UNDERSTANDING INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

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CHAPTER 10

Interreligious Majority–Minority Dynamics

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Before the Second Gulf War a conversational, if not actually dialogical, encounter between a white American Southern Baptist from Texas and a Muslim from Iraq would have been quite unlikely, even unimaginable. Today, thanks to globalization and migration, it is a routine occurrence in the USA, as well as elsewhere. Despite its frequency, however, such encounter between Christians and Muslims is fraught with tensions and illustrates well the complex and highly charged dynamics of relations between members of a racial, political, cultural, and religious majority and those of the minority. To understand the multifaceted challenges, there is perhaps no more productive site than the meeting of white American conservative Christians and Middle Eastern Muslims. The attitude of these two groups towards each other is generally marked by suspicion and intolerance, and their political outlook vastly complicates their religious relations. American Southern Baptists by and large are opposed to interreligious dialogue and tend to condemn Islam as a violent religion and the Prophet Muhammad as a purveyor of false doctrines and immorality. The Revd Franklin Graham, son of the famed evangelist Billy Graham and president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, has called Islam 'a very evil and wicked religion'. The Revd Jerry Vines, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, once referred to Muhammad as a 'demon-possessed paedophile'. On the other hand, Middle Eastern Muslims tend to accuse America of being rabidly pro-Israel and of leading a crusade against Islam. Some groups of them are engaged in mass violence against Americans, whom they regard as 'infidels'.[1]

This chapter will begin with a global snapshot of the current situation of religious diversity and the complexity of majority–minority interreligious encounters across the world

generally, and in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia in particular. It will then engage in an in-depth discussion of Muslim–Christian relations in the United States as a paradigmatic case to explore the dynamics of an interreligious dialogue between the religion of the majority and that of a minority. What these countries have in common is the fact that they are multicultural, multi-ethnic, and religiously diverse societies with significant minority religious communities in the midst of a dominant religious majority, for instance Islam in Pakistan and Malaysia, Hinduism in India, Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and Christianity in the United States. We proceed on the basis that a persuasive case can be made that, in the current religious climate, relations between Christianity and Islam are the most strained and bear the most grievous consequences, not just in the United States, but also around the world. Indeed, Islam has been on the upsurge, especially in Asia and Africa, making it one of the fastest growing religions in the world. Unfortunately, this has often resulted in growing antagonism and hardening of attitudes towards Christian minorities living in the midst of Muslim majorities in many parts of Asia and Africa, especially in the post-September-11 world. Northern Nigeria has witnessed sectarian violence between the Muslim majority and Christian minority populations, resulting in the loss of lives and property destruction.[2] In Lebanon, relations between the dominant Shia majority and the Maronite Catholic minority remain fraught with tension.[3]

The term 'minority' is controversial for its possible pejorative connotations. It is popularly used in the demographic sense to refer to groups of persons of small size in comparison with the total population in terms of, for instance, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, economics, culture, religion, etc. However, it almost always connotes power relations between the minority groups and the majority/dominant group, with the latter, which at times may be numerically small, controlling and occupying positions of power and consequently able to establish economic, political, and legal structures of discrimination against minority groups. Syria is a recent case in point. It comes as no surprise therefore that the discourse on minority groups is inseparably linked with that of rights and policies ensuring these rights, such as affirmative action. Hence, instead of the term 'minority', which may have a pejorative connotation, especially when used by the dominant group, the expression 'historically excluded groups' is at times preferred.

We will also examine, from the Roman Catholic perspective, how interreligious dialogue between the dominant and minority religious groups, and among the religious minority groups themselves, can profitably be done. Compared with ecumenical dialogue, interreligious or interfaith dialogue engaged in by Christians is of more recent origin. In the Roman Catholic Church such dialogue, which requires a respectful and positive attitude towards

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[1] See Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[2] See Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1998) and Rosalind I. J. Hackett, 'Nigeria's Religious Leaders in an Age of Radicalism and Neoliberalism', in Timothy D. Sisk (ed.), *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict, and Peacemaking* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 123–44.

[3] George Emile Irani, 'Between Intolerance and Coexistence: The Vatican, Maronites and the War in Lebanon', in Sisk, *Between Terror and Tolerance*, 49–68.

other religions, was given an official stamp of approval by the Second Vatican Council (1962–5), and in the last fifty years significant efforts have been made at the institutional and grassroots levels to promote religious harmony. However, the problems, theological as well as practical, that are raised by interreligious dialogue, are many and difficult, especially in light of current political and military conflicts.[4]

A GLOBAL SNAPSHOT OF MAJORITY–MINORITY INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

Though our focus is on Muslim–Christian relations within the broader discussion of majority–minority religious encounters, it is highly likely that very similar dynamics are operative in majority–minority encounters involving other religions throughout the world. Indeed, no religion has been innocent of hatred and war, both within itself and against other religious communities, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and even religions that uphold non-violence as moral ideals, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, especially when these two are the religions of ethnic majorities embroiled in sectarian conflicts with ethnic minorities, as is the case in India and Sri Lanka.

Sectarian violence against religious minority groups has hit the headlines in the past three decades in many parts of the world—Muslims against Ahmadiyya and Christians in Pakistan, Hindus against Muslims and Christians in India, and Buddhists against Hindus in Sri Lanka. Interreligious conflicts are often linked inextricably to broader socio-economic and political issues. On the one hand, at the grassroots level one often finds harmonious interreligious relations as majority and minority religious groups get along in daily living without any problems: Hindus and Christians making pilgrimages to each other's religious shrines and participating in local communal festivals across religious boundaries, for example.[5] On the other hand, since the 1970s there has been a rise in inter-communal tensions and violence as religion becomes politicized in response to broader economic problems and its consequential political crises and social dislocations.

To worsen matters, in many parts of the world the popular association of Christianity with colonial imperialism often taints interreligious encounters. For many Asian and African nations that have gained independence from their colonial masters since the mid twentieth century, independence and postcolonial consciousness have led to a recovery of national pride and, with it, a massive revival of traditional religions. And Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are now not only asserting themselves on the national and international stage, in some quarters they are also putting pressure on religious minorities within their midst to abandon Christianity as a colonial relic and foreign import in favour of the local religion of the majority.[6] In addition, increased mobility in today's world has generated large-scale movement of peoples, increasing diversity and plurality, and intensifying tensions between the dominant community in the host countries and newcomer minorities. More problematic is the use of terror and violence by a dominant majority community against a vulnerable minority community to conform to the majority's definition of identity and social belonging. The World Council of Churches was very direct in its 2004 assertion:

> In some parts of the world, religion is increasingly identified with ethnicity, giving religious overtones to ethnic conflict. In other situations, religious identity becomes so closely related to power that the communities without power, or who are discriminated against, look to their religion as the force of mobilization of their dissent and protest. These conflicts tend to appear as, or are represented to be, conflict between religious communities, polarizing them along communal lines. Religious communities often inherit deep divisions, hatreds and enmities that are, in most cases, passed down through generations of conflict. When communities identify themselves or are identified exclusively by their religion, the situation becomes explosive, even able to tear apart communities that have lived in peace for centuries. It is the task of interreligious relations and dialogue to help prevent religion from becoming the fault line between communities.[7]

With the blurring of boundaries between the majority's legitimate quest for a distinctive socio-cultural and religious identity construction and its hostility towards minorities for being different, the unfortunate result is often communal tensions and religious strife, as can be seen in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere. Moreover, too often religious identities become intertwined in ethnic conflicts, thereby giving religious overtones to ethnic conflicts, as is the case in Sri Lanka.

