

# Doing Interfaith Dialogue for Peace in a Globalizing World

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**Abstract:** This paper tackles the problematic relationship between religion and violence. Religion is ambivalent in relation to peace and violence. Nonetheless, as peace advocates, we need to use the potential resources of religion as a way of advancing peace in a violent world. Interfaith dialogue is a tedious task not only because it needs time and patience in its engagements but also because of the complexities involved in the conversation. Thus, people engaged in interfaith dialogue must be open not only to sharing their experiences and views but also must be prepared to listen to questioning their positions and faiths. Since dialogue implicates a whole worldview, not limited to religion, we need to learn from each other in the process of engagement. In this dialogue, we need to shift from a focus on our commonality to the affirmation of our differences.

**Keywords:** *Globalization, Peace, Peacebuilding, Religion, Western Hegemony, Religious Violence*

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*Peacebuilding should be a primary focus of interfaith dialogue in the future.*<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I will link interfaith dialogue and peace studies in the contemporary context of globalizing world.<sup>2</sup> Interfaith dialogue as a theological discourse has progressed with the researches on the theology of religion and comparative theology. These researches are mainly propelled by a greater awareness of different religions around the world beyond or outside the borders of Christianity. Christianity in the age of globalization cannot isolate itself from nor impose itself on other faiths or religions around the world. Christianity is only one among the many religions or faiths. Christianity has to grapple with the problems of the plurality of faiths and religions and has to open itself to dialogues with these other religions or faiths. Moreover, peace studies have embarked into the contribution of religion in conflict resolution beyond and outside the disciplines of the social sciences. Religion is ambivalent because it can fuel conflict or foster peace in the world. History is replete with both stories where religion is used to justify violence and to pursue peace. This ambivalence puts religion into question with regard to its relation to peace. Nonetheless, religion remains a potent force in the resolution of conflict by utilizing its resources. Finally, globalization not only expands the reach of the market economy and consumerist culture, but it also generates possible conflicts due to interactions and tensions of different peoples. To avert that possibility, dialogue is needed to address these differences and to foster peace among peoples. The goal of this paper is to come up with an interfaith dialogue for peace discourse that tackles the role of interfaith dialogue in deterring conflict and attaining peace.

### **Promise of Globalization**

The world has been dubbed as a global village. This labeling sounds romantic where the earth is compressed in time and space so that people can simultaneously meet together in different time and in virtual space. The globe is compressed not because the size has been reduced but because the time and space have been

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<sup>1</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding: The Future of Interfaith Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, 2012, 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> There is sometimes confusion on the use of phrases in relation to dialogue because some would use interreligious dialogue and some would prefer interfaith dialogue. According to Kwok Pui-Lan, "the term interfaith dialogue is used instead of interreligious dialogue to signal that conversations and interactions are taking place between people of faiths and not between religions per se, between religions as systems of beliefs and practices. Although I agree that religion is primarily a faith experience with the divine, and secondarily a dogma statement, this faith is framed within a religious discourse. Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 1. See also, Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion*, Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, ed., Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, 1-65.

shortened due to efficient modern technology. Globalization<sup>3</sup> seems attractive since it facilitates communication and transportation of peoples. With the internet, people can talk via chats and see each other via cams despite the distance of places that separate them with minimal efforts and expenses. Moreover, with many available cheap fares among the competing airline companies and discounted tours in tourism agencies, people can fly in different countries and enjoy the tourist attractions in various places. However, even if the efforts or expenses are simple and minimal, still people can only avail of these privileges if they have the money to pay and spend in the global market. The elite class who earns more than it spends can save money and plan for their itineraries during their vacation and tour. However, the underclass can only watch on their television and wonder the beauty of the world. They can only afford to purchase their daily survival needs and not even meet their basic needs. They dream that one day they will win the lotto and sweepstakes so that they too can travel around the world and enjoy the amenities of the global village.

