

PREACHERS OF DIALOGUE¹: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND INTERFAITH THEOLOGY

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Abstract

While the appeal of ‘civilisational dialogue’ is on the rise, its sources, functions, and consequences arouse controversy within and between faith communities. Some religious leaders have attempted to clarify the religious foundations for such dialogue. Among them are Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Britain and the Commonwealth, Edward Idris, Cardinal Cassidy of the Catholic Church, and Fethullah Gülen.

The paper compares the approach of these three religious leaders from the Abrahamic tradition as presented in their scholarly works – Sacks’ *The Dignity of Difference*, Cardinal Cassidy’s *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, and Gülen’s *Advocate of Dialogue*. The discussion attempts to answer the following questions: Can monotheistic traditions accommodate the dignity of followers of other monotheistic and polytheistic religions as well as non-theistic religions and philosophies? Is a belief in the unity of God compatible with an acceptance of the religious dignity of others? The paper also explores their arguments for why civilisational and interfaith dialogue is necessary, the parameters of such dialogue and its anticipated consequences: how and how far can dialogue bridge the claims of unity of God and diversity of faiths? Islam’s emphasis on diversity and the Quran’s accommodation of earlier religious traditions put Islam and Fethullah Gülen in the best position to offer a religious justification for valuing and cherishing the dignity of followers of other religions.

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The plea for a dialogue of civilizations is on the rise among some policymakers and politicians. Many of them believe a dialogue between Islam and the West has become more urgent in the new millennium. For example following the 2005 Cartoon Wars,² the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conferences, and the European Union used a joint statement to condemn violent protests and call for respect toward religious traditions. They pled for an exchange of ideas rather than blows:

We urge everyone to resist provocation, overreaction and violence, and turn to dialogue. Without dialogue, we cannot hope to appeal to reason, to heal resentment, or to overcome mistrust.³

Globalization disperses people and ideas throughout the world; it brings families individuals with different beliefs into close contact. Today, more than any period in history, religious diversity characterizes daily life in many communities. Proponents of interfaith dialogue claim that, in an increasingly global world, interfaith dialogue can facilitate mutual understanding, respect for other religions, and, thus, the peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths.⁴ One key factor for the success of the interfaith dialogue is religious leaders' ability to provide an inclusive interfaith theology in order to reconcile their commitment to their own faith with the reality of religious diversity in their communities. I argue that prominent leaders of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are already offering separate but overlapping theologies to legitimize interfaith dialogue.

A balanced analysis of multi-faith interactions is overdue in political science. The discipline characterises religious interactions solely from the perspective of schism and exclusion. The literature asserts that interactions among believers of different faiths will breed conflict, including terrorism, civil wars, interstate wars, and global wars.⁵ According to this conventional depiction, interfaith cooperation is especially challenging to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam due to their monotheism; each claims it is "the one true path". The so-called "monotheistic exclusion" refers to an all-or-nothing theological view: you are a believer or you are an infidel. Judaism identifies the chosen people, while outsiders are gentiles; Christians believe that no salvation is possible outside of Jesus; Islam seems to call for a perennial *jihad* against non-Muslims. Each faith would claim 'religious other' is a stranger to God. Political "us versus them" thinking evolves from this "believer versus infidel" worldview. This mindset, in turn, initiates the blaming, dehumanizing, and demonization of the believers of other religious traditions. Eventually, it leads to inter-religious violence and conflict.

Disputing this grim characterization of religious interactions, scholars of religion offer a tripartite typology of religious attitude towards the 'religious other.' They are: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Exclusivism suggests a binary opposition of religious claims: one is truth, the other is falsehood. In this dichotomy, salvation requires affirmation of truths of one's particular religion. Inclusivism integrates other religious traditions with one's own. In

2 Cartoon Wars refer to the controversy and protest following the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten's publication of a dozen cartoons of the prophet Muhammad in December 2005.

3 For the text, see <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/offthecuff.asp?nid=837>

4 One recent interfaith meeting the author attended was Seattle Interfaith Creation Festival aiming to create an interfaith dialogue for environmental protection. At this event Jewish chanting, Christian prayers, and Quran recitation filled the sacred spaces throughout the Capitol Hill neighborhoods of Seattle including First Baptist Church, Temple De Hirsch Sinai, and Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral. More information about the Interfaith Creation Festival is available at <http://www.interfaithcreationfest.org/>. For a comprehensive picture of interfaith projects and groups in the United States, see <http://www.pluralism.org/interfaith/>. For a recent study on interfaith activities in the United States, see McCarthy (2007).