Pakistan

From the time of the military dictatorship of the late General Zia Ul Haq to the present day, Pakistan has witnessed an increase in attacks against the Christian minority as alien outsiders, especially through the misuse of controversial blasphemy laws to intimidate and harass Christians.[8] It was against this backdrop that the Roman Catholic Bishop of Faisalabad, John Joseph, shot himself in the head on 6 May 1998 in protest against the execution of a Christian on spurious blasphemy charges.[9] But Bishop Joseph's death

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[4] Cf. Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 2010) and Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

[5] See Karen Pechilis and Selva J. Raj (eds), *South Asian Religions: Tradition and Today* (New York: Routledge, 2013) and Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey (eds), *Popular Christianity in India: Riting Between the Lines* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2002).

[6] Cf. Jonathan Y. Tan, 'Rethinking the Relationship between Christianity and World Religions, and Exploring its Implications for Doing Christian Mission in Asia', *Missiology*, 39/4 (2011), 498–508.

[7] *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions* (Geneva: WCC, 2004).

[8] Cf. Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, 3rd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[9] Linda Walbridge, *Christians of Pakistan: The Passion of Bishop John Joseph* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

brought no relief to the beleaguered and vulnerable Pakistani Christian minority. The ongoing harassment of Pakistani Christians culminated in the killings of six Christians in Gojra on 1 August 2009 for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an. Christian activists have continued to press for the repeal of blasphemy laws that make it very easy for anyone to single out Christians for harassment.

India

India is an example of a country where religion is caught up in a treacherous mix of caste, race, ethnicity, politics, class, and economics. Since the 1980s, India has witnessed the rise of the militant Hindutva religious movement and its political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which reject the constitutionally mandated tolerance of Indian Muslims and Indian Christians, on the grounds that these minority religious traditions are foreign and alien to the majority Hindu culture of India.[10] Much of the sectarian interreligious violence by the Hindu majority against the Muslim and Christian minorities has been fomented by Hindu radical groups such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Sang Parivar, and Bajrang Dal, which have been accused of coercing Indian Christians and Indian Muslims to abandon their faith and embrace Hinduism, or be killed.[11] Interreligious relations between Hindus and Muslims plunged to their lowest point with the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by Hindutva fundamentalists on 6 December 1992. The ensuing violent clashes between Muslims and Hindus in major Indian cities resulted in more than 2,000 dead and many thousands more injured.[12] Hindu–Christian relations are especially tense and confrontational. The observations of the Indian theologian T. K. John in 1987 are prescient and still hold true in contemporary India:

> [Hindu] critics see Christianity as an alien and complex power structure that threatens to eventually undermine India's culture, national integrity and its religions. They feel that a religion that is disappearing from its former stronghold is being dumped, like so many unwanted drugs, on the Third World where it has to be nourished, supported and propagated by foreign money, control and power, instead of drawing its strength from the soil. They conclude that even current efforts at inculturation (which meet with so much inside opposition) are subterfuge measures to win over hesitant or unwilling recruits to the Christian fold. They accuse the Christian missionaries of taking undue advantage of the poverty, the illiteracy and ignorance of the vast majority of the people, and for the proof of this they point to

[10] See Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2003) and Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Susan Bayley, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[11] Ram Puniyani (ed.), *Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2005).
[12] Sarvepalli Gopal, *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Rise of Communal Politics in India* (London: Zed Books, 1993); Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Hinduism and Secularism: After Ayodhya* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

the fact that they have altogether withdrawn their 'forces' from the more difficult areas like the caste Hindus, the educated and the economically well-off.[13]

Since the 1990s, many Hindutva nationalists have increasingly taken issue with Christian missionary outreach among the Dalits, especially in Gujarat and Orissa, beginning with the cold-blooded murder of the Australian Evangelical missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons Philip and Timothy in 1999 and culminating in the violence and mayhem against Dalit Christians in Orissa by Hindutva agitators in the aftermath of the assassination of the Hindu fundamentalist Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati by Maoist insurgents on 24 August 2008. In the face of vitriol, hate, and exclusivism promoted by right-wing Hindutva militant groups, we may ask whether the quest for interreligious relations between majority and minority groups in this case rather smacks of naivety.

The Statement of the Executive Body of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) in response to the Orissa violence against Indian Christians is unequivocal in asserting that tit-for-tat responses will only worsen things. One cannot fight religious exclusivism with more religious exclusivism. Rather, one disarms religious exclusivism with an inclusive Christian love. As the Indian bishops explained, 'no matter how great the threat that may confront us, we cannot renounce the heritage of love and justice that Jesus left us' because 'when Jesus went about healing the sick, associating with outcasts and assisting the poor, those works were not allurements but the concrete realization of God's plan for humankind: to build a society founded on love, justice and social harmony'.[14]

In a similar vein, the Catholic Archbishop of Delhi, Vincent Concessao points out that inflammatory missionary tracts which disparage and denigrate Hinduism are counter-productive because 'they give fanatics a battering ram to crush Indian Christianity at large'.[15] Commenting on the increasing tension between Hindus and Christians, the Indian theologian Sebastian Madathummuriyil puts forward the case for the Indian Catholic Church to re-examine the Church's imperialistic objectives of mission that reflect exclusivist and totalitarian tendencies', as well as to rediscover its identity, 'paying heed to the challenges posed by religious, cultural, ideological, and linguistic pluralism'.[16] In particular, Madathummuriyil thinks that, as a minority community in India, the Indian Catholic Church is well positioned to be a prophetic voice for peace and harmony among Hindus, Muslims, and Christians in India against the backdrop of the Hindutva ideology of homogeneity of religion, culture, and language:

[13] T. K. John, 'The Pope's "Pastoral Visit" to India: A Further Reflection', *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 51 (1987), 59.
[14] Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, 'Violence Against Christians: Statement of the Executive Body of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India', *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 72 (2008), 816.
[15] Cited in Francis Gonsalves, 'Carrying in Our Bodies the Marks of His Passion', *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 72 (2008), 806.
[16] Cited in Gerald M. Boodoo, 'Catholicity and Mission', *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 65 (2010), 118.