Moreover, the globe has also been hailed as a borderless world. People are in the move travelling in different parts of the earth. These travelers have diverse purposes in mind that they want to accomplish in foreign lands. However, the movement is not just open to everybody because there are restrictions. People have to obtain their passports and sometimes visas so that they can move in a foreign land. They must satisfy all requirements imposed by immigration laws. If they pass the requirements, then they are lucky to enter that country. Thus, the borderless world is, in fact, restrictive and selective.

### **Disenchantment in Globalization**

The global world has been synonymous with free market because of an open flow of goods in the market. This exchange in the market is supposedly marked

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<sup>3</sup> Sometimes we take globalization for granted, perhaps because it is the catchword of contemporary times that inundates discourses of scholars and so we accept this characterization as a self-evident phenomenon. Globalization is oftentimes linked with economics. In this sense, we speak of the market as expanding and moving worldwide. Scholars speak of integration and linkage of the market around the world making it a global market. Moreover, globalization describes it as free market. The freedom is based on a liberal notion that the market should be left alone by itself so that it is free from intervention of the government. The government is seen as a hindrance for the progress of the market. This freedom is also linked with the liberal notion that the individuals as economic actors can participate in the market without restrictions of their autonomy. They are free to do business and to engage in the market. Since it is free, the movement of goods and services are open to the market. The producers are free to sell and the consumers are free to buy. However, globalization is also linked with culture as a symbolic system that frames our worldview. The market creates a culture for the people since they are influenced by fads and fashions that are advertised or marketed by the media. This culture is known as consumerism where consumers buy without distinguishing needs and wants since they are already blurred in the market. This consumerist culture becomes a symbolic status that confers identity to the consumers.

by a level playing field but, as we can see, it is ruled by stiff competition among different players. We discover that the market is swamped by western products from transnational corporations (TNCs). Although we also notice local products around, we bewail that the market is dominated by western products from industrializing countries. Since the competition is stiff, highly capitalized products from international business outperform their local counterparts. Thus, business can either flourish or perish in this competition. Considering the edge of the foreign products, the local counterparts will eventually dwindle or even disappear. The consumers are free to choose their goods according to their preferences constrained by their limited budget. The domestic products and local establishments may lose in this competition due mainly to their high prices and low quality, while the foreign products thrive due to financed advertising and marketing strategies. In fact, the retailing small businesses of the local people are being taken over by big businesses that put up grocery stores. To our dismay, the playing field is not really equal but unfair because there are gainers and losers, winners and bankrupts in this field. In fact, instead of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, globalization further widens it. Thus, the saying, the rich become richer while the poor become poorer remains a truism.

Aside from the economic competition, there exists also cultural competition. In globalization, we see and meet different peoples around the world. We discover that the dominant language used by people is English because that is the *lingua franca* of media and technology. We need to speak the language and converse with people in this language. People sometimes assume that one can speak and understand the language. The leading information is western due mainly to our educational system where instructions and publications come from the US and UK that propagate western thoughts. The spokespersons that are influenced by western thoughts are spread all over the world and carry out this information. The prevailing race is the white people due in part to the impact of Hollywood movies and entertainment industries that display the superiority and excellence of the white characters and performers. In this scenario, globalization is really western hegemony which dominates the global scenario that overtakes local beliefs and disregards traditional practices. Local culture is devalued and subsumed by western hegemony that disregards the indigenous peoples. This western hegemony brings about social inequality in the global setting.<sup>4</sup> Western hegemony marginalized and excluded local and indigenous cultures. Although local people try to assert their culture and resist the west, they are defeated by its dominance. The local cultures are reduced into cultural entertainments and tourist attractions displayed in the market. People cope with the

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<sup>4</sup> Philippe de Woot, "Ambiguities of Globalization," in *Globalization and Multicultural Societies: Some Views from Europe*, Marina Ricciardelli, Sabine Urban and Kostas Nanopoulos, ed., Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, 125-126.

demands of globalization by conforming to the western standard and expectation and surrendering their local cultures. This trend may lead to the marginalization and exclusion, if not loss or demise, of local beliefs and practices. The integration and interconnection of people promised by globalization is a sham because they are divided or graded. In the cultural setting, the law of the jungle prevails: The survival of the fittest and the elimination of the unfit.

