by the other. One of them was a pairing of Muslim and Christian (KI & WK). WK writes in her blog: '*At this point I felt that perhaps he wanted me to become a Muslim – i.e. he was trying to convert me! I could see in his way of speaking with me how I used to be as a Christian with everyone who was not a Christian!!*' When I asked her during the focus group meetings if she felt she was able to handle the situation she came back to the point of having herself exhibited similar attitudes in the past:

> I could, like, almost hear myself, like, as a Christian. But I don't think I'm quite like that now, but I would have been like that in the past as a Christian so I could kind of recognise, like, where he was coming from. And … I didn't feel uncomfortable, except [laughs] … except that I wanted to say no, because he wanted to carry on the dialogue beyond this [Walk in my Shoes – CK] and he invited me to his house for dinner, which is very nice. But I didn't really feel I could say no. (WK)

She also commented how her partner was not questioning his faith at all, whereas she had come to do so. On the one hand, this was surprising to her (and me), because he studies theology at Leeds and this is what had made WK become more critical of her beliefs. On the other hand, KI is an Imam and in that sense feels perhaps less allowed to question the teachings of his tradition. Holding an official rank like this, he was an untypical and in some measure perhaps indeed an unsuitable participant in the programme. WK still considered her experience of the conversations a positive one and even voiced the desire to continue the meetings after the programme has finished. Her last blog entry finishes thus:

> It's been really positive speaking with KI and I've learnt a lot about the Muslim faith that I didn't know before. On reflection I realise we didn't discuss some really important stuff like who is Mohammed for Muslims – i.e. is he Allah or not?! I think he is a prophet but why is he then more important than other prophets? I would like to discuss this with KI another time. (WK)

The other instance of proselytising occurred not during a conversation, but in a letter in between meetings. In this letter, the proselytising conversation partner also cancelled his further participation in the conversations, so no actual meeting took place afterwards. I was informed about the situation by the recipient of the letter: We met and talked about it, and the person seemed to handle the situation without difficulty. It appeared that perhaps behind the sudden motive of proselytising stood

developing romantic feelings. Although this necessarily remains on the speculative level, it just goes to show that the Walk in my Shoes programme did not take place in isolation, but was subjected to all the human frailties. The participant then asked to be paired with another conversation partner, and thus started the programme over again and this time there were no incidents and the feedback in the end was very positive. In fact, during the focus group meetings she rated the partner who had tried to proselytise her (a Muslim) relatively more positive than her second partner (a Jew), precisely because of the challenge he put to her:

> Well, I had two partners in the beginning, so … before the first one dropped out, I found that that partner's challenge made me think a bit more about my faith than the second partner did, because I was probably too quite similar to the second partner in the way we thought, … so I probably would have gotten more out of it from the first one … in terms of making me think about my faith and, you know … (DC)

Another pairing was problematic, where one person seemed to be a less skilled communicator. WX defined himself as an Evangelical Baptist, his partner CM was a British Christian-born Muslim convert. While CM was taking offense (and quite rightly so) at some of what WX apparently said, WX reported to have enjoyed the programme, because '*most of all I would say the personal aspect*' but also the opportunity to '*make strange theological jokes and actually have somebody understand them.*' (WX) His partner probably did not understand the jokes as intended, but recognised his partners' difficulties in relation to social instinct and put it down to the difference in age (CM being at the time 25, WX 19 or 20). Having interacted with WX I would agree that he is a nice person, but often difficult to follow in his remarks (what common parlance would call 'nerdy'). Nevertheless, when asked about what he thought was the best thing about the Walk in my Shoes programme, the offended partner CM answered: '*the relaxed environment, it made it easy to talk [...] probably after the first session was over, after that we sort of got used to each other, yeah, it was quite nice, relaxed.*' (CM)

Overall, it is fair to say, the set-up of the programme and the social tact of the participants were sufficient to avoid situations where difference or disagreement escalated into conflict. In fact, one participant even pointed out that social tact got in the way of the discussions. He said:

> I think, there was kind of more of a tendency, because you started to know
> 1… then you started to not wanting to maybe saying things too much you
> are disagreeing on and at times, I mean not really to a great extent, but I
> think there was that tendency to dwell on this you do agree with. (NG)

Thus the challenge in designing the programme is not necessarily in preventing conflict, but perhaps rather in enabling discussion and disagreement.

6.6.2 Distribution of speaking time

Another indicator of how participants' social tact was operative in the programme is the distribution of speaking time during the conversation partnerships. In the questionnaire, I therefore asked participants to indicate on a sliding scale the distribution of 100% speaking time between them and their partner.

The problematic combination where one partner felt the other had used considerably more speaking time, whereas that partner was not aware of this and considered time equally shared occurred only twice. A situation where both partners thought the other had spoken more did not occur at all. Thus turn taking seems to have worked well, which indicates that the format of the topic sheets with several questions covering different aspects has adequately facilitated the fair distribution of speaking time. This is confirmed by the focus group interviews where no complaints were voiced in this regard.

6.6.3 Liberal vs. conservative believers – mismatched partners in dialogue?

During the research that accompanied the drafting of the Walk in my Shoes programme, I spoke to various people involved in facilitating interfaith dialogue events and programmes. There seemed to be a consensus among them that liberal and conservative believers generally do not make good conversation partners. I

wanted to trace whether this held true for the Walk in my Shoes programme. For this reason, I included a question in the second part of the religious profiling section of the questionnaire asking the participants to rate themselves in regard to being 'conservative' or 'liberal' respectively.

Posing the question

The difficulty in posing the question was that the meaning of the terms 'conservative' and 'liberal' are subject to value definitions. Both terms are not only used to describe an attitude or point of view, but are often simultaneously used to pass a value judgement on the attitude or point of view thus labelled. This is problematic for the evaluation of the answers students give. For instance, a student may be reluctant to call his religious practice and beliefs conservative, because in his experience 'conservative' is associated with backwardness. Likewise one might be hesitant to call oneself a liberal in matters of religion, because that seems to imply being wishy-washy. Therefore, in asking the participants about their own 'conservative-ness' or 'liberal-ness', I attempted to 'objectify' their answers somewhat by introducing the notion of an outside perspective. Thus the question, posed as an incomplete statement, read '*Others would probably consider my beliefs to be ...*'[250] Participants were asked to complete the statement by ticking one of five boxes that represented different graduations on the spectrum from 'conservative' to 'liberal.'

Individual distribution

As detailed above, the other four statements in this section that were to be completed by the participants in a similar way, revealed largely homogeneous answers among the participants of Walk in my Shoes. This one, however, showed a

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[250] There is an ambiguity in the phrasing of this question that I did not recognise at the time. 'Others' could refer to 'others of my faith community' or 'others of the general public outside my faith community.' I had intended the latter and the results presented here could be faulty, if students took it to mean the former, as different faith communities have standards of different degrees of strictness. Thus a liberal member of a conservative community could still be more conservative than a conservative member of a liberal community.

broader distribution of answers on the scale offered. Thus 11 students rated themselves as being conservative, 10 as being quite conservative, 3 in the middle of the spectrum, 6 as quite liberal, and 5 as liberal.

Distribution in conversation partnerships

To answer the question whether the liberal/conservative distinction is meaningful in predicting whether conversation partners get along well or not, it is necessary to look at how the objectified conservative/liberal self-descriptions occur in the conversation partnerships. The surprising result is that in roughly one third of the partnerships the partners shared the same self-description on the conservative/liberal spectrum. Another third was only one box apart and for the remaining third the difference was two boxes of gradual difference. In only one instance the partners differed by four boxes, or degrees. Was this relative homogeneity in the partnerships due to the process of matching? During the initial event, after an ice-breaking exercise, participants chatted over food and found more or less naturally a partner for their Walk in my Shoes conversations. In this situation, did liberals intuitively seek out other liberals and did conservatives find other conservative believers? Perhaps this was indeed the case.

However, there were also students who came to the programme after the initial event had already taken place. I matched them on the basis of what faith they wanted to learn about and, of course, the availability of conversation partners. The liberal/conservative distinction did not play any role in the formation of these partnerships. Yet, the situation of relative homogeneity for those 'random' partnerships is the same, or even slightly more pronounced, as for the self-matched ones. I have no explanation for this.