To be a prophetic Church in the Indian context, then, would imply, on the one hand, forfeiting traditional strategies of mission and, on the other hand, enhancing measures for regaining trust and confidence of both Hindus and Muslims through dialogue in an age of widespread anti-Christian sentiments.[17]

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka continues to be a nation that is splintered along racial-ethnic and religious fault lines: Sinhalese vs Tamil; Buddhist vs Hindu; and Buddhist vs Christian. The horrors of the long-running internecine strife between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil communities have resulted in extremely poisoned relations between these two ethnic communities. It does not help that most Sinhalese are Buddhists while the Tamils are mainly Hindus or Christians, and Sinhalese nationalists have often wrapped their inflammatory political rhetoric in the garments of Buddhist religious pride.[18] Outright civil war between the Tamils and Sinhalese erupted over 'Black July' with anti-Tamil ethnic cleansing riots by the Sinhalese majority that began on 23 July 1983. From 1983 until the military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, hundreds of thousands died and many more Tamils fled Sri Lanka as refugees. Moreover, the use of Buddhist religious rhetoric to legitimize the civil war against the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka by nationalist political parties such as the Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Sinhala Heritage) Party has poisoned peaceful interreligious relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.[19] Significantly, the Jathika Hela Urumaya was led by Sinhalese Buddhist monks who entered politics in 2004 on a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist platform promoting violence and war to drive the Tamil minority out of Sri Lanka.[20]

On the one hand, there have been attempts by the Sinhalese Buddhist majority to initiate interreligious engagements to bring about peace, reconciliation, and healing across racial, ethnic and religious boundaries. For example, the Sinhalese Buddhist activist, A. T. Ariyaratne, who founded the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, a social movement with a successful village-renewal programme that seeks to improve the lives of villagers amidst poverty and civil war, has responded to the sectarian tensions in Sri Lanka by sponsoring peace walks and peace conferences that have promoted reconciliation between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority on the basis of shared values that are common to Buddhism, Hinduism,

and Christianity.[21] On the other hand, similar initiatives by the Christian minority have been viewed as 'a sinister plan for pan-Christian domination'.[22]

Malaysia

Contemporary Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious, and multi cultural society comprising Malays (50.4 per cent), Chinese (23.7 per cent), aboriginals/indigenous (11 per cent), and Indian (7.1 per cent). About 60 per cent of the population of Malaysia is Muslim. Christians are exclusively non-Malays and comprise around 9.0 per cent of the population, followed by Hindus (c.6.5 per cent), and followers of Chinese religions (c.2.5 per cent). At the same time, Malaysia is also a socially and politically volatile society divided by an explosive mix of ethnicity and religion. Although Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and the majority of Malaysians are Muslims, freedom of religion in Malaysia is guaranteed under article 11(1) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution.[23] However, the Malaysian Federal Constitution also empowers the federal and state governments to pass laws against the propagation of non-Muslim religions among the Muslims.[24] The simmering discontent between Malays and Chinese, the two dominant ethnic groups in Malaysia, came to an explosive clash in the series of violent racial riots, stoked by extremist Malay nationalists against the Chinese community, beginning on 13 May 1969.

In the aftermath of these riots, the Malaysian government embarked on a policy of national reconciliation to rebuild a shattered society. In an ironic twist, the cornerstone of the Malaysian government's policy of national reconciliation is the New Economic Policy (NEP) which institutionalized communalism, Malay dominance in nation-building, and Malay sovereignty over the other minority communities in all matters—political, social, and economic. In reality, the NEP resulted in widespread economic inefficiency, corruption scandals, cronyism, and nepotism as a small Malay elite controlled the political and economic levers of powers to the exclusion of ordinary Malays and other races. As the tangible economic benefits of the NEP failed to trickle down to the ordinary Malays in rural communities, the Islamic Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) emerged to champion Islamization as the alternative to the cronyism and corruption of the NEP. In response to the popularity of PAS's Islamization platform, the ruling political elite adopted a similar policy of Islamization to blunt PAS's tactics.

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[17] Boodoo, 'Catholicity and Mission', 118.

[18] See Darini Rajasingham Senanayake, *Buddhism and the Legitimation of Power: Democracy, Public Religion and Minorities in Sri Lanka* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Institute of South Asian Studies, 2009); Mahinda Deegalle (ed.), *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka* (New York: Routledge, 2006), and Patrick Grant, *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2009).

[19] See Stanley J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Susan Hayward, 'The Spoiler and the Reconciler: Buddhism and the Peace Process in Sri Lanka', in Sisk, *Between Terror and Tolerance*, 183–200.

[20] Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma: Just-War Ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

[21] See A. T. Ariyaratne, 'Sarvodaya Shramadana's Approach to Peacebuilding', in David W. Chappell (ed.), *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 1999), 69–80.

[22] Jeyaraj Rasiah, 'Sri Lanka', in Peter C. Phan (ed.), *Christianities in Asia* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 57.

[23] Article 11(1) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution states, 'Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it'.

[24] Article 11(4) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution legalizes all federal and state legislation prohibiting the propagation of non-Muslim religions among Muslims in Malaysia: 'State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.'

To say that the Malaysian government's heavy-handed programme of Islamization has resulted in increased religious tensions between the majority Muslim and other religious minority communities in Malaysia is an understatement. As a religious minority, Malaysian Christians have found themselves in the direct firing line of legislation and programmes aimed at giving Islam a privileged position over the other religious faiths in Malaysia. For example, federal legislation was passed in 1981 to ban possession of Indonesian translations of the Bible. In response to vociferous protests by Malaysian Christians, a concession was made in 1982 to allow them to use the Indonesian translation for personal devotion and public worship. However, current law prohibits the dissemination and circulation of any Indonesian or Malay translation of the Bible among Muslims in Malaysia. In 1991, legislation was passed by the Malaysian Parliament to prohibit the use in non-Islamic literature of, among other things, the term 'Allah' for God. Malaysian Christians objected to this prohibition of the use of 'Allah' for God, because it impinged on their rights to use these terms in Malay-language translations of the Bible as well as in liturgies and prayer meetings.[25]