### **Hegemony of Globalization**

In travelling to different parts of the world, we discover the peculiar cultures of peoples. We are not after all the same but we are, in fact, different in many ways. These cultures range from the most visible material aspects to the most abstract immaterial aspects of life. As we move into the global world, we discover that the visible and the abstract cultures are relatively interwoven in a worldview. As travelers, we feel being swayed back and forth into the force of globalization. Globalization is a force that either pulls or pushes us to one side or the other. For those who are pulled, they are assimilated into the system. Seemingly, they benefit from the system because they are included into it. But in the process, they are dissatisfied because they merely yield to the system and lose their identity. This assimilation absorbs them into the dominant system that fashions them into its image and likeness. They become part of the throng that follows the regularity and expectation of the system. For those who are pushed, they are isolated from the system. Seemingly, they lose the chance and advantage because they alienate themselves from it. They have to suffer the consequence of their resistance. However, in the process, they gain their identity and assert their freedom. In this globalization, we have to play the game and swing with this force. The pendulum “is oscillating between assimilation and segregation.”<sup>5</sup>

In this global world, there is a concomitant force of universal unity of integration and multiple diversity of uniqueness.<sup>6</sup> This force leads people to feel uncertain and insecure. To cope with this force, they become conscious of their thought and action by making selection and prioritization of their choices. They are wary of the totalizing force of integration that annihilates their uniqueness in the process. However, they are also cautious of the isolating force of uniqueness that segregates them from the rest. Thus, they waver or shuffle into the pendulum of integration and uniqueness by waffling into the global and local possibilities. The oscillation between integration and uniqueness haunt their everyday decision whether they conform to it or resist

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<sup>5</sup> Viggo Mortensen, “Theology Meets the Religions,” in *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue*, Viggo Mortensen, ed., Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, xii.

<sup>6</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*, New York: Orbis Books, 2004, xix.

it. They resort to selectivity and prioritization so that they can still carve a space for them to exercise their uniqueness. This selectivity can counterbalance the dominant force of western hegemony by connecting themselves to their tradition and heritage.<sup>7</sup> They resist the force of integration because they fear being engulfed or swallowed by the system that would eventually obliterate their uniqueness. Globalization, as it moves to integrate and connect people around the world, tends to homogenize culture into monochrome which undercuts the uniqueness of people. People are exasperatingly and delightfully varied in their culture. The youths are susceptible to this mechanization of the market since they are exposed to the internet and seduced by consumerism.

Globalization is equated with westernization or even neo-colonization because of this subtle invasion of the world market that propagates western culture at the expense of local culture. That invasion can evoke outrage and disgust as much as envy and spite by people disenfranchised by globalization.<sup>8</sup> The unilateral power of globalization that favors the dominance of the west at the expense of the rest can have risky consequences. This western hegemony can marginalize the rest that would harbor and breed disgruntlement. People are categorized into groups of insiders and outsiders in this social division. These groups are socially divided and graded. The insiders erect boundary and create distance that would separate them from the outsiders. This division solidifies an identification between the in-group and a disidentification with the out-group. This segregation is often imposed by the insiders against the outsiders whom they consider as abhorrent.<sup>9</sup> This social division creates more damage and tension between these groups leading to conflict. When this hidden conflict is triggered or provoked, it may burst into a manifest violence that can have a lethal effect.