Success of the conversation partnerships in relation to the liberal/conservative distinction

But does the *success* of a conversation partnership in the Walk in my Shoes programme depend on how similar the locations of the two partners are on the liberal/conservative spectrum? If this was the case, the most successful partnerships should be the ones, where partners are identically conservative or liberal respectively. On the other hand, the partnerships that went less well should reveal a marked difference in how liberal or conservative participants were.

I identified three partnerships whose blogs and focus group contributions had been particularly, enthusiastically positive.[251] In all three instances, the conservative/liberal self-description of the conversation partners differed by two degrees (boxes). Although this difference is relatively moderate, it is still the biggest difference observed in the programme.

There were also two partnerships that had been problematic, one because of the element of proselytising, the other because speaking time was unevenly shared.[252] There were feelings of unease and one participant complained explicitly that he found it difficult to make himself heard in the conversations. Yet, in terms of their liberal/conservative self-description, the participants in these partnerships were clearly closer to each other than the partners in the particularly successful partnerships were: one pair differed by one degree or box, the other shared identical descriptions.

Lastly, a look at the one partnership that had a strong difference in the liberal/conservative self-descriptions reveals that this was not at all an unsuccessful pairing, as both partners were very positive about their experience. The dissimilarity between the partners, however, was real, as they differed in regard to the other parameters asked about in both parts of the questionnaire's religious profiling section as well.

Conclusion

It seems safe to conclude that in the Walk in my Shoes programme, the liberal/conservative distinction did not bear relevance for the success of a conversation partnership. Some participants even expressed the desire for more variance in this regard in the tandem partnerships. BF, for instance, stated:

> [B]oth myself and my faith partner are quite liberal in the way that we negotiate our faiths, and I think it could be really interesting to pair a liberal with somebody who is not so liberal, you know … somebody who is more … erm … the word fundamentalist has a very negative connotation, but, you know, somebody who is slightly more conservative and fixed and less flexible, let's put it that way. (BF)

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[251] These were the partnerships of VE & FF; BF & TO; and BZ & PI.
[252] These were the partnerships of CM & WX and WK & KI.

Although BF acknowledges, that such a pairing '*would not be such a fun experience*' she would still be ready to take that risk, because '*I think it would yield really interesting results.*' (BF)

6.6.4   Conclusion

Trying to convert somebody is not a violation of the epistemological restrictions of the multi-faith situation. (Cf. 3.8b) It represents the suggestion that one frame of reference may work better in accounting for, and in making sense of, life experiences in the world. Therefore, if an instance of proselytising occurs, it is not a violation of the epistemological rules of discourse. However, it might well be a violation of social code of conduct. On the one hand, social conduct has to be such that conversations can continue and that they do not turn into an altogether unpleasant, if sometimes challenging, experience. On the other hand, the ethos of philosophical inquiry commands that the discussion be as open as possible, including the possibility of conversion. My argument has been that the design of the topic sheets and the tandem format of the conversations are sufficient to reveal the basic epistemological parity of different sets of religious teachings; my argument has further been that if somebody, within that framework, wanted to put his religion forward as a superior frame of reference, the social tact of the participants could be trusted that this would take place in a manner acceptable to the social situation, and that if a violation of social code of conduct indeed occurred the participants would be able to negotiate such a situation on their own, as they have to in other life situations as well. The results presented in this section on 'Working together and getting along' confirm that these assumptions hold and a fairly radical openness of dialogue is possible and valued by the participants, who are willing to take risks and are able to handle uncomfortable situations that come with it.

6.7   Practical evidence for theoretical assumptions

In this section I will evaluate how the theoretical assumptions arrived at in chapters 3 and 4 were in evidence in the blog entries or focus group interviews, while in the next I will deal with those derived from an analysis of the research material. In both sections I will quote from the blog entries and particularly the focus group

transcripts quite extensively. I am aware that these quotations do not strictly prove my point, because in the process of selection there is necessarily a subjective element of judgment on my part and in presenting the quotations there is a loss of context. Rather, these quotes are intended to provide '*a flavour of the data*' and to let the reader '*'hear' the points as stated by the informants*' as Denscombe puts it, but also to act '*as a piece of evidence supporting the argument*' that this thesis puts forward. (Denscombe 2010:296)

6.7.1   Tradition-to-life philosophising

I wanted to facilitate philosophical interfaith dialogue. The only kind of philosophising that is universal for all believers, regardless of their specific religious tradition is, I argued in chapter 4, in the dialectic of applying conceptual categories, usually inherited from the religious tradition, to the lived experiences of the believer in the world and, vice versa, renegotiating these categories in the light of those experiences.

Such tradition-to-life and life-to-doctrine philosophising was to be facilitated through the topic sheets, but of course this does not mean that such discourse was therefore guaranteed. The blog entries show that a good deal of factual knowledge was exchanged, especially in the beginning of the tandem partnerships. This is not surprising, because some knowledge of the other's religion has to be there before philosophical reasoning that takes place within it becomes intelligible. Exchanging factual knowledge is also less personal than tradition-to-life negotiations and therefore easier to do with a person that is, at least at first, a stranger. Factual knowledge is also easier to report about in a blog and thus may feature there more prominently than it did in the tandem conversations. One participant comments on the developing confidentiality of the conversations and the move towards what I have called tradition-to-life philosophising: '*The meetings are now taking on a more personal character and focusing more on our real life examples rather than general principles, as we have covered the main tenets of our faiths.*' (PI) Another expresses this same move thus: '*In my pair, we kind of we got to know each other quite well and ... it became less, almost, about faith and the kind of particular laws, and it became more about how faith impacts on our own lives, on our own personal experiences. We shared stories and it was really, really nice.*' (JL)

Participants were acutely aware of the difference between factual knowledge and tradition-to-life negotiation. Comparing the Walk in my Shoes programme to other interfaith dialogue events she had attended, participant DR comments: '*I think often when you discuss religion you talk about principles. Whereas here you talk about how you actually apply that in your life and how you live it, or struggle with it or whatever. Which was really good.*' (DR) This is echoed by EV: '*[T]his was much more personal and actually allowed you to talk you about where I am, where each person in my group was within their faith and how it worked out in practice, not the general principle.*' (EV) The word 'negotiation' is actually used by BF in her description of what she found to be the nature of the programme:

> [It] gives an opportunity to explore the fabric of your faith and perhaps … how that interweaves with the fabric of somebody else's faith in a very, kind of, day-to-day … personal kind of way. You know you can negotiate … like I said before: the 'why you think things you think' as opposed to just 'what you think'. BF

Participants not only noticed the difference between tradition-to-life negotiation and factual encyclopaedic knowledge, but they clearly found the former much more interesting. Participant BZ writes in her blog: '*So for me, I'm trying to dissect the part which is actually his faith from what he's been taught to say.*' (BZ) And NG said in a focus group:

> I'd just find it boring if someone just says 'I believe it … every one of these things and, you know, I'm not saying that's wrong … [laughs] … but if someone would come to me and say that, I would just be a bit …,like, well ok …. it's kind of boring, I can find this from a textbook. (NG)

6.7.2   Restriction of staying within your own faith tradition

The epistemological situation requires one to stay within one's own frame of reference and not try to reach an agreement across faiths. The design of the topic sheets was to steer the conversations such that this would not happen. The following blog entry confirms that this seems to have worked quite well. An atheist participant writes:

> The atmosphere was exemplary of what I'd like interfaith dialogue to be - conversation where criticism isn't important or even relevant, and the aim is to understand each other. Now, as soon as I typed that sentence the Atheist Society member in me wanted to jump in and point out that excluding critical analysis from a discussion is never a good idea, which sort of shows how I've come to take a different approach in Walk In My Shoes to the one that I'd usually adopt.

> The way that the questions are laid out helps convey that this sort of thing isn't helpful, and in principal I would always have agreed that I could gain a better understanding of someone's faith if I held off on attacking the first bit of it I disagreed with. However, doing Walk In My Shoes hammered home to me that conversation can be much more fertile when the element of "me vs. them" is removed.