Non-Muslims in Malaysia are also rankled by legislation that criminalizes apostasy (*takfir*) by Muslims, as well as the actions of non-Muslims who proselytize their faith to Muslims. These laws against apostasy drew international headlines and condemnation in the case of Lina Joy, who brought a suit before the Malaysian Federal Court to compel the Malaysian National Registration Department to record her change of religion from Islam to Christianity on her identity card after her baptism as a Roman Catholic.[26] On 30 May 2007, her appeal was dismissed by a 2-1 majority, and she and her Christian fiancé were forced to leave Malaysia under threats of violence from Malaysian Muslim activists. More importantly, the Malaysian Federal Court ruling further inflamed interreligious tensions, as non-Muslim minorities perceive this to be yet another nail in the coffin of religious freedom in Malaysia.[27]

In response to pressure from the Malay Muslim majority, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) was established in 1986 as an umbrella organization for Malaysian Christians that includes the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) representing the mainline Protestant Churches, the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) representing the Evangelical, Brethren, and Pentecostal churches, as well as the Malaysian Catholic Church as equal partners. The CFM comprises about 5,000 member churches and encompasses around 90 per cent of the total Christian population of Malaysia. The CFM is also an active member of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism (MCCBCHS), which was formed in 1983 with the following objectives: (1) to promote understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation among the different religions in Malaysia; (2) to study and resolve problems affecting all interreligious relationships; and (3) to make

representations regarding religious matters when necessary.[28] The MCCBCHS has become an organized channel for dialogue between the non-Muslims and the Malaysian government on issues of religious freedom and the impact of encroaching Islamization on the rights of the non-Muslim religious minorities to practise their faith without interference or fear.

AMERICA: 'THE WORLD'S MOST RELIGIOUSLY DIVERSE NATION'?

Whereas there is little contention as to what the United States is geographically, there is a lively debate about the current religious situation of this country, what constitutes a minority,[29] and what interreligious dialogue is and how it should be carried out, especially between religious majority and minority groups, and among the religious minority groups themselves. The United States is irretrievably religiously plural, as hinted at in a recent book by Diana Eck.[30] Its basic thesis is nicely captured on its front cover by an unfurled American flag, with the fifty stars in the upper left-hand corner replaced by the symbols of various religions. Eck's volume, which came out of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, introduces readers to a 'New America', characterized by not only religious diversity (a sociological datum) but also religious pluralism (a religious and theological challenge to the claim of uniqueness, superiority, and universal necessity for a particular religion). The New America is not only 'Protestant, Catholic, Jew', to invoke another landmark book, published in 1955, by the sociologist Will Herberg,[31] but also Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and a lot of other, no less important, religious traditions, such as Jain, Sikh, Baha'i, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Daoist, Native American, Mormon, Seventh-Day Adventist; and the list would be quite lengthy if new religious movements such as New Age and Wiccan are added. The issue then is not *whether* the American religious situation is diverse and pluralistic—it incontrovertibly is—but rather *how* America is to deal with this new phenomenon in all sectors of life, especially religion. It is here that fierce controversies, particularly theological, are raging.

Religious Diversity and Pluralism

Eck is deeply aware that not only are these religions transformed in and by America but also the face of the New America is shaped by this new religious diversity. As she tersely puts it:

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[25]　See Albert Sundararaj Walters, *We Believe in One God? Reflections on the Trinity in the Malaysian Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002).

[26]　Jane Perlez, 'Once Muslim, Now Christian and Caught in the Courts', *New York Times*, 24 Aug. 2006: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/24/world/asia/24malaysia.html> (accessed Aug. 2012).

[27]　See Albert Walters, 'Issues in Christian–Muslim Relations: A Malaysian Christian Perspective', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 18/1 (2007), 67–83.

[28]　Paul Tan Chee Ing and Teresa Ee, *Contemporary Issues on Malaysian Religions* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1984), 13.

[29]　Cf. Michael Mazur, *The Americanization of Religious Minorities: Confronting the Constitutional Order* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[30]　Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a 'Christian Country' has become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002).

[31]　Will Herberg, *Protestant–Catholic–Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

'Not only is America changing these religions, but these religions are also changing America'.[32] Eck's sociological and theological accounts of America's religious diversity do not of course go unchallenged, especially by the more conservative Christians who steadfastly hold that America has been and will remain a Christian nation. But that religious diversity has been growing exponentially in America, and steadily since 1965, seems beyond doubt. Recently, the Princeton University sociologist Robert Wuthnow confirmed this new religious phenomenon.[33] New immigrants to the United States include large numbers of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of other religions, and they do not for the most part live in religiously homogeneous enclaves of their own, separated from the rest of the American population, but in the same neighbourhoods as other Americans. Thus, believers of different faiths regularly rub shoulders with one another in daily life.

In her 2006 Presidential Address to the American Academy of Religion, Eck explored the impact of religious pluralism on the academy, civic life, and theology.[34] Wuthnow takes Eck's threefold concern further and asks whether Americans are taking advantage of the opportunities that diversity provides and moving towards a more mature pluralism than they have experienced in the past. Both Eck and Wuthnow rightly point out that with the twin constitutional principles of non-establishment and religious freedom, America possesses a solid legal foundation for religious diversity. But whether Americans privilege *pluribus* over *unum*, in their national motto *ex pluribus unum*, and how they understand national unity implied by *unum*, are moot points. However these debates are solved, it is clear that, as Wuthnow has shrewdly noted, 'in our public discourse about religion we [Americans] seem to be a society of schizophrenics'.[35] On the one hand, a large majority of Americans believe that America is a special nation with a divine destiny, a shining city on the hill, a beacon for the world. Furthermore, a large majority of American Christians are convinced that Christianity is the only true, or at least unique, religion; and that America is a nation built on Christian principles. The President is expected to conclude every national address with the phrase 'God bless America'—and 'God' is implicitly taken to refer to the Christian God—otherwise he would be suspected of being a non-Christian at heart (maybe a Muslim or a Mormon)! On the other hand, a majority of American Christians are also convinced that tolerance is a civic and religious virtue conducive to democracy and harmonious living and that religious diversity is to be respected if not promoted. Nevertheless, when American Christians occupy the dominant position and enjoy the controlling power, especially in politics and economics, that they currently do, this religious tolerance remains merely what it is, namely tolerance, and the line between it and intolerance is dangerously thin. Let the others be 'other', the dominant

religious group might say, as long as they don't bother us, and above all, do not harm our interests.

Religious Diversity and Power Relations

To the extent that American Christians claim and in fact do exercise dominance in the various arenas of national life, especially religious, this dominance has not gone uncontested and resisted by different non-Christian groups and even by Christians themselves. At the very least, white Americans are now being challenged by the ever-growing presence of non-European immigrants, both documented and non-documented, particularly Hispanic, to imagine an America in which in the near future the so-called ethnic minorities will become the demographic majority.[36] In addition, American Christians are challenged by the non-Christian believers in their midst to rethink their belief in the superiority and universal necessity of Christianity, to reconfigure their modes of interacting with non-Christian believers on the level of both individual and community, to negotiate religiously mixed marriages, and to seek forms of collaboration for the social, political, and religious common good. Clearly, the very identity and the future of both America and American Christianity are at stake, and the way forward to a 'New America' seems to be much more than tolerance and coexistence. In short, nothing less than interreligious dialogue is required.