## Global Violence

People have needs in their lives, not only material needs but also nonmaterial needs. These needs have to be procured and satisfied. However, individuals cannot satisfy these needs by themselves alone; they have to be supplied by society. We have to realize that people are not isolated individuals; they are closely related to society. Individuals are not self-sufficient by themselves. In other words, the satisfaction of these needs depends on cooperation and interdependence. When these needs are unmet, people succumb to frustration. The unmet needs can be a frustrating

<sup>7</sup> Mark Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat*, London: Continuum, 2002, 132.

<sup>9</sup> Martin E. Marty, *When Faiths Collide*, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 17.

experience and they express their frustrations in varied ways. This suffering that they endure may resort to violence when they feel hopelessly deprived and unjustly treated. They use violence as a retribution for those injustices they suffer. Violence is a product of various factors — political, social, and ideological — that coalesce together. The unmet needs when they are prolonged and unbearable are heading to violence. The unmet needs are symptomatic of a deep-seated disillusionment. They are, in fact, warning signs that alert us to the potential force of violence.<sup>10</sup> As we have seen, globalization divides the people between the haves and the have-nots and the gap is widening between the rich and the poor. This division creates grievances that demand mitigation, if not redress. Moreover, the inequality among people disadvantages the marginalized and excluded people who experience discriminations and humiliations. They demand equal recognition and equal opportunity in the world and they require immediate solution to this social injustice.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, these factors are couched or filtered in religious frameworks that portray images of cosmic struggle between good and evil, between angel and Satan that organize, coordinate, and mobilize people to commit violent acts for the sake of retribution. Religion is arguably a powerful and pervasive force for it provides framework to our experiences in the world that gives meaning to our lives as it connects them with their deeply-held belief with the divine.<sup>12</sup> These secular and religious factors are fused or blended into their religious worldview that counters their marginal status and regain their national dignity.<sup>13</sup> This religious framework is not only cognitive, but also emotive forces that can mobilize people to effective action. We have to note that “religious language and symbolism are critical ways in which human beings interpret reality expressing the full range of emotions in religious terminology... Thus, even if the roots of the conflict are economic disenfranchisement, the revolt against the status quo may in fact express itself in religious terms.”<sup>14</sup> If religion provides framework in giving meaning to their experience, then it plays a vital role in their struggles. Their action depends on the way they interpret their experience as they frame it in their religious framework. They resort to violence as a way of clamoring for social change.<sup>15</sup> “The global pretension to encompass commonalities within the

<sup>10</sup> Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, New York: Harper San Francisco, 2002, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *The Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 10 and 218.

<sup>14</sup> Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Since the majority of Christians live in non-Western world, the western world should learn from and listen to their cultures and learn from their cultures. In the past, the non-western people were represented as the other known as orientalism and the westerners were their self-appointed ventriloquists. Now, they should consider them as co-equal partners and support their struggles

ideal conceptual scheme is always being subverted by local needs, the demands of this specific situation.”<sup>16</sup>

Globalization exposes people to different religions. This pluralistic society can be upsetting and threatening to people who cling to their own religion. For them, multiple religions sow chaos in society and pollute their authentic faith. They reject other religions because they conflict or compete with their own belief. “Conflict with the other, in our case the religious stranger, is a group-bonding element.”<sup>17</sup> They estrange or alienate each other and that action may create chasm and chaos between them. In this situation, it is tempting to demonize the other — the member of a different religion.<sup>18</sup> Religion becomes exclusivist in the sense that it asserts its monopoly of truth and superiority of status from others. The adherents think that they alone possess the truth and the others are “culpably blind and so deserve to be treated badly.”<sup>19</sup> This exclusion divides the people into ‘we’ and ‘they’ category which breeds antagonism. “We live in a dangerous world in which many people talk of a ‘we’ and a ‘they’ [instead of] talking more to address violence constructively with each other about us.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus, religion is uneasy with globalization. This uneasiness is based on the way religion is treated or taken in globalization. In our contemporary world, “globalization and the mass media have spawned secular and consumerist culture on the one hand, and stimulated an interest in the search for cultural and religious identity on the other.”<sup>21</sup> Globalization creates a consumerist culture that undermines religious heritage. “Globalization brings with it set of values — a religion — that conflicts with those held by adherents of the major traditional religions of the world.”<sup>22</sup> Consumerism offers an idol called the market that provides an illusion