> The predetermined topics of discussion make it a lot easier to think of it as me talking about me and someone else talking about themselves - obviously differences will make themselves apparent, but the underlying feeling tends towards "these are the alternatives" rather than "this is the opposition". (XT)

Another interesting quote is from a blog, where a participant reports a conversation partner transgressing this epistemological rule of staying within one's frame of reference (unless we interpret it as an invitation to convert). The blog writer clearly saw the structure of the situation and chose not to respond in like manner, because the frame of reference (or: the reading strategies) were clearly different:

> He did explain my own faith to me in ways that were fascinating, and pretty difficult to respond to at all (The Old Testament is the story of Atlantis, a reading of the actions of God that was really hostile). I decided not to engage strongly on this though, as it seemed more as though he wanted to tell me how it is, rather than discuss those ideas. And the reading strategies he was using and I use were not going to provide an easy basis for conversation. (EV)

6.7.3 Projecting oneself into the other's frame of reference

To find practical evidence for what I described as 'projecting oneself into the other's frame of reference' (cf. 3.7) is at the same time difficult and superfluous. It is superfluous, because understanding the other within their own frame of reference requires just such projection and it is hard to imagine that this should not have taken place in the conversations. To ask someone a simple question to clarify a statement that this person has previously made requires that the one asking is projecting

themselves into the frame of reference of the one they pose the question to. It is difficult, however, to find a quote that would make the process of projection 'visible,' because we needed an instance of reasoning within the other's frame of reference. The following quotes all from one blog entry might be interpreted to exhibit such 'projected' reasoning. The context for the first quote is a discussion of the situation of being separated from one's fiancée by a very long distance: '*I told him what a painful situation it is though, being away from [my fiancée], and SJ* [a Christian]*, having listened, very seriously said that it is my devotion to Krishna that allows me to go on.*' (HP)

The second quote has the following context: SJ, a Christian, has told HP, a Hindu, how his sister was made to drink alcohol by her colleagues from work and lost her job as a consequence: '*I pointed out that whether or not it was because her body could not tolerate alcohol and she had a problem with drinking, it might have been God's arrangement to rid her of the association of such people!*' (HP)

Yet another instance, where HP employs reasoning that works within the framework of her conversation partner's Christian faith is when she suggests that he becomes a vegetarian. SJ had told her that for Christians there is a rule of 'no blood' but that this refers to humans only. HP, being a vegetarian herself, finds this contradictory '*for animals also have blood,*' but she does not say this at this point. When the tandem meeting draws to a close, both, HP and SJ explicitly affirm that they believe their religious path to be the true one, but that they would not try to change the other. It is at this point, that HP interjects: '*[...] I told him that if there is anything I would have liked to change about him, it would be his eating patterns. Indeed, I would have advised him to be a vegetarian and stop eating meat. SJ took it well ...!*' (HP) In a situation where she had just explicitly stated that she respects his epistemological position within the frame of reference of his religion, she ventures to suggest his becoming a vegetarian, because she sees this as a piece of reasoning that works within that frame of reference of his (although it is clearly motivated by her own convictions and not just by her desire for him to be more consistent in his reasoning). The statement '*SJ took it well ...!*' (if we may believe this) could indicate that he accepted the viability her argument has within his own frame of reference.

6.8 Benefits as reported by participants

This section is about the particular advantages and benefits of the programme as reported by the participants in the blog entries and the focus groups. Because the focus of the programme design (and the theoretical approach to the entire project) was on sound performance of philosophical interfaith dialogue, rather than the achievement of desired results, there are only few approach-inherent expectations of the outcomes or benefits of the programme, such as that participants would emerge with a better understanding of their own tradition and that of their tandem partner. But even if the set-up of the programme worked and the tradition-to-life philosophising did take place, there was no guarantee that participants would feel positive about this experience.

By and large, it is fair to say that the participants felt enthused by their participation in the programme. Some even voiced the intention to continue the conversations with their tandem partner after the programme had ended, and one focus group suggested that Walk in my Shoes continued to exist as a Facebook page to which people could post.[253] When I analysed the qualitative data I had collected, seven main benefits of the Walk in my Shoes programme were explicated by the participants: not being judged by the conversation partner, quickly reaching a very confidential level of exchange, gaining new insights, experiencing a sense of communion with people from another faith, recognising structural similarities between faiths and circumstances, learning from the other, and the opportunity to 'perform' one's religion. They will be illustrated with some quotes in the following sections.

6.8.1 Not being judged

One thing that very clearly emerged from the focus groups was the notion of 'not being judged.' This seemed to be one of the key ingredients for the participants to enjoy the Walk in my Shoes programme. Interestingly, this notion was not hampered by, but indeed depended on, the very fact that the other was of a different faith. '*I wouldn't be judged finally for the way I handled my own religion and there*

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[253] I considered setting up such a Facebook group, but events in my private life demanded my full attention right after the programme had ended with the focus groups.

it'd be understood [that I am a] person of a faith instead of a person representing a faith.' SJ

> [W]e did talk about the dynamic of speaking to somebody of a different faith and just about how there isn't all of those kind of expectations or … social kind of need to conform to a certain model in certain settings. That wasn't there at all … and I think we both found that quite positive. Because my experience is that you can only do that … at least in my faith I can only do that with certain people … and this person of another faith turned out [laughs] to be one of those people that I could do that with and that was … that was something really good (BF)

> TO: What you just said, I mean, everyone struggles with their faith and it was nice to understand other people's struggles as well.
> FF: Mhm, without judgement, without any, you know … bad atmosphere.
> VE: I really enjoyed being able to ask about where she bought meat and feel that she was answering freely and recognising that I was interested in knowing rather than interested in judging.

> [A]nd it was really refreshing to be able to say what you felt about your faith to somebody of another faith, because you knew that that person wouldn't judge you on your practices, if that makes any sense? So if I spoke to another Sikh about something that wasn't according, you know, right-on Sikhism, he'd judge me. But speaking to somebody who is of a complete different faith I could say the hell … whatever I wanted and it wouldn't matter at all. So that was really, really refreshing. (TO)

This element of not judging and not being judged is facilitated by the epistemological parity of the situation, which the programme, it appears, manages to embody in its set-up and design:

> There's often moments where we both knew we disagreed, or where she'd make a statement and she knew that it was contradictory to what I thought, but that was just what we both did and, you know… , according to the way we practice, it was ... Because I think my partner had a lot more rules on her way of living than I did, so … that often came up … but it was … you know, I never felt judged or anything. (VA)

The soundness and effectiveness of tradition-to-life negotiation of faith categories depends decisively on the honest appraisal of the person doing it. It is therefore hard to overestimate the value of a safe, non-judging space in which such faith negotiation can take place. That the programme succeeded in creating such a space is perhaps one of its greatest strengths.

6.8.2   Getting deep fast

Related to the idea of a safe, non-judging space, participants were very vocal about the close relationships they had experienced through the programme. This was helped by the fact of being of a similar age, as some participants expressed, but was also facilitated by the programme set-up and the topic sheet design. KS comments:

> I thought it was really great, [...] the level of the discussions in terms of … discussions that deep you normally don't have except with your best friends and to meet somebody and straight off [...] be that deep within a conversation on a human level and how you relate to things in human life and having different perspectives on things, and how you exactly … how you relate to things, I thought it was just mind-blowing. And … just the thing about not having to go through a whole process of getting to know a person, but just kind of being able to go straight in there, that was nice. (KS)

My own experience from the tandem pair of five, of which I was a part, confirms this observation. Here is a quote from my own notes from the first meeting:

> People were remarkably open: MM talked about her situation and mentioned her children in Canada and her husband who now has to take on a parent role, which he was reluctant to do before. RO mentioned in his introduction his disintegrating marriage with his wife and young son now in Japan […]. EV mentioned her seven years of "doing ill".

Another vivid example of how confidentiality flourished in the safe space of the conversations comes from the blog of VE:

> We had an interesting conversation that came out of the idea of no extra marital sex. FF and I ended up swapping stories of how we lost our virginity, what the considerations [were] that we employed to make the decision and how we feel about it now. It felt completely comfortable and the right thing to do, but there was still something slightly surreal about having such an open and honest conversation with someone I have spent so little time when there are plenty of people who have known me for years that I haven't told. (VE)

Although many people seemed to forge quite close relations with their tandem partner, I do not believe that people generally stayed friends after the programme (in my tandem we did not and I know of a few more tandem pairs who did not either). I think the value of the programme does not consist in turning people into friends, but precisely in enabling confidential, honest and self-reflective conversations, *without* having to be friends beyond the programme.