5 For example, Huntington (1996)

this integration, one's own religion represents the complete and pure, while other religions represent the incomplete, the corrupted, or both. Pluralism accepts that no religious tradition has a privileged access to religious truth, and all religions are potentially equally valid paths.⁶

This paper examines the theology of interfaith dialogue (or interfaith theology) in the Abrahamic religions by means of analyzing the works of three prominent religious leaders, a Rabbi, a Pope, and a Muslim scholar. First, Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Britain and the Commonwealth, offers a framework for the dialogue of civilizations in his book *Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. Rather than mere tolerance and multiculturalism, he advocates what he calls the dignity of difference—an active engagement to value and cherish cultural and religious differences. Second, Pope John Paul II's *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* argues that holiness and truth might exist in other religions because the Holy Spirit works beyond the formal boundaries of Church. Third, the Turkish Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen's *Advocate of Dialogue* describes a Muslim approach to interfaith dialogue based on the Muslim belief in prophecy and revelation.

I analyze the interfaith theologies of these religious leaders in five sections: First, I explore variations on the definition of 'interfaith dialogue' in their works. Second, I examine the structural and strategic reasons for the emergence and development of the interfaith theologies. Third, I respond to four common doubts about the possibility and utility of interfaith dialogue and theologies. Fourth, I use John Rawls' overlapping consensus approach to develop a framework with which to analyze religious leaders' support for interfaith dialogue. Fifth, I discuss the religious rationales of each religious leader as it relates to interfaith dialogue.

What is Interfaith Dialogue?

The leaders I examine initiate and support interfaith dialogue. More importantly, they articulate religious foundations for interfaith dialogue. While they emphasize the deliberative, formal, and theological nature of interfaith dialogue, distinguishing it from everyday religious encounters and conversations, their notions of dialogue vary. For example, Gülen defines dialogue procedurally and consequentially: dialogue is the "coming together of two or more people to discuss certain issues, and thus the formation of a bond between these people."⁷ Gülen's minimalist approach aims to facilitate interfaith dialogue both in order to search for the commonalities between different faiths and to stimulate development of an interfaith framework out of interfaith practices. Privileging the practice (Kantian 'practical reason') over the speculative (Kantian 'pure reason') in religious epistemology is common in Gülen's teaching.⁸

The Catholic Church's notion of dialogue stresses religious 'witnessing.' It is more than a verbal act; it is the co-witnessing each other's faith for mutual growth and enrichment. Witnessing connotes a deeper engagement involving a more spiritual experience than intellectual communication. Furthermore, unlike Judaism and Islam, ecumenical dialogue has become a significant part of the Catholic Church's approach to dialogue in addition to the interfaith. The Second Vatican Council's *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Restoring Christian Unity) attempts to accommodate and integrate non-Catholic Christian Churches into Catholic

6 Race (1983), Aslan (1998), Eck (1993).

7 Gülen (2004).

8 Carroll (2007)

theology. *Nostra Aetate* (the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) emphasizes shared belief and practices between the Catholic Church and non-Christians.⁹

Last, according to Sacks, interfaith dialogue is not a debate about winning an argument or changing one's own beliefs, but a deliberation for an inclusive identity formation with the 'other'. In this identity formation process, dialogue participants make their "views intelligible to someone who does not share them" and listen to enter "into the inner world of someone whose views are opposed to" their own. The aim of dialogue is not "to change one's beliefs but make space for another deeply held belief".¹⁰ This facilitates respect for differences and makes globalization humane. To this end, Sacks envisions two simultaneous dialogues with complementary functions: an interfaith dialogue and a faith-globalization dialogue.

What explains the growing appeal of interfaith dialogue among some religious leaders? The answer lies with global political developments; the religious leaders in question seek a peaceful coexistence in a global world.