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for liberation. They need to examine their identity and their theology if they support peace and not endorse violence. Harold A. Netland, “Introduction: Globalization and Theology Today,” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006, 14-15. However, there is also a problem among non-western people. They are preoccupied with their parochial and survival world that they fail to see their suffering of social injustice and the need to force connection for common struggle. The “challenge to interreligious solidarity in our postcolonial condition is how to enable the subalterns to mutually recognize one another and create a political solidarity narrative to galvanize support.” Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 80.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Barnes, SJ, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 236.

<sup>17</sup> Marty, *When Faiths Collide*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Marty, *When Faiths Collide*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: One World, 2001, 83.

<sup>20</sup> Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> David J. Hawkin, “Introduction,” in *The Twenty-first Century Confronts its Gods: Globalization, Technology and War*, David J. Hawkin, ed., Albany: State University of New York, 2004, 12.



of satisfaction or contentment of people. The idol is embodied in materialism and propagated by consumerism. This idol contradicts traditional religions that worship a true God. The pervasive consumerist culture has diluted the fidelity to religion as it turns to material goods and values. The western culture is clearly identified with the values of consumerism. In this consumer-driven world, “the market has come to function like religion.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Religious Peacebuilding**

We have to note that religion is only one among the multifaceted aspects of our lives and religion is part and parcel of human culture that connects us to the divine.<sup>24</sup> The problem with ‘the clash of civilization’ thesis is the assumption that religion is the all-embracing definition of human beings that ignores the other equally important dimensions of humanity. This definition reduces human being into one dimensional facet. We are not just defined by our religious affiliation and identification, but other aspects of our identity too, such as our ethnicity, nationality, language, sex, class, to name a few, come into play. Those characteristics make us multidimensional or multifaceted people. Moreover, “we are not defined by the communal and social practices of our religious community alone, because we simultaneously belong to and participate in many overlapping communities.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, we are not just multidimensional but also multi-affiliational people. These dimensions and affiliations are interwoven or interconnected in our identity. “Each of us has multiple identities, and they cannot be easily separated from one another or compartmentalized.”<sup>26</sup>

In interfaith dialogue, there is a looming fear that we will lose our religious commitments when we are open to other faiths. Insiders often see outsiders “as dangers because their presence and activities may cause believers of one sort or another to doubt the integrity of their own commitment.”<sup>27</sup> Such unfounded fear is based on a static understanding of self-identity with one-dimensional definition and affiliation. We can relate in various interactions and diverse dimensions because we are not just fastened into one aspect or facet. “If we understand the self as a web of relations constantly interacting with others, we will be more open to transformation

<sup>23</sup> Hawkin, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>24</sup> There have been debates on the relationship between culture and religion. There are those who equate or link culture and religion. However, there are those who separate culture from religion. Although culture and religion are different, it is safe to say that religion is part of culture but it goes beyond it because it has a transcendental reference to the divine which culture may not imply. There are references to these debates but they are not yet systematically analyzed as I see it.

<sup>25</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 78.