6.8.3   Learning and gaining insight

The participants learned in various ways through their participation in the programme. Most obviously, they learned about another faith, and the blog entries bear ample witness to that fact. This ranged from rather factual knowledge ('*We discussed for my personal information that in a county there is a diocese and a bishop and the general structure of the Anglican church*' JL) to more theological precepts: '*I appear to have discovered a "salvation by grace" form of Islam.*' (WX)

Participants also frequently reported to have learned something about their own faith tradition by being asked about it by their conversation partner: '*She asked how things would be written down for judgement in Christianity and I didn't know the answer but am planning to do some research to find out!*' (ZG)

Discussing faith and engaging in tradition-to-life philosophising also led to less fact-based and more reflective insights, not only into one's faith tradition, but about one's own faith and practice. For example: '*I think we found a common need for stillness and calm and both spoke about how we do this. Talking to God took on a whole new meaning for me, and talking with her helped to clarify what I believe, which is often shaky and temporary and very post-modern!*' (TO) Another participant explicitly addresses the issue of progressing in understanding within one's own faith:

> For me, it was also the chance to understand more how … what I believe and to actually realise and think about [it] in a, like, more logical … no, I wouldn't say logical, but a more [...] realised fashion what I actually believe in [...], rather than just doing things and not really thinking about it.' (IE)

Such learning about oneself did often take the form of contrasting one's own beliefs against those of one's conversation partner:

> I think for me, we often actually agreed on what we were talking about, but often had very different strategies of finding ourselves there and I, like, it made me more comfortable with my strategies, because I didn't necessarily always like his strategies, although obviously they worked for him. I actually found it a positive thing, because it made me firmer in my own ways of, like, assessing things. (PX)

Yet another respect in which participants felt they had learned something through their participation in the programme was that of expressing one's beliefs.

Perhaps the most articulate phrasing of this aspect comes from VE who said in her focus group:

> I guess the one [thing] that came to my mind most clearly while people were talking was the clarity of the language, because a lot of the ideas that came up in the topic sheets were ones that within the context ... or within my faith community I would be very familiar with, these aren't terribly new ideas ... the concept of life after death and why do bad things happen to good people. What was interesting was then to go 'Now can I take that concept and remove any of the jargon from it, remove any of the words that I would expect to be able to put in, because the person I was talking to might have heard them before.' So like, the clarity of the language that came out was just lovely and the clarity that I got to receive was equally lovely. (VE)

6.8.4 Recognising structural similarities

Naturally, comparisons loom large in the blogs and even in the focus group transcripts. There is a lot of talk about similarities and many participants expressed their amazement about the extent to which they found their faith situation to be similar to their conversation partner's. This does not mean that participants found their religions to be the same in a pluralist or universalist sense. Although I cannot be sure that some such thinking was present, the blog and the focus group material provides a lot of evidence that participants perceived what could be called structural similarities (although they still held on to the notion of separate 'buildings' so to speak.) ER, for instance speaks not of similarities in doctrine or teaching, but in 'faith' and in 'journey': *I think it was [...] similarities to mine [...] I'm Jewish and between my faith and Catholicism which I really didn't think existed. Just ... not so much in practice but in faith and in journey ... to get to faith ... so many similarities in the thought process and the way it worked, it was really enlightening.'* (ER) The situation of being a student of faith in a secular environment was often mentioned as a point of commonality:

> Regarding our environment, we both agreed that it was not conducive to our practising our faith to the extent we would like to. Both of us commented on how British student culture seems to revolve around drinking and sex, especially with all the night outs that are advertised on campus, and how it was very difficult to interact with people who were not like us. (HP)

Another participant distinguishes clearly between theology – the religious teachings – and the structures of living a faith: 'I found that while the theology varies a lot between Hinduism and Mormonism, motivations and aspects of practice are quite similar. We both follow health codes and consider prayer and scripture study to be essential acts of worship.' (PI)

6.8.5   A sense of communion with people of another faith

On the basis of such 'structural' similarities, or similarities in one's situatedness, participants were bonding with each other strongly. VA said in his focus group: '*I was just going to say that there is something we [...] found a lot of common ground on and coming back to a lot is how, comparing ourselves to non-believers, that we have an extra dimension to our lives and so we see the world completely different.*' (VA) Similarly, DC said: '*I found as well, because I knew that person was of faith, and that he would understand where I was coming from so I could be quite open about how I felt, and, you know, more readily than to someone who was a non-believer.* Elsewhere she expressed the thought in even more clearly positive terms:

> I think, it was just nice to find someone that had similar values to me and it's reassuring to know that other people believe in God or whatever, 'cause I don't have many friends who are religious, so … it's nice to have someone of a similar age to me had similar ideas to me. (DC)

This is echoed by DR: '*The thing that, like, gives you confidence, the fact that you know there are other people out there. They are living in … they've got faiths as well and so that you're not alone [laughs]. And so that gives you confidence to think about it.*' (DR) One participant went so far as to re-define the notion of faith community:

> [T]he other thing which I really got a lot out of this experience was a kind of expansion of what counts as a faith community. And in my pair, we … I feel we got to a point, where we didn't think of ourselves necessarily as belonging to our individual faiths, but felt more that we actually constituted our own faith community, the two of us … if that makes sense ... [...] so it was a kind of going beyond our individual faiths without even … without giving up our own viewpoints, but it was something more than just looking at another person. (BF)

I would like to point out that the kind of community spoken of by BF is not based on a supposed convergence of beliefs. She expressly states that she and her tandem partner enjoyed a shared community 'without giving up our own viewpoints.' While at the surface this may seem odd, or perhaps intellectually shallow, I would like to suggest that, rather the opposite, it evidences intellectual maturity, which consists in recognising the irresolvable gap between two different belief systems and accepting it as such.

6.8.6   Learning from the other

Originally conceived of during my participant observation and tentatively confirmed through my reading of the blog entries was the impression that there were instances where participants seem to have learned *from* each other. This does not fall into the same category of learning about the religion of the other or learning about oneself in talking to the other, as discussed above (cf. 6.8.3), because learning *from* the other seems to constitute a transgression of the epistemological boundaries between the faiths, boundaries which I argued cannot be soundly crossed. However, the learning from the other was not in matters of 'religious content' as it were, but in matters of structure. The same 'situational' or structural similarities between their respective faiths talked about in sections 6.8.4 and 6.8.5 facilitated a kind of 'structural' mapping of interpretive strategies or strategies of tradition-to-life negotiation. The doctrines themselves were left 'untouched.'

The most basic of such mapping of strategy is the inspiration that some participants drew from the religious practice of their conversation partners. SJ writes in his blog: '*I feel quite spiritually lacking compared to my partner at the moment and would like to undergo some self-improvements to try and match her standards of piety at least at some point in my life.*'(SJ) During the focus group interview, he confirmed what he had written in his blog:

> I'd definitely say so that I did learn some things from her [HP – his tandem partner] about … mainly mental posture, about how you deal with life and with difficult situations especially. 'Cause she seems to follow a lot of rules. So definitely I learnt something from her about how to keep a few rules as well as praying for extended periods of time. She seems to have got it down perfectly … So definitely learnt something there. … (SJ)

In a similar vein, EV writes in her blog:

> One of the biggest things I am taking away from the first meeting is that it confirmed a challenge I was already feeling that I need to create more deliberate space for prayer and meditation. I am an extrovert and somewhat resistant to entering places of silence and stillness. That's a response to the excess of silence which I encountered during my illness and especially the treatment programme to overcome it. This challenge has been coming in lots of different forms and from different directions. It is good also to hear it in this context, from the practice of different faiths. I don't quite know what I am going to do about this yet, but I'm listening to God about it. (EV)

The same person reports another instance of learning from her conversation partner during the focus group. Her husband and her, both of different Christian denominations, engage in theological discussions regularly. Listening to one of her conversation partners in a tandem meeting helped her to understand a point her husband had made repeatedly and which she had failed to grasp:

> [My conversation partner] talked a bit about practicing the presence of God … that was not quite the words he used for it, but those are the words my husband would use for it and I think it helped me make sense of what he [my husband] is on about for the first time … (EV)

Another tandem pair bonded strongly over their shared distance to their respective institutional leadership. One tandem partner said in the focus group: '[T]hat is virtually what we spoke about: how to cope with community, institution, authority, that sort of thing, yeah. So … basically, it was all about resolving issues for us yeah.' (TO)

A similar instance is reported by BZ in her blog. BZ is nominally Hindu, comes from an Indian Mauritian family, but has been born and grew up in Britain. She is very reflective of the various strands of her cultural identity and finds it difficult to give them up for a more monolithic religious identity as defined by the doctrine of one version of Hinduism or another, even though she is a very religious person and would like to become more serious in her faith practice. Her tandem partner was Mormon, and BZ asked him whether he would not prefer to live in Salt Lake City as there are 50% Mormons living there and as this should therefore feel like his spiritual home to him. She was very surprised, when he answered 'no' and said that Salt Lake City was too American for him and that he liked to live in Britain. She writes: 'So when PI said he preferred to be here - I suddenly realised what he was talking about and could relate to him as opposed to my initial belief. So my conversation with PI

has kind of clarified my resistance to taking up another belief...it is tied in with my identity!' (BZ)