New Religious Minorities: Challenges and Opportunities

To assure the success of interreligious dialogue in the USA, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that, in spite of the widespread talk about religious diversity in America, the nation is predominantly Christian and will remain so for the foreseeable future. According to the 2008 US Religious Landscape Survey of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 76 per cent of the American adult population self-identifies as Christian, whereas the total of non-Christians makes up 4.9 per cent (Jews 1.7 per cent, Muslims 0.6 per cent, Buddhists 0.7 per cent, Hindus 0.4 per cent, other world religions 0.3 per cent, and other native faiths 1.2 per cent).[37] Clearly, non-Christians in America represent a demographic and religious minority. In terms of economic and political power, though there are anecdotal reports of notable successes, especially among Asians, non-Christians remain an insignificant minority. Even so, non-Christian minority groups, as mentioned above, present enormous challenges to America and American Christianity.

The emergence of religious diversity in the USA may be attributed almost exclusively to post-1965 immigration. There is little doubt that globally, migration, either forced or

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[32] Eck, *New Religious America*, 25.
[33] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[34] Diana Eck, 'Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 75/4 (2007), 743–76.
[35] Wuthnow, *America*, 6.

[36] It was reported by the *Washington Post*, 17 May 2012, that for the first time in history, most of the babies in the USA are members of the minority groups, signalling the dawn of an era in which whites no longer will be in the majority.
[37] See Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life at <http://religions.pewforum.org>.

voluntary, of non-Christians to predominantly Christian countries, has increased exponentially since the Second World War, due often to new instances of violence and war; poverty and natural disasters; political and religious persecution; and globalization. In the USA, the emergence of religious minorities, except Judaism, is the unintended effect of the changes in immigration laws in the 1960s. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, abolishes the system of national-origin quotas and has dramatically increased the number of non-European immigrants, especially from South America, Asia, and Africa. Whereas immigrants from Latin America are predominantly Christian, those from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa bring with them their non-Christian religions, especially Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Migrants, especially transnational immigrants and refugees, by necessity live in a strange land, forced to adjust to unfamiliar and often oppressive circumstances amidst painful experiences of displacement and disorientation. While a great deal of scholarly attention has been given to linguistic, economic, social, political, and cultural challenges facing migrants, relatively little study has been made of their religious situation, especially in the case of non-Christian migrants living in traditionally Christian countries.[38]

The Religious Predicament of Non-Christian Migrants

To facilitate a fruitful dialogue between non-Christian minorities with the Christian majority in the USA and among these religious minorities themselves, it is of utmost importance to recall the special condition of these non-Christians, most of whom are migrants, others American-born but disenfranchised, especially with regard to religion.[39] This religious condition of immigrants may be described as precarious, marginalized, threatened, and endangered. First of all, the religious faith of non-Christian migrants, especially those facing economic poverty, ethnic and racial discrimination, social isolation, and political oppression, is constantly under severe pressure. For their faith to be sustained and developed, worship houses (synagogue, mosque, temple, pagoda, gurdawara, etc.), community fellowship, and, where appropriate, clerical leadership and institutional structures are all absolutely necessary. But unfortunately, whether because of limited financial means or isolation from a supportive close-knit community, these things may not be available to non-Christian migrants. Their faith will remain important, but its practice and expression may well be imperilled for want of necessary support structures.

Secondly, though non-Christian migrants can be economically and educationally successful, the number of those who is very small. As minority religious groups, they are socially marginalized and even politically suspect, especially Muslims in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks. There is a temptation for these migrants to abandon their faith and religious practices in order to avoid discrimination and hatred and to move into the social and religious mainstream. Thirdly, the faith of non-Christian migrants is seriously threatened by modern rationality, materialism, and consumerism whose combined onslaught is a most serious menace to the faith of the migrants' children. To these, often educated in secular institutions and trained in technical professions, their parents' faith appears quaint, backward, and even superstitious. Christianity, by comparison, is associated with scientific rationality, technological superiority, and material prosperity, and thus offers a powerfully attractive alternative to their homeland religions.

Lastly, and this is an extremely delicate point but must frankly be acknowledged, the religious adherence of non-Christian migrants in the West is arguably endangered by the ever-present attempt—overt and subtle—of evangelization and even proselytism by Christians. Rare is the case where non-Christians are not pressured—albeit gently—to reject their faith and convert to Christianity, especially if they marry a Christian, attend a Christian school, work in a Christian environment, especially in a country where the celebration of Christian feasts (e.g. Christmas, Easter) are national holidays, and whose way of life is pervaded by Christian symbols, beliefs, and rituals.

These four characteristics of the non-Christian migrants' religious situation—precarious, marginalized, threatened, and endangered—make them extremely vulnerable to the loss of their faith and religious identity. Understandably, they are suspicious of any attempt at inter-religious dialogue, especially by those who hold the reins of power in almost all aspects of life. Interreligious dialogue often appears to them as proselytism through the back door. This fear is of course not unknown to Christians living as a disadvantaged minority in non-Christian lands.

Opportunities for a New Religious Identity

This characterization of the condition of non-Christian migrants in the USA should not however be taken to imply that they are mere powerless victims or passive citizens. On the contrary, recent studies of immigrants in the USA (as well as in Europe) in different disciplines including anthropology, psychology, economics, politics, and religious studies again and again show how immigrants of all faiths are constantly and actively reshaping their religious identities in response to external and internal pressure.[40] Contrary to the secularization

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[38] The situation of Christian migrants living—mostly as a tiny minority—in non-Christian countries is often far more difficult than that of non-Christian migrants living in predominantly Christian countries. This 'non-symmetry' deserves careful and greater attention than hitherto accorded.

[39] See Graziano Battistella (ed.), *Migrazioni: Dizionario Socio-Pastorale* (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 2010). See also Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (eds), *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008); Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando S. Segovia (eds), *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

[40] Cf. Yvonne Y. Haddad, Jane L. Smith, and John L. Esposito (eds), *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States* (New York: Altamira Press, 2003); Karen J. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vasquez, and Jennifer Holdaway (eds), *Immigrants' Faiths: The Transforming Religious Life in America* (New York: Altamira Press, 2006).

thesis, which predicts the death of God in modernity, religion has been a powerful and irreplaceable force shaping and changing the immigrants' constructions of personal and community identity in economic, social, political, and cultural spheres.