<sup>26</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Marty, *When Faiths Collide*, 103.

and change.”<sup>28</sup> People “who find it quite natural to honor and encourage other religious traditions have a sense of self that is inclusive of but not exhausted by their own religious affiliation.”<sup>29</sup> The capacity to see ourselves in multiple identities requires a degree of humility and openness. This requirement can be the basis in building a world of peace and not of conflict.<sup>30</sup> We do not only see religion in a clash but we have to look also as an accord to humanity. “This should remind us that unwillingness to meet people of other faiths often permits us to slander them ignorantly and to act on that slander with vile and inhumane action.”<sup>31</sup>

In order to address potential violence in religion, we need to critically scrutinize the presuppositions and pre-understanding of religion. This critical scrutiny leads us to acknowledge that interfaith dialogue is a two-way process. We need to understand religious presuppositions of other people on their motivation to commit violence in the name of religion and we also need to understand our own pre-understanding of own religion in our relationship with the other religions. Without challenging these presuppositions and accepting these pre-understanding, we are heading towards disaster. “Understanding the factors that can and do lead people of faith and goodwill — wittingly or unwittingly — into destructive and evil patterns of behavior must be a high priority on the world’s agenda.”<sup>32</sup> Scholars should heed this critical stance not just to other’s religion but also to one’s own religion. “Believing that one’s religion is the ultimate truth and infinitely superior to others can easily lead to intolerance, prejudice, and exclusivity.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, “by adopting critical and self-critical methods of interpretation, theologians [and religionists] ought to be prepared to challenge and transform their own pre-understanding and interpretative horizons.”<sup>34</sup> The attempt to universalize religions is counterproductive. The “harmony between religious communities will not be served by universal theology, which would claim to bypass differences and contradictions; rather it will be served by the development within the various traditions of theologies which, taking the mutual differences seriously, will assume them and resolve to interact in dialogue and cooperation.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, interfaith dialogue should learn from these differences. Theologically, “the notion that interactions of faith communities should lead to their

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<sup>28</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 60-61.

<sup>29</sup> Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 203.

<sup>31</sup> Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> Wirner G. Jeanrond, “Belonging or Identity: Christian Faith in Multi-Religious World,” in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, Catherine Cornille, ed., New York: Orbis Books, 2002, 110.

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, Phillip Berryman, trans., New York: Orbis Books, 2002, 235.

complete overcoming of differences and toward their merger into one violates the commitments of faith communities and the stories that animate them.”<sup>36</sup> If religion is to become a force of peacebuilding and not a cause of intolerance and conflict, new construction and relation with the religious other must be sought.<sup>37</sup>

The diversity of religions around the world has been a common knowledge, but the impact of these different religions in globalization has been intensified. They impact us in our particular places where we live. “While religious diversity can justly be celebrated as enormously interesting, it is also an unsettling phenomenon for people who are actually religious.”<sup>38</sup> We need to admit that “this new cultural, socio-political and religious context — cultural diversity, economic globalization, and religious pluralism — presents difficult challenges to the church and theology.”<sup>39</sup> Interfaith dialogues have been heavily bent on concentrating on the convergences or commonalities of religions and neglecting the divergences and dissimilarities among them. Without wishing to conceal the differences and contradictions among religious faiths, we must admit them where they exist and face them where they appear honestly and responsibly. To conceal these differences and contradictions would amount to cheating and would actually deprive dialogue of its authenticity.<sup>40</sup> “Faith will continue to collide, but those individuals and groups that risk hospitality and promote engagement with the stranger, the different, the other, will contribute to a world in which measured hopes can survive and those who hope can guide.”<sup>41</sup> These challenges demand recasting our old theological or religious baggage in order to rethink religion and theology anew in this global situation. People cannot remain fixed in their mind or unchanged by their relationship. Whether we like it or not, “we live in a world where religious diversity is increasingly affecting and changing everything around us and ourselves as well.”<sup>42</sup> We need to construct “new paradigms, new ways of understanding and living out our particularity in the midst of pluralism.”<sup>43</sup> If there is an alternative to a theology of other religion, it will emerge from a reflection on the other, not on religion.”<sup>44</sup>

In a dialogue, listening is an indispensable requirement. In this dialogue, God may be communicating to different peoples professing diverse faiths that we should

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<sup>36</sup> Marty, *When Faiths Collide*, 149.

<sup>37</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Francis X. Clooney, SJ, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, xix.

<sup>40</sup> Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 229.