A last example comes from WK: '*For Muslims, the social is more important and significant than the individual i.e. the small, individual sins we commit are not so significant as those which impact upon others. I respect this and I felt that Christians could do with more of this thinking.'* (WK)

6.8.7 Performing faith identity

The last aspect that emerged from the participants' feedback is what I believe is best called 'performing faith identity.' The tandem meetings seemed for many participants to be a very enjoyable and even uplifting experience. This is, I would argue, because they were directly engaging with the faith identity of the participants. In a way, the meetings thus were not just a conversation about faith, but an enactment of faith, not just a discussion of religion, but a religious act itself. The following quotes, in my estimation, confirm and illustrate this interpretation:

> At this point, we were both very inspired by talking about our faith in God and about these 'miracles' in our lives. I had a very nice feeling and felt comfortable talking about God to SJ. I may be wrong, but I felt it was reciprocal. My faith in Krishna, both by listening to SJ and his own faith in God, and by talking about Krishna and His role in my life, was boosted. (HP)

> And to get together ... it was like, it was the highlight of that day: we are going to go and have coffee and chat about something that's much more ... do you know what I mean? ... just like on a completely different level and gives you, like, a completely different perspective to that day. And just ... I was also really blessed with a partner, we'd laugh together and we'd cry together and that was just really lovely. (VE)

> [H]ow lucky I am to have found someone that I enjoy talking with. Actually, it's more that than, not only do I look forward to our meetings but I find myself refreshed by them – taking time to talk about things that are fundamental to how I view the world reminds me how valuable those beliefs are to me, and with deadlines coming closer that no bad thing to be reminded of. (VE)

> [W]hat we both found is that at the end of the conversation we kind of felt, … well we were obviously really happy when we left – not because we were leaving, but because of what we'd talked about – but also, we kind of felt at peace, we were just content, it was just … nice … so it was kind of

like … not therapy, but like, you know … I can't explain it, but …. not like meditation …, but you know the feeling you get, just like that, like that. It was nice. (DR)

6.9   Conclusion

This chapter's purpose was to report on the trial run and its results of the Walk in my Shoes programme, which I had designed with the intention to implement the theoretical insights gained from research presented in earlier chapters. The programme was overall a success. The participants came from a fairly wide variety of religious backgrounds and many of them held fairly conservative beliefs and thus belong to a group of believers that are not easy to involve in interfaith dialogue and who are usually critical of the pluralist leanings often inherent in it. The topic sheets enjoyed high approval rates from the participants and were successful in facilitating tradition-to-life philosophising. The programme structure worked well, although some adjustments can usefully be made when running the programme again. The five principles of philosophical interfaith dialogue were practically realised and the participants showed themselves to be able to handle potentially uncomfortable situations that arose from the open character of the programme. Analysis of the qualitative data in terms of focus group transcripts and the blog entries participants wrote illustrate that the treatment of religions as closed frames of reference with the concomitant implications holds, if applied in practice.

The feedback of participants furthermore reveals that they benefited from their participation and that they enjoyed the experience. Because the focus of the programme design (and the theoretical approach to the entire project) was on sound performance, rather than the achievement of desired results, there were few systemic expectations in this regard. Thus one would have assumed participants to emerge from the programme with a better understanding of their own tradition and that of their conversation partner, which indeed was the case. But beyond that, the parallel-ness and structural similarity of the epistemological situation of each of the conversation partners created benefits that would not have been there, if they had also shared the same content, or the same religious tradition.

For there to be mutual amicability, it was not necessary that people shared a common religious tradition or epistemological frame of reference. Rather, the structural similarity of tradition-to-life negotiation provided rich ground on which to come together as conversation partners. There even was a sense of fellowship based on this structural similarity that could not have developed if participants had also shared their respective religious traditions for then a process of 'judging the other' would have come into play that was absent precisely because participants did not share a common frame of reference to which the activity of reasoning, including judging, is bound. This structural similarity also accounts for some of the learning that took place: although everyone stayed within their respective frame of reference and there was no indication of any epistemologically problematic crossing of boundaries, participants were able to learn what could be termed 'hermeneutical strategies' from the each other: ways of sense-making without taking on actual content from the other's cumulative tradition.

Perhaps the most significant empirical finding of all is that participants found the activity of philosophical interfaith dialogue defined as tradition-to-life negotiation a valuable, enjoyable and even religious activity, not despite, but because it sacrificed the idea of coming to a common agreement for the soundness of its performance.

Thus this last chapter presented the results of the trial run of the Walk in my Shoes programme based on empirical data, both qualitative and quantitative. It served to 'tie back' these results to the considerations during the design process (chapter 5), but more importantly to relate them to the theoretical findings of the first part of the thesis. I feel justified to conclude that they have been validated as much as possible.

7 Conclusion: the contribution of the thesis

This thesis has dealt with the idea of philosophical interfaith dialogue in three respects: historically, conceptually, and practically. 'Philosophical interfaith dialogue' has been understood to refer to dialogue about the truth and validity of religious teachings. As such it has been prominent within the modern interfaith movement originating from the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Therefore, the thesis first engaged with the history of the interfaith movement and provided a comprehensive account and analysis of the issues relating to the notion of dialogue about religious truth. I offer this as the first original contribution the thesis makes.

The analysis of the history of the interfaith movement then led to a conceptual discussion of what I have called 'religious truth discourse' with a view to ascertain the inherent nature and rules that derive from the epistemological position of religions as systems of sense-making. Firstly, this has led me to conclude that indeed no reasoning across religious traditions about religious truth is soundly possible, whereby my perspective was defined by a general outlook and did not take account of the specificity of the relations between any two specific religious traditions. This general outlook has been necessary in order to achieve generalisable results, or a minimal consensus that would hold in all possible combinations of religious believers. Although no reasoning across religious boundaries is possible, I argued that it is possible not only to understand sense-making that takes place within an alien religious frame of reference, but also to participate in such reasoning through hypothetical, emphatic self-projection. In this way, dialogue about religious truth between adherents of different religious traditions is possible provided reasoning stays within the boundaries of any one tradition, to which the respective other must become a hypothetical participant.

Secondly, discussing definitions of religions I then extended the notion of 'system of reasoning' from a narrow understanding of it as a 'system of doctrines' to a broader one as the activity of negotiating the meaning of conceptual categories the believer inherited through their religious tradition in light of their experiences of being in the world. Such an understanding of reasoning about religious truth does not depend on the specific nature of a given religion, but applies to the situation of believers in general and is accessible to non-specialist lay people as well.

The final part of the thesis then applied the theoretical conclusions practically by designing a programme that facilitates philosophical interfaith dialogue. This was

done in two steps: firstly, a discussion of the design rationale; and secondly a presentation and interpretation of the empirical data collected during a trial run of the programme. It was argued that these results validated the theoretical conclusions as far as that is possible and provided evidence of the value the programme has from the perspective of the participants. Thus, this thesis' second contribution is, I suggest, that it demonstrates a practical and fairly universally applicable way of how to facilitate religious truth discourse.

By pointing out a way in which religious truth discourse can be engaged in co-religiously (even though not cross-religiously), the thesis has significance for the practice of interfaith dialogue. Religious truth discourse is largely absent from the interfaith context of the UK today. Partially due to the failings of the interfaith movement, issues of truth are left to either pluralist interpretations, which rather pre-empt than facilitate reasoning about the validity of religious teachings, or to theologians, the impact of whose work on the practitioner on the grass roots level is unclear. (Cf. Prideaux 2009) The philosophical interfaith dialogue as explicated in this thesis and as facilitated by the Walk in my Shoes programme can thus add this missing element to the broader interfaith dialogue arena. As detailed in chapter 2, there is a tendency in the UK to focus in matters of interfaith more on the local and community level and thus to reach regular believers (although by no means always successfully). The philosophical interfaith dialogue this thesis proposes is fully compatible with these attempts and can indeed contribute to make interfaith dialogue meaningful to people of faith on the grass roots level.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Poster advertising the Walk in my Shoes programme

9.2 Flyer advertising the Walk in my Shoes Programme

WaLk in my Shoes

- Want people to understand your faith?
- Want to learn how to express your faith?
- Interested in how other people of faith think?