In an informative overview of immigration and religion in the USA, the sociologist Alex Stepick argues that there are three obvious and well-established facts about immigrants and religion. First, religion is vitally important in the lives of the majority of immigrants in the USA; for them, God is very much alive. Secondly, immigrant religions are diversifying the American religious landscape, hitherto largely Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. Thirdly, immigrants practise their religion transnationally, crossing national, cultural, and religious borders, maintaining continuous links with their homeland religions.[41] Stepick also points out that there are several emergent, not yet fully understood phenomena in the religious life of immigrants. All of these have to do with the formation of the immigrants' new religious identity in their adopted country. Uppermost in their minds is the question of which old elements must be preserved and which new elements may and should be adopted to constitute their religious identity. The choice is stark: the homeland religion vs American Christianity; cultural preservation vs assimilation into the American mainstream; native tongue vs English; promotion of cultural and national heritage vs cultivation of religious faith; ethnic particularity or pan-ethnic association; patriarchy vs gender equality; first-generation immigrant vs second-generation youth; individual piety vs structural organization; social networking vs church relationships; spiritual activities vs civic engagement; restriction to the USA vs transnational and transcultural bridge-building.[42] All these tensions not only produce profound anxiety and deep conflict in the immigrants' everyday life but also afford them endless opportunities to create an alternative religious way of life different from both American Christianity and homeland religion that is open, fluid, hybrid, and ever-evolving.

Needless to say, each minority religion in the USA resolves these tensions differently, even within the same religious tradition, depending largely on its location, time, ability for adaptation and change, and theological stance towards modern culture, and more specifically towards America. In general, the immigrant's religious attitude towards the new culture is either full embrace or total rejection, or most often, a variegated mixture of both. These three approaches, with their myriad varieties and degrees, often produce divisions and subdivisions within each religious tradition (e.g. Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism; and Shia, Sunni, and Sufi Islam) among immigrant believers and native converts (Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African-American Muslims), or along ethnic, class, national, and regional origins (for instance within Hinduism and Buddhism). Notwithstanding these internal divisions and rivalries, there is no doubt that minority religions in America are alive and well. Many of them, if not all, have built houses of worship, schools and universities, hospitals and

social services institutions, cultural and recreation centres, and have founded ideologically divergent associations and societies for social and political activism. The question is whether the vitality of these minorities and that of American Christianity will be enhanced by a dialogue among themselves.

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE WITH NON-CHRISTIAN MIGRANTS: A CATHOLIC EXPERIMENT

As mentioned above, interreligious dialogue was officially approved and encouraged by Vatican II, especially in its Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*). In the last fifty years, dialogue between the Catholic Church and other religions, in particular Judaism and Islam, has made significant progress, especially under the pontificate of John Paul II.[43] Unfortunately, alongside considerable accomplishments, there have also been events and official statements that seem to hamper interreligious dialogue. In theology, there has been no significant progress towards a more adequate understanding of the salvific role of non-Christian religions beyond the oft-repeated thesis that they contain 'seeds of the Word' and constitute 'a preparation for the Gospel'. Again, perhaps unintentionally, the Vatican rather cast a chill on interfaith dialogue with the condemnation of the (rather moderate) writings on interreligious dialogue of theologians such as Jacques Dupuis. More recently, Pope Benedict XVI created a storm of protest with his 2006 Regensburg address 'Faith, Reason and the University', with his quotation of an offensive remark by the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos about the Prophet Muhammad. Fortunately, this mishap led directly to the response of an open letter signed by 138 Muslim leaders, *A Common Word Between Us and You*, initiating a serious dialogue between Christianity and Islam. On balance, Vatican II and its aftermath can be said to have created a highly favourable environment for interfaith dialogue. In the USA, the dialogue between the Catholic Church and Jews, for historical and theological reasons, has obtained pride of place and has achieved momentous results.[44] Dialogue with Muslims, certainly actively pursued since Vatican II, has gained renewed impetus with *A Common Word*. Dialogue with Asian religions is less extensive, although dialogue with Buddhism has been notable, especially in the monastic context.

[41] Alex Stepick, 'God is Apparently Not Dead: The Obvious, the Emergent, and the Still Unknown in Immigration and Religion', in Leonard *et al.*, *Immigrants' Faiths*, 13–14.
[42] Stepick, 'God is Apparently Not Dead', 14–26.

[43] See Francesco Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to 2005* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).
[44] See Cunningham *et al.* (eds), *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007) and Philip A. Cunningham *et al.* (eds), *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011).

A Pastoral Initiative: Catholic Policies for Interreligious Dialogue

The dialogue between Christianity and minority religions of migrants has been advanced by a little-known 2004 document ('Instruction') issued by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People titled *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*. It is the first document of the Roman magisterium to take into account the special religious situation of non-Christian migrants living in traditionally Christian countries, especially Muslims, and to present an extensive treatment of interreligious dialogue with these migrants.[45] In part II ('Migrants and the Pastoral Care of Welcome'), the Instruction speaks of cultural and religious pluralism and the need for inculturation of Christianity (34–6). It insists on the duty of all the local churches to extend to all migrants, irrespective of their religions, assistance, true welcome, and integration (42). It then proceeds to expound the church's pastoral care of Catholic migrants, Eastern Rite Catholic migrants, and migrants of other churches and ecclesial communities (49–58). Lastly, it discusses the church's 'pastoral care' for migrants of other religions in general and for Muslim migrants in particular. This is of immediate interest to us; it is helpful to highlight here the main points of the Instruction's description of the church's mission to non-Christian migrants. The church's mission is said to be first of all 'the witness of Christian charity, which itself has an evangelizing value that may open hearts for the explicit proclamation of the gospel when this is done with due Christian prudence and full respect for the freedom of the other' (59). In addition to acts of charity, the church is called to 'dialogue with these immigrants', albeit that such dialogue must be 'conducted and implemented in the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation' (59).

With regard to practical policies, the Instruction calls attention to four matters. First, it does not consider it 'opportune for Christian churches, chapels, places of worship and other places reserved for evangelization and pastoral work to be made available for members of non-Christian religions. Still less should they be used to obtain recognition of demands made on the public authorities' (61). Secondly, while Catholic schools should be open to non-Christian migrants and the latter must not be forced to participate in Catholic worship, the schools' 'own characteristics and Christian-oriented educational programmes' must not be jeopardized. Furthermore, Christian religious instruction, while not to be made compulsory for non-Christian students, 'may be useful to help pupils learn about a faith different from their own' (62). Thirdly, marriage between Catholics and non-Christian migrants 'should be discouraged' (63). Fourthly, the 'principle of reciprocity' should be promoted between Christians and non-Christians in the sense that the 'relationship based on mutual respect and on justice in juridical and religious matters' must be practised not only on the part of

[45] See Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People website: (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/doc). References are to paragraph numbers.