<sup>41</sup> Marty, *When Faiths Collide*, 178.

<sup>42</sup> Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 189.

<sup>44</sup> Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 15.

learn from each other and listen to one another. Listening is difficult if we are self-enclosed in our narrow mindset and self-absorbed in our truth-claim. In listening, we open up ourselves and reach out to the other. In listening to the other, we can neither stick to ourselves nor relocate to the other; we are transformed in the process of dialogical encounter. This dialogue is a process where we learn from the other without depriving ourselves but enriching ourselves in this profound encounter. If we refuse to listen and reject the other, then we generate an ill-will in our sullen exclusivity and destroy one another in the process.<sup>45</sup> We need to listen to one another so that we can learn from each other. Our global world urges upon us a necessary interreligious learning. “Diversity becomes primary context for a tradition’s inquiry and self-understanding. Particular traditions in their concreteness become the place where the religious meaning of diversity is disclosed.”<sup>46</sup> Diversity should not cause fear and threat but rather curiosity and enrichment. “The diversity we experience — in relation to those nearby as well as those who are far away — need not be seen as a threat; it can become part of the rich texture of life on the journey.”<sup>47</sup> The presence of the outsiders helps the insiders to reappraise and enhance their own commitment to their faith.

In this diversity or plurality of religions around the world, we become all learners and listeners along our journey. We have some religious stories to share with others in our journey. In fact, “what prevents religions from blithely merging, what leads people to resist being blended into an undifferentiated whole, is their attachment to story.”<sup>48</sup> Each story is unique but, in a way, we can weave them. “The religions do not have to be incommensurable in all their features. They may share certain themes in common.”<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, these stories cannot be trimmed and flattened into a unified story. There remains an excess and surplus that cannot fit within that unity. The multifarious stories attest to the diversity of faith experiences of people professing different religions. This diversity relativizes all stories that people narrate. “The claim to metanarrative found in religions of the world are relativized in our pluralistic world.”<sup>50</sup> To understand each story being told, we must learn to be multilingual. We can fully appreciate each story told if we know their idioms. We must learn to be theologically and religiously multilingual. “We shall always remain more at home with our own religion, as with our mother tongue, but it is not impossible to learn another’s, if one has the humility to discern the limitation of one’s

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<sup>45</sup> Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 75.

<sup>46</sup> Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Kimball, *When Religions Become Evil*, 194.

<sup>48</sup> Marty, *When Faiths Collide*, 156.

<sup>49</sup> Marty, *When Faiths Collide*, 155.

<sup>50</sup> Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 16.

understanding.”<sup>51</sup> In the context of otherness, other religions and other faiths make legitimate demands to cross the boundaries — whether they like it or not — instead of erecting boundaries between them.<sup>52</sup> “Critical and honest engagement in dialogue often means that we will not be the same after the encounter, after we have learned and gained helpful insights from others.”<sup>53</sup>

Listening does not mean taking the story as such; listening requires questioning too. However, this listening and questioning are mutually respectful and constructive. There are difficult stories that we hear and we want to inquire about them. We need to question those stories that demand further clarifications. We need to creatively engage with those stories in order for the respective religions to flourish so that we will not build intolerance or suspicion. When we hear difficult stories, we need not prejudge them, but reflect on them carefully. We need not end the dialogue with those difficult stories, but we engage with those stories at various levels in our religious traditions.<sup>54</sup> We need to be humble in admitting our finitude. “What is required is for a proper sense of Christian faith and practice in a pluralist world is a theology which allows such a passivity, the experience of limitation imposed by otherness of all kinds, to speak of the other — of God — within the context of a critical commitment to the good of all God’s people.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, “contact with a much more complicated world than before permits many people to question their social reality, including religious authority and institutions.”<sup>56</sup> “Interfaith dialogue can contribute to the promotion of goodwill and mutual recognition of various religious and civic groups in public life.”<sup>57</sup> This dialogue as a “negotiation of the middle,” as Michael Barnes calls it, is “a mutual process of learning, of critical questioning and respectful listening, which imagines the possibility of harmonious difference.”<sup>58</sup> If we engage into dialogue, we belong to the middle because we interweave different stories. “The context of dialogue allows one to ask searching questions about them, so long as [we] are willing to permit queries about [our] own faith’s seeming oddities.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, this dialogue “with this diversity of religions around the world, no religion can proclaim superiority and inferiority of the other.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 70.