Then **WaLk in my Shoes** is for you!

Through **WaLk in my Shoes** you will pair up with a conversation partner of a faith you are interested in learning about. You will meet 4 to 5 times between the end of January and mid-March for one-to-one conversations in your own time. This might be at a café or somewhere around campus or in your home if you feel comfortable about it, or perhaps even at your place of worship. You will be provided with topic sheets that help you to get started in your conversations and give you a rough guideline how you might explore different topics. However, you are free to take the conversation into any direction you are interested in. Topics include: tolerance and its limits, why bad things happen to good people, being a member of a faith community, life after death, sacred space, balancing religious practice with a student lifestyle, etc.

As a second, parallel, part of **WaLk in my Shoes**, we will provide you with a personal blog and ask you to write about your experience of talking about your faith. It is a chance to reflect on how your conversation went, where you succeeded in getting your perspective across and what you have learned about the other. It is also a place to muse about how the conversation has clarified aspects of your own faith for you or where you would like to continue at the next meeting. This blog will be private to you, but you can invite others to view it if you want, who will then be allowed access.

There are loads of **benefits** in taking part in **WaLk in my Shoes**:

You meet new and interesting people of faith. You learn how to articulate your beliefs and you experience how a person of another faith views the world. In thinking about it all you might clarify your own stand on things for yourself and deepen your understanding of your own faith.

The initial meeting for **WaLk in my Shoes** will take place twice, on January 27th and 28th. There you will be able to pair up with someone for your one-to-one conversation meetings. A final group meeting will take place in the last week of term, March 16th – 20th, where you can give feedback and tell us how the programme has or hasn't worked for you.

What next? If you are interested in **WaLk in my Shoes**, please send an email to Christian Kaestner, the project organiser at walkinmyshoesleeds@gmail.com , or accept our invitation to the programme on facebook (search for "Walk in my Shoes Leeds"). Christian will then send you an email with the details of the initial events. If you have any questions regarding the programme, please also drop Christian a line, he will be happy to answer them for you.

9.3   Topic sheets booklet of the Walk in my Shoes programme

How
Walk in my Shoes
works

the programme

At the initial event of the Walk in my Shoes tandem partnerships will be established who will then arrange to meet in their own time and at a convenient place for conversations about their faith. Tandem partners are asked to meet 4 or 5 times until the end of term. During the last week of term (ending March 20th) all participants will be invited to a focus group meeting to share their experience with the programme and to feed back suggestions how it might be improved.

the topic sheets

This booklet contains 12 topic sheets that are meant to help to structure the conversations. It is not necessary to stick slavishly to the questions offered there, rather they are intended to create a framework for a productive exchange. Each conversation should last about 45 minutes to an hour, but this may vary. Between you and your tandem partner you are free to **choose which topic sheets you want to cover.** However, we suggest that you **do them in the order they occur in the booklet.** Thus it would be helpful to decide beforehand which ones you are interested in. Likewise, it is advisable to **read through the topic sheet** you are going to use **before** the meeting and possibly to **take some notes** as well.

the blog →

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

The University Of Sheffield.

The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical & Religious Studies

Table of Topic Sheets

p. 6	01 Things Sacred
p. 8	02 Making Sacrifices
p.10	03 Talking to God
p.12	04 Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?
p.14	05 Tolerance and Limits
p.16	06 Urgency and Hope
p.18	07 Violence and Religion
p.20	08 Belonging to a Faith Community
p.22	09 Death and Immortality
p.24	10 Keeping the faith
p.26	11 Falling Short of God's Ideal (?)
p.28	12 God, the World, and Me
p.30	Extra Room for Notes

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the blog

After each conversation tandem partners are asked to write a paragraph or more reflecting on the conversation. For this purpose they are each provided with private, password protected online blogs. The blog will be set up shortly after the initial event where the tandem partnerships were established and each participant will receive an invitation to join their blog as an author.

Because we are using the free platform www.blogger.com, you will be required to have a google account in order to access the blog.

- **If you already have a googlemail.com or gmail.com email account:**

  - Follow the link sent to you by Walk in my Shoes.
  - Enter login and password of your googlemail or gmail email account.
  - Choose display name & accept terms of service.
  - Access your blog!

- **If you do not have a googlemail.com or gmail.com account**

  - Follow the link sent to you by Walk in my Shoes Leeds.
  - Choose "create new account".
  - Enter a valid email address and choose a password.
  - Choose display name & accept terms of service.
  - Check your inbox for a link sent to you by google.com.
  - Click the link to verify your email address.
  - Your account is now established. Enter your email address and password every time you want to access your blog.

Signing in at www.blogger.com will take you to the *Dashboard*, where you can see a list of the blogs you are subscribed to. Find the *Walk in my Shoes* one and select "New Post" or "View Blog". When you view the blog, the "New Post"-button is in the upper right hand corner.

Walk in my Shoes

Things Sacred

Many things can be sacred to people of faith, such as objects, persons, times and places. In principle, the sacred is set apart from the profane, the ordinary, the everyday. In today's society people of different faiths share in the realm of the ordinary world, but the sacred usually defines religious identity

About this topic:

Although the concept of 'the Sacred' is not limited to the realm of religion, it is important for people of faith in today's world. To narrow the wide focus, the questions below ask you to concentrate on sacred space, scripture and diet. You can narrow the focus even more if you want by selecting one or two from the three themes offered here.

Suggestion:

If you want, you can visit each other's places of worship.

Focus space

- What places are sacred to you? What is in them? What do you do there?

- Besides communal sacred spaces, are there also personal spaces that you consider sacred?

- How is the sanctity of those spaces created? How is it maintained?

Focus scripture

- What kind of scriptures are there? What is the role of scripture in the beliefs your faith tradition?

- How is scripture used in communal worship?

- When do you read scripture? How do you use it in your religious practice?

- Is there a passage from your sacred texts that you particularly like and/or find important? Why?

Focus diet

- Is there a specific diet prescribed by your religion? What is the reason for this?

- What customs and rituals are there in your faith tradition in relation to food and eating?

- To what degree do you follow these dietary rules and rituals in your daily life?

- What role does food play in community life and in relations between individuals?

Suggestion:

As an interesting practical exercise in relating to people of another faith you can plan a joint dinner for people of each of your traditions.

Consider issues such as seating arrangements, food, prayers, dietary requirements, etc.

Even more practical would be to actually have a joint dinner!

Walk in my Shoes

Making Sacrifices

In many faith traditions, the practitioner is asked to forgo, or **sacrifice**, **some pleasures** in order to achieve spiritual realizations or to adhere to prescribed ethical norms. For instance, a believer might be called upon to abstain from sexual relations to some degree, an idea that is looked upon with suspicion by many people today. A faith may also require its followers to practice forms of meditation and/or prayer that are time consuming or otherwise **difficult to 'fit in'** with the situation of being a student.

What this topic can do for you:

To explore the Do-s and Don't-s of your faith and how they affect your daily life as a student and your interaction with others. Likewise for your partner.

your notes

Consider

• What regulations and expected behaviour are prescribed by your religion for its followers?

• Are there different 'rules' for different kinds of followers (e.g. clergy, laypersons etc.)?

• To what degree do you follow these rules?

• How do you negotiate to what degree you adhere to them?

• How could your environment help you to stick to the standards you accepted for yourself?

• How is your relationship with your religious community affected if you do not or do not fully follow certain prescribed standards of behaviour or practice set by your religion?

• How does the fact that people of different religions follow different rules affect how you view them?

more room for notes

Walk in my Shoes

Talking to God ⟶

Communication with the Divine is essential for many believers. There are different forms of communication, some **communal**, often ritualised, some very **personal** and free in the form they take. A lot of religious authority is built on the claim to successful communication with the Divine.

What this topic can do for you:

A vast part of religious life and practice has to do with communication and interaction with the Divine. To explore this area is to truly get to know the other as a person of faith and to make yourself intelligible as a religious practitioner.

your notes:

Consider

• What forms of ritualised acts of communion with the Divine/God are there in the religious practice of your community?

• How do you participate in them? What do they mean to you?

• How do you communicate with the Divine on a personal level? What do you 'talk' about?

• In daily life, what are your communication strategies with God?

• Have they ever failed you? How do you deal with the perhaps relatively ambiguous responses you get?