Christians' treatment of non-Christian migrants in traditionally Christian countries but also on the part of non-Christians' treatment of Christians in countries where the latter are a minority, especially in matters of religious freedom (64).

With regard to Muslim migrants, the Instruction acknowledges that 'today, especially in certain countries, there is a high or growing percentage'. Given that past relations between Christians and Muslims have been marred by violence and war, the Instruction urges a 'purification of memory regarding past understanding'. However, it reminds Catholics to 'practise discernment' and to distinguish between 'what can and cannot be shared in the religious doctrines and practices and in the moral laws of Islam' (65). Though the Instruction recognizes that there are important similarities between Christians and Muslims, such as 'belief in God the Creator and the Merciful, daily prayer, fasting, alms-giving, pilgrimage, asceticism to dominate the passions, and the fight against injustice and oppression', it expresses the hope that

> there will be, on the part of our Muslim brothers and sisters, a growing awareness that fundamental liberties, the inviolable rights of the person, the equal dignity of man and woman, the democratic principle of government and the healthy lay character of the State are principles that cannot be surrendered. (66)

With regard to marriage between a Catholic woman and a Muslim man, the need for 'a particularly careful and in-depth preparation' is stressed, and both parties are to be aware of 'the profound cultural and religious differences they will have to face, both between themselves and in relation to their respective families and the Muslim's original environment, to which they may possibly return after a period spent abroad' (67). Furthermore, the Instruction warns the Catholic party that if the marriage is registered with a consulate of the Islamic country of origin, he or she may have to recite or sign documents containing the *shahada*, a practice that it implicitly disapproves as it can imply conversion to Islam. Finally, concerning the baptism of the children, the Instruction urges that the stark differences between the rules of Islam and Catholicism in this matter be made 'with absolute clarity' during the preparation of marriage and that 'the Catholic party must take a firm stand on what the Church requires' (68).

Concerning interreligious dialogue more generally, the Instruction urges Catholics to cultivate 'a convinced willingness' since contemporary societies are becoming increasingly multi-religious. To this end,

> the ordinary Catholic faithful and pastoral workers in local Churches should receive solid formation and information on other religions so as to overcome prejudices, prevail over religious relativism and avoid unjustified suspicions and fears that hamper dialogue and erect barriers, even provoking violence or misunderstanding. (69)

This dialogue aims at not only finding common points between Christianity and other religions so as to build peace together but also at rediscovering 'convictions shared in each community' (69). Catholics

must never renounce the proclamation—either explicit or implicit, according to circumstances—of salvation in Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. The whole work of the Church moves in this direction in such a way that neither fraternal dialogue nor the exchange and sharing of 'human' values can diminish the Church's commitment to evangelization. (69)

There is no doubt that *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* marks a significant and much-needed advance in outlining a detailed policy of the Catholic Church's pastoral care for non-Christian migrants. On the other hand, for various reasons one may take exception to several of its practical policies and recommendations. Though the Instruction does strongly urge all local Catholic churches to extend assistance and welcome to migrants of all faiths, especially those living in the West, and to help them integrate into their new environments, its overall tone is indisputably defensive and evangelistic rather than dialogical. In matters regarding the exclusion of non-Christian migrants from using Catholic places of worship, the preservation of the Christian character of Catholic schools and educational programmes, the discouragement of marriages between Catholics (especially women) and non-Christian migrants (especially Muslims), and the application of the principle of reciprocity, the Instruction's policies are designed to protect the Catholic Church's interests rather than to promote a genuine interreligious dialogue between Catholics and non-Christian migrants.

Furthermore, the Instruction at times blurs the line between acts of charity with evangelization, regarding the former simply as a means or a strategy for conversion. While it recommends 'due Christian prudence and full respect for the freedom of the other', the Instruction sees 'the witness of Christian charity' as 'an evangelizing value that may open hearts for the explicit proclamation of the Gospel' (59). In light of this statement, non-Christian migrants can hardly be blamed for accusing Western Catholics of exploiting their economic deprivation for religious gains. Similarly, the Instruction's suggestion that Christian instruction, while not to be imposed on non-Christian children attending Catholic schools, 'may be useful to help pupils learn about a faith different from their own' (62) will easily be seen by non-Christian parents as a subtle form of proselytism.

As a whole, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* does not seem to be sufficiently sensitive to the peculiarly vulnerable religious plight of non-Christian migrants living in traditionally Christian countries as described above. The Instruction does not appear to be aware that Christians and non-Christian migrants living in the West stand in an asymmetrical power relation. To put matters starkly, Christians are seen as 'givers' and non-Christian migrants are 'receivers'; the former are opulent hosts, the latter often-unwanted guests; the former endowed with powerful religious structures, the latter with destroyed religious communities. To non-Christian migrants whose faith is precarious, marginalized, threatened, and endangered, and who depend almost totally on the Christians' charity and welcome for physical and psychological survival, the church's proclamation that 'the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation' (59) and that

Christ is 'the only Mediator between God and man' (69) will most probably sound not as a humble confession of the church's faith and a rejection of 'relativism' (62) but as a not-so-subtle 'invitation' to them to abandon their religions and join the church if they want to prosper in their new countries.

In this respect, it is well to remember that, while the Catholic Church itself may not be engaged in crass proselytism, there are other Christian churches that are actively and massively engaged in this practice, especially those advocating the 'prosperity gospel' and those who are adamant that unless one is a Christian one cannot be saved.[46]

Clearly, interreligious dialogue between Catholics and non-Christian migrants, if it is to achieve its true nature and purpose, must be thought anew. First of all, Catholics taking part in interreligious dialogue should be deeply aware of their own vastly superior position of power and the religious vulnerabilities of non-Christian migrants and must never exploit either of them for religious gain. Secondly, they must state, unequivocally and forthrightly, at the outset of the dialogue that they have no intention whatsoever to 'convert' them to Christianity. Indeed, they will be slow in accepting conversions except when they are ascertained to be motivated by purely religious convictions. Thirdly, while steps will be taken to ensure that no human and religious rights of Catholics are violated, their observance should not constitute the *sine qua non* for entering into interreligious dialogue. Indeed, interreligious dialogue may foster such observance without demanding a strict application of the principle of reciprocity. Fourth, interreligious dialogue will always take the fourfold form of common life, common action, theological exchange, and shared religious experience, with the extent and priority of each depending on particular situations and circumstances.[47] This fourfold dialogue might at times make the common use of Christian places of worship not only appropriate but also powerfully effective (as witnessed at a common worship of Christians, Jews, and Muslims—and even non-believers—for healing and forgiveness shortly after 11 September 2001 in a Christian church).