<sup>52</sup> Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender and Peacebuilding*, 86.

<sup>58</sup> Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 231-232.

<sup>59</sup> Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 82.

<sup>60</sup> Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 22.

## Conclusion

Interreligious dialogue for peace is both a theological and ethical issue.<sup>61</sup> The conflict leading to violence in different parts of the world makes us rethink our position and perspective. As we have seen, there is a tension between religion and globalization and this tension is visible and concrete. We are not satisfied with the present situation and we need to transform the world for the sake of the future generation. Conflict and violence are destructive to humanity and they should end; dialogue and peace foster harmony and they should reign. In this situation, the challenge is not only to construct sound theology but also to propose pragmatic ethics. Life is at stake and should be preserved. Learning from this turmoil, a new vision is emerging where the church is committed to dialogue and building of peace in many communities. Thus, the question in our theological ethics of interreligious dialogue for peace is: “how to negotiate differences.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, theological discourse should play a significant part in the process of building a peace and fostering harmony in a multi-religious society. “In principle faith is always interfaith formed and practiced in relationship with others.”<sup>63</sup>

Peace studies focus on negotiations with common interests, not positions for having peace in the future. “This process of weaving the future and successfully negotiating with the modern world is a challenge for all religions.”<sup>64</sup> In order to attain peace, it is important to understand the underlying motives and reasons for the prevailing conflict and violence in various parts of the world. Conflict resolution theory regarding religious actors must examine their complex ways of making decisions about conflict and peace.”<sup>65</sup> The task then is “to understand the dynamic of each religion and to see what drives it, so that we may understand why religions do sometimes clash with each other.”<sup>66</sup> Religions should enter and engage into social critique of society that relates faith and politics. As history attests, religion has a dual legacy to humanity as messenger of peace and preacher of violence. “Thus both its contribution to peace and violence need to be studied. This can be a basis of theologies of peacemaking and conflict prevention and resolution.”<sup>67</sup> Authentic and sincere dialogue is about relationship where the “them” and “us” eventually become “we” in the process. We are asking together: what does God want us to do in this turmoil?<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Mortensen, “Theology Meets the Religions,” xii.

<sup>63</sup> Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Hawkin, “Introduction,” 17.

<sup>65</sup> Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 199.

<sup>66</sup> Hawkin, “Introduction,” 18.

<sup>67</sup> Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 199.

<sup>68</sup> Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 87.

I would like to end this paper by quoting Charles Kimball on his answer to a question from the audience with regards to the evils plaguing our society:

When I am asked about my views on these matters, I sometimes respond like my former professor: What I think is not what is important for you. What do you think? And more importantly, what do you feel you should do as responsible Christian (or Muslim or Jew) in your religiously diverse neighborhood and interdependent world community?<sup>69</sup>

Kimball singles out both thinking and feeling in relation to these violent events around the world because they implicate the cognitive and emotive aspects of our lives. As we have stated, religion involves both thinking and feeling in our relation to the divine and this relation is expressed in our interaction with other religions. Moreover, interreligious dialogue also requires both theological and ethical responses to this relationship because we need to address the theological horizon that frames this violence and the ethical horizon that motivates action. Thus, I will also echo the same: How about you? What do you feel about your relationship with other religions and what shall you do when violence erupts in that relationship? I leave that question open to all of us so that we seriously and carefully reflect on it.**PS**

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<sup>69</sup> Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 208.

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