• How do you interpret 'signs'? What are your guidelines for such interpretation?

10
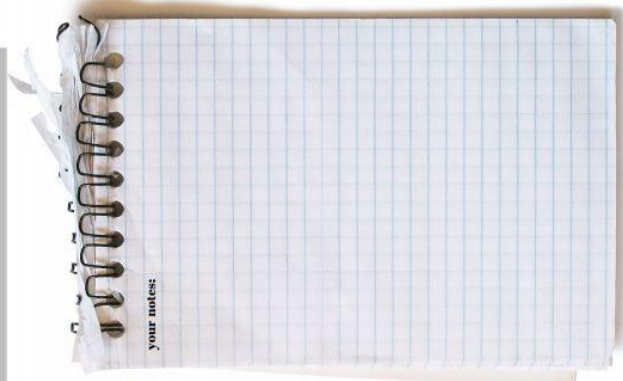
Suggestion

If you want, you can move on the discussion to include topics like sacred space (often defined as a place of communion or interaction with God) and scripture (often regarded as the word of God). See also topic sheet 'Things Sacred', pp. 6-7.

more room for notes

11

Walk
in my
Shoes

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Faith in a transcendent God or ultimate reality usually relates in some way to the notion of universal justice. However, our experience in the world challenges this notion as we often see ordinary people suffer through no obvious fault of their own.

Have a look at the picture and the accompanying text

Imagine Marian Fontana, the woman in the picture, shares your own faith. How would you try to console her? How would you encourage her not to lose faith?

In thinking about this, it may be helpful to consider ...

... are there examples from your own faith tradition or scripture where good people seemed to suffer unduly? In those instances, how is sense made of this suffering?

... what explanation does your religion provide for the existence of evil in the world?

... how does that affect your everyday behaviour and religious practice?

... have you yourself experienced something painful and how did your faith help you (or not) in dealing with it?

In sharing your views with your conversation partner, you might also address the following issues:

source:
http://www.usatoday.com/news/gallery/2008/911_faith/flash.htm?pid=176
(accessed June 10th, 2008, 5pm)

• What constitutes "bad things" according to your religion and your own understanding?
• What makes "good people" good?

12

Your notes
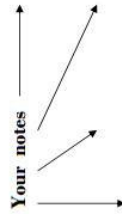
When Marian Fontana learned of the attack in the Trade Center, she says, "My first impulse was to drop to my knees and pray." Her husband Dave, a firefighter, had rushed to the WTC even though he'd taken the day off to celebrate their anniversary. She knelt before the television in her living room, said The Lord's Prayer, and tried to bargain with God for Dave's life.

In the days that followed, when she realized her husband was dead, Fontana stopped talking to God. She still wants to believe in God, but "something has shifted, and even my limited spirituality seems to have been squashed among the debris."

13

Walk in my Shoes

Tolerance and Limits

Religious people are usually expected to be tolerant of insults from others because forbearance is considered a virtue in many religions. However, religious people do take offence in some circumstances and see themselves justified in doing so by their religious teachings and/or their own sense of dignity, especially when their religion and their religious identity is affected.

What this topic can do for you:

To sound out what **tolerance** means to you, how it is described in (and possibly prescribed by) your religion and where it stops; and likewise for your partner

Consider

- What examples are there in your tradition of people who set an ideal standard of tolerance?

- How do these examples apply to your own life? To how you interact with people of another faith?

- Where, do you think, tolerance should stop? Can you think of a specific scenario (hypothetical or real)?

- How do you communicate that certain behaviour is unacceptable to you?

- What constitutes blasphemy (insult to God) in your tradition?

- How do you respond to such an act?

- What behaviour do you expect of people of another faith for them to show respect to your faith?

your notes:

Suggestion

To discuss tolerance and its limits in regard to religion use specific examples, hypothetical or real, to illustrate your points.

more room for notes

14

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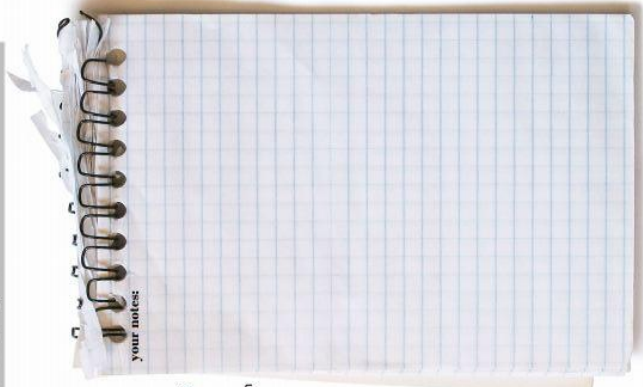
Walk in my Shoes

URGENCY & HOPE

Religious teachings often carry a sense of urgency with them. Religious practice is not something to be postponed for later in life. The stakes are often high in terms of salvation and sometimes in terms of damnation, too.

About this topic:

This is a particularly sensitive topic, as it touches on issues that are potentially upsetting to the relationship of people of different faiths. Yet it is at the same time vital to many believers, as truth, especially ultimate truth, is all but a trivial matter and from its very notion demands universal recognition.

Consider

- Where does a sense of urgency arise within the teachings of your religion and your own beliefs? Why is it important to practice today rather than later in life?

- How does this sense of urgency inform your own religious practice?

- How do you deal with the high demands connected to this sense of urgency in your daily life? Is it easy to keep it up or do you need a break every once in a while?

- How does the hope or reward your religion promises inform your attitude to life? Your actions?

- How do urgency and hope shape your perception of others? How do they inform your behaviour toward people of other faiths or people of no faith?
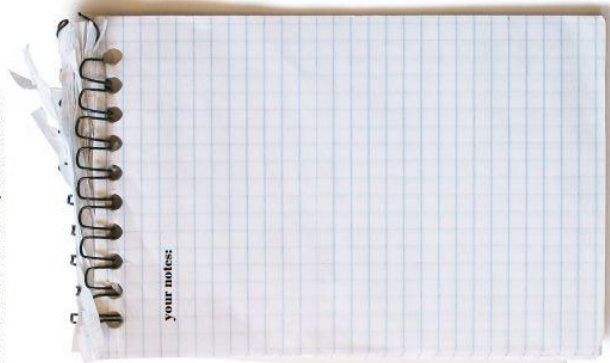
your notes:

Please consider:

This is not an exercise in converting one another, but about exploring from where within the teachings of your religion and/or your own personal believes urgency and hope arise.

more room for notes

Suggestion:

In preparation for the tandem meeting, you might find it interesting to read the introduction of

Juergensmeyer, M. (2000) Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence. London: University of California Press.

more room for notes

19

Walk in my Shoes

Violence and Religion

Religion is often viewed as a dividing factor and indeed as a drive behind potentially violent conflict. When listening to the teachings of different faith traditions it is clear that being non-violent is universally seen as a religious virtue, though what is meant by 'non-violent' and especially how it translates into the political arena may not always be equally clear.
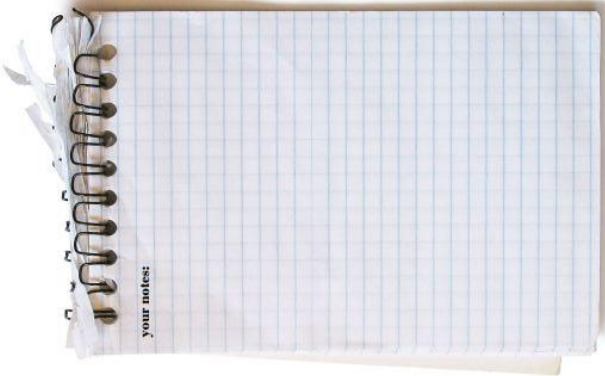
About this topic:

Especially since terrorism and religion have become so interlinked with each other in public consciousness, it is tempting to discuss world politics when talking about religion and violence. It is unlikely, however, that this will lead to a better understanding of your own and your partner's faith. The suggested focus here is, therefore, on the religious teachings and their application in daily life.

Consider

- Where in the narratives of your faith tradition does violence play a role?

- How is violence viewed in these circumstances?

- Where in today's world is violence justified or even necessary according to the understanding of your faith tradition? (E.g. Death Penalty?)

- How do you relate to these aspects of your faith?

- We usually think of violence in physical terms. What other forms of violence might there be in regard to faith?