Interreligious dialogue between Christians and non-Christian migrants living in traditionally Christian countries takes on a special urgency since the number of the latter is increasing rapidly. It can be especially difficult because of the extremely vulnerable religious condition of the non-Christian migrants, but this should not discourage interreligious dialogue.

CONCLUSION: MAJORITY–MINORITY DYNAMICS AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Our discussion of interfaith dialogue between religious majority and minority groups shows up a number of pertinent dynamics. Arguably migration is one of the most informative venues

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[46] Interestingly, according to the 2008 US Religious Landscape Survey of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, seven in ten Americans agree that 'many religions—not just their own—can lead to eternal life'.

[47] See Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*.

for the study of interfaith dialogue. The movement of peoples brings about the movement of religions, whether it be Hindu Tamils brought in by the British to work in tea plantations in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Chinese migrants seeking a better life in colonial Malaya, or Muslims fleeing turmoil in their homelands for a better life in the United States. As people move, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, they bring with them their cultures, religions, and ways of life. And alongside the context of migration, which can often result in a situation where the religious majority is constituted by the native population, for instance the majority German Christians with the minority immigrant Turkish Muslims in Germany, there are many instances where the majority/minority divide falls within the native population—such as Armenian Christians in Iran, Shia Muslims in Iraq, and so on. And it is not always the case that the majority group holds the power, as the situation of Syria has recently highlighted. Nevertheless, as people move from one place to another the challenges of migration—whether voluntary or involuntary—for interfaith relations between the majority community and the minority communities cannot be ignored. And as migration leads to increasing cultural diversity and religious pluralism across the world, some interesting observations can be made. The American sociologist Peggy Levitt, in noticing the close identification between faith, ethnicity, and culture in the identity constructions of Latino and Irish immigrants in the United States, shows how religion plays an important role for migrants. One could say that the overlap between faith, ethnicity, and culture among migrants is so deeply entrenched that they are often hard-pressed to distinguish what is 'national' or 'ethnic' about themselves and what is 'religious', and therefore, when they 'act out' these identities, either privately and informally or collectively and institutionally, they express important parts of who they are and pass on these formulations to their children'.[48]

Further, interfaith dialogue engaging majority and minority groups is not restricted to religious matters, but is implicated in all areas of life. In the Asian context, for instance, this issues in a threefold dialogue with Asian cultures, religions, and the poor.[49] Further, all migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, is more than transnational or global population mobility *simpliciter*. It too often results in the commodification and exploitation, leading to the abuse and dehumanizing of the human person. It is often the case that migration 'reveals the vulnerability of people's lives, their insecurity, exploitation, joblessness, uprootedness, political uncertainty and humiliating treatment as outsiders or foreigners'.[50] The 'existential condition of a transnational immigrant and refugee' can include 'violent uprootedness, economic poverty, anxiety about the future, and the loss of national identity, political freedom, and personal dignity'.[51] And in many countries, religious minorities can face the added

pressure of proselytism. In such conditions interfaith dialogue is deeply affected; the pursuit of interreligious relations is an acute challenge.

The power relations that obtain between majority and minority groups is clearly also a hugely influential factor. At times, minority communities experience fear, insecurity, vulnerability, and backlash from the majority community just for being different. The situation of the Roma in Europe is a case in point. Minorities complain about the majority scapegoating them for social ills and pressurizing them to lose their distinctive racial-ethnic or religious features and become fully assimilated in the mainstream of society. It is also the case that, for a migrant population, religious differences and divisions already existing among them in the home country are almost always continued in the host country, and these vastly complicate the dialogue between the majority and minority religions. And in pluralist societies, religious leaders are often challenged to be the source of reconciliation, healing, and peace between their own communities and other communities within their societies; overcoming intolerance and extremism with acceptance and solidarity. However, interfaith dialogue is often carried out not at the official but at the grassroots level, through sharing of daily life, collaboration for the common good, intellectual exchange, and mutual participation in religious activities.

The World Council of Churches' 1979 *Guidelines on Dialogue* hit the mark when it stated that 'dialogue is most vital when its participants actually share their lives together', and went on to explain that where 'people of different faiths and ideologies share common activities, intellectual interests, and spiritual quest, dialogue can be related to the whole of life and can become a style of living-in-relationship' (part III, guideline 6). Authentic dialogue can only arise from genuine relations of mutuality and solidarity between majority and minority communities at the grassroots level. The common good is promoted at all levels when barriers are broken down, bridges are built between majority and minority communities, and goodwill is promoted at grassroots levels to foster reconciliation and harmony and to break the cycle of hate, fear, mistrust, and violence.

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[48] Peggy Levitt, 'Immigration', in Helen Rose Ebaugh (ed.), *Handbook of Religious and Social Institutions* (New York: Springer, 2005), 397.

[49] See Peter C. Phan, *In our own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 13–31.

[50] S. Arokiasamy, *Asia: The Struggle for Life in the Midst of Death and Destruction*, FABC Papers, 70 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1995), 9.

[51] Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 8.

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CHAPTER 11

Fundamentalism, Exclusivism, and Religious Extremism

DOUGLAS PRATT

In this chapter we address the phenomena and interconnectedness of religious fundamentalism, exclusivism, and extremism, for they impact both directly and indirectly upon interreligious engagement. If dialogue and the quest for social harmony and mutual respectful understanding are positive drivers of interreligious relations, then 'fundamentalism' may be identified as the spoilsport, with extremism and exclusivism conspiring against any form of religious détente by opposing, or at the very least undermining, the idea of and opportunities for interreligious engagement. We begin with a discussion of 'fundamentalism' which, despite problems of suitability and applicability, is a term generally used to name a broad religio-political perspective found in most, if not all, major religions. Although many scholars would prefer to excise the word from discourse on religion, and for good reason, it continues nevertheless to enjoy wide coinage. Like it or not, it is part of current vocabulary. So for our purposes we need to critically examine its meaning and gain a more nuanced appreciation for what the term properly refers to. Furthermore, the question can be rightly asked: how may the negative and deleterious dimension of fundamentalism be ameliorated? In order to respond to such a question, we need to begin with understanding. This means we need to identify where the term 'fundamentalism' comes from and what it means.

Following that, we will examine another phenomenon that is often, but not always, related to fundamentalism, namely exclusivism. Here we will both explore its problematic dimensions and pose a radical possibility of habilitating the term so that the root idea of something 'exclusive' can be seen to refer to something needful and positive for interreligious relations. Furthermore, fundamentalism not only connects with the phenomenon of exclusivism; at times it is clearly associated with variant forms of extremism and religiously motivated acts of violence, including terrorism.[1] So we need to discuss the vexed problem of religious

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[1] See Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).