Need for Interfaith Dialogue

Religious leaders and their teachings are not immune to the effects of global development. The theme of globalization, either as cause of increasing inequalities (particularly in Sacks), or as an inevitable process (particularly in Gülen), permeates religious discourse on interfaith dialogue. The Catholic Church's *Nostra Aetate* (literally, 'in our age') starts with a statement that links interfaith dialogue to globalization: "In our age, when the human race is being daily brought closer together and contacts between the various nations are becoming more frequent..."¹¹

Globalization prompts these leaders to see the whole world—a common humanity and a shared physical environment—as visible support for the existence of a single creator. However, globalization creates two challenges for faith communities. First, people of different faiths are meeting each other. Continuing religious diversity undermines the naïve religious expectation that if one is exposed to the message of Jesus or Quran, s/he will embrace the truth. Furthermore, the religious diversity may incite a reflexive fear on the part of some religious leaders and followers that if one is exposed to the teachings of other religions, s/he will turn toward that religion. Worse, the global unification of markets and the homogenizing consumer culture has created a backlash among some religious leaders who have embraced exclusivist identity based claims.¹² Dialogue-oriented religious leaders share a view that globalization is an unstoppable process that shrinks the world and makes isolation impossible. This leaves dialogue or conflict as the only two options. Interfaith dialogue is then a peaceful alternative to solve the religious problems of a common humanity made manifest by globalization.

Second, globalization intensifies economic inequalities and environmental degradation. Increasingly, similar problems force faith communities to connect in order to moderate the pervasive influences of globalization. Three religious leaders I examine share a belief about the importance of interfaith dialogue and its ability to add a moral dimension to globalization.

9 Cassidy (2005)

10 Sacks (2002; 83)

11 Flannery (1996; page)

12 Barber (1996), Huntington (1996)

For example, Sacks argues that, although the dialogue of civilizations has always been laudable, new political and economic developments such as economic inequality, environmental destruction and climate change, the spread of information technology, and the increasing power of civil society make this dialogue indispensable for future peace and human welfare.

Facing these huge international challenges, the religious leaders I study seem to believe that economic and political solutions are not enough. These religious leaders are sceptical of such solutions because they feel that economic and political approaches empower the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and weak, leading to the erosion of human dignity. Among the religious leaders, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks offers the most refined analysis of globalization and its religious implications. According to Rabbi Sacks, lacking a moral dimension, globalization is doomed to remain fragile. Furthermore, the injustices associated with globalization can create anger and resentment among the poor and weak.

However, conflict between the losers and winners in globalization can be avoided. The religious leaders I examine claim that there is a religious authority and responsibility to add a moral dimension to globalization by voicing what Rabbi Sacks describes as “the silent cry of those who today suffer from want, hunger, disease, powerlessness and lack of freedom.”¹³ For Rabbi Sacks, while interfaith dialogue should focus on finding religious justifications for the dignity of difference, the faith and globalization dialogue should offer ways to enhance the economic justice for a more equitable sharing of world resources. Religious communities’ participation is imperative in this process because religious individuals feel a particular moral responsibility to alleviate suffering of the poor and the oppressed.

More than Rabbi Sacks and Pope John Paul II, Gülen underlines the need of an interfaith dialogue to combat the materialism that, Gülen believes, is the root of all evils including wars, conflicts, environmental problems, poverty, and the loss of morality.¹⁴ He claims that the Western-oriented materialist assault on religion damages all religions, particularly Christianity. Under this materialist attack, Christianity can fend off materialism only by allying with Islam.¹⁵ According to Gülen, their similar and powerful teachings can balance a hunger for material gains with service, love, and peace-making. If the two faiths united to advocate for this on the world stage, this cooperation would create a strong foundation for a just and compassionate globalization, rather than one of unequal distribution and unsustainable consumption.

While the structural factors of globalization and materialism contribute to the religious leaders’ commitment to interfaith dialogue, urgent political incidents also cause these leaders to call for dialogue. These religious leaders maintain that religion is integral to global politics. According to Rabbi Sacks, belying the Enlightenment predictions that religion would become “mute, marginal, and mild,”¹⁶ resurgence in religiosity is sweeping across the globe. But religious leaders also realize that the increasing global religiosity does not necessarily contribute to an ever-increasing peace due to the politicized and potentially violent nature of some forms of religious resurgence. To contribute to peace, religions should engage in interfaith dialogue to find ways to “acknowledge the integrity of those who are not of our faith”

13 Sacks (2002; 11). Jonathan Sacks expands some of his arguments in Sacks (2005).

14 Gülen (2000; 241)

15 Gülen (2002; 242)

16 Sacks (2002; 11)

and to “hear the voice of God in a language, a sensibility, [and] a culture not our