- How does the issue of violence impact on your relationship with people of other faiths? How does it impact on how you view them?

your notes:

18

Walk in my Shoes

Belonging to a Faith community

Being a person of faith often also means being a member of a faith community of some kind. Festivals and collective worship as well as family communities are important aspects of a religious life and also help people of faith in day-to-day matters.

What this topic can do for you:

To make yourself understood and to understand the other each as members of a larger faith community. To learn about what role fellow believers and the community play in each other's lives.

your notes:

Consider

- What makes one a member of your religious community?

- What rites and rituals are involved in forming and maintaining your religious community?

- What behaviour is expected of a community member? How does that affect your daily life?

- How is your religious community structured? What hierarchies are in place? How does that affect your religious practice?

- How important is community to your life as a person of faith?

- How does your community relate to other religious communities?

more room for notes

Walk in my Shoes

Death and Immortality

Death is the inescapable end of our present existence and it challenges us to find meaning in our lives. Questions about death and immortality therefore occupy a central place in the belief structure of religious traditions. Each religion has specific ways of making sense of death and how this is done influences its teachings, practices and rituals in various ways.

About this topic:

Since questions of death and afterlife are central to religious teachings and practice, it is important to know about them in order to understand a faith. Besides being relevant to the teachings of a religious tradition, it is also a highly personal topic that allows you to understand how those teachings manifest in the life of a believer.

Consider

- Think of a situation in which you encountered death. What impact has that experience had on your outlook on life and on your religious beliefs and practices?

- What does your religious tradition say about why there is death in the world? What does it teach about afterlife?

- How tangible are these teachings for you? Do they help you to face your own mortality? How do they impact on your daily life? How do they affect your religious practice?

- What rituals are there in your faith tradition connected to the situation of death?

your notes:

more room for notes
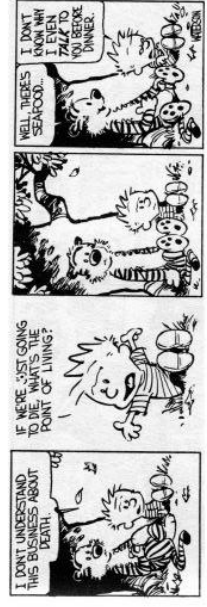
Walk in my Shoes

Keeping the Faith

Although faith is usually taken to be beyond material proof (or disproof), maintaining one's faith is something that requires 'nurture' of some kind. Despite such nurture, most believers have experienced doubt. This doubt can relate to relatively minor things, but can also be fairly existential. Sometimes doubt is a catalyst to open up new horizons of faith.

What this topic can do for you:

To speak about the essentials of your faith and your strategies to nurture them. To reflect on ways of dealing with doubt, perhaps to share how your faith has developed.

your notes:

Consider

- What do you consider essential practice that nurtures your faith?

- How do you maintain such nurture in your daily life? Can you think of specific examples?

- What ways of dealing with doubt are recommended in your tradition? Who do you go to? What do you do?

- Can you think of a personal example where this worked for you?

- In the course of your religious practice or your life as a believer, have you developed personal strategies for dealing with doubts? What are they?

For further reflection ...

- What do you consider essential to your faith? At what point, would you say, has someone of your tradition lost their faith?

- What things are unessential? Where is it ok for you to disbelieve or have your own interpretation?

more room for notes

Walk in my Shoes

## Falling short
of God's ideal (?)

To follow a religious lifestyle is not always easy. Moral standards are high and sometimes difficult to keep. Religious practice may be involving and in certain circumstances difficult to maintain. Falling short in these regards can feel like a falling away from the Divine or like one has abandoned God, requiring atonement to close the gap.

What this topic can do for you:

To reflect on ways of dealing with shortcomings in religious life. To communicate what provisions there are in your faith tradition to accommodate and rectify set-backs. Likewise, learn about your partner's faith.

your notes:

Consider

• What are examples of standards in your religious tradition that are difficult to keep in today's world?

• Why are they difficult to keep?

• In your religious tradition, are there established ways of dealing with the inability to maintain a given standard ? What are they?

• Can you perhaps share an example from your personal experience? If you rather not, can you perhaps think of a hypothetical example to illustrate your points?

• How do you decide which standards are set by God?

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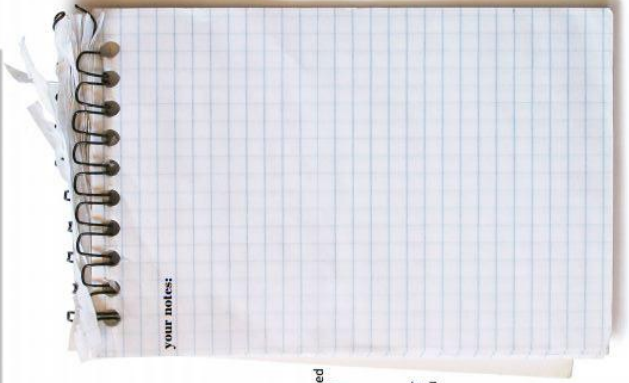
more room for notes

✎ **For further reflection ...**

Sometimes it may also feel like God has abandoned the believer. There may be feelings of anger, disappointment and discouragment. If you have experienced those, it might be worthwile to reflect on how you dealt with them. If possible, you can relate that back to the teachings of your tradition.

Suggestion:

It might be interesting to reflect on what different viewpoints believers hold in your faith tradition as characterized through the matrix of God/the world/the believer and their relationships.

When thinking about this matrix, do you actually agree with someone from another faith tradition more than with some members of your own faith?

Walk
in my
Shoes

God, the world, and Me

There are different ways to view **God** or the **Divine**, the **world** and **oneself** and the **relationship** between them. In fact, they can be seen as a matrix through which to characterize principal features of a belief.

About this topic:

This is a fairly abstract topic with the potential to convey the 'big picture' of a person's outlook on life. After having discussed a number of more specific topics in the course of the programme, it is now a good opportunity to think about the more abstract principles which you perceive to be underlying your life.

your notes:

Consider

- If you consider God to be a person, what does that mean? If you believe the Divine is not personal, how would you characterize it?

- Do you think that the external world has a relationship with God or the Divine? If so, what kind? How does God or the Divine relate to the world?

- What is your relation to God or the Divine? Are you created? Separate? One?

- Given your relationship with God discussed above, what do you see to be the goal of your religious practice?

- How do you relate to the world? Do you engage with it? Do you try to transcend it? What does either of these mean?

- What is the goal of your life?

Walk in my Shoes

Extra room for Notes

9.4 Layout of blogs for Walk in my Shoes programme

Walk in my Shoes: Martina

Welcome to your **Walk in my Shoes** blog!

Please write an entry after each conversation. (You can write more often, if you want!) In writing your entry, please consider the following questions:

• What were the issues you addressed, what did you talk about?
• How did the topic sheet shape your conversation?
• What do you feel you were able to give in the conversation?
• What did you gain from the conversation?

+ your reflections …

Happy blogging!

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2009

▶ Why do bad things happen to good people

balbal

Posted by walkinmyshoes at 2:36 PM   No comments:

Home

This is your own private blog. If you want, you can invite others to view or post comments to this blog. Please send the email address of the person you want to invite to

walkinmyshoesleeds@gmail.com

9.5 Focus group questions

- What was the best thing about "Walk in my Shoes" and the meetings for you?
- Have you had any previous experience of interfaith dialogue? Which?
- How is Walk in my Shoes different from the forms of interfaith dialogue you have had experienced previously?
- What are the **advantages** of Walk in my Shoes vis-à-vis those other forms of interfaith dialogue?
- What are the **disadvantages** of Walk in my Shoes vis-à-vis those other forms of interfaith dialogue?
- Were you happy/unhappy with your partner? Why?
- Do you think the success depends on the partner or would it work with pretty much everyone?
- For who does "Walk in my Shoes" work best? What type of person would get the most out of it? For what kind of people wouldn't it really work? Why?
- What (kind of things) did you get out of Walk in my Shoes and the meetings?
- Was there some sort of progress in your exchange, as you had several meetings? What kind? In what way?
- Have you experienced a situation, where
    - your conversation partner explained how s/he made sense of reality in a certain way
    - this way of sense-making was new to you
    - you realised that the same pattern of sense making would work for you in your own faith

This is not about taking on the teachings of another faith. Rather, this is about discovering new ways to make sense of reality in terms of your own faith. I'm interested in whether such new perspectives can be inspired by or emerge from a conversation with someone of another faith. Have you experienced something of the
sort and, if so, could you give examples?

- What is something that you think needs improving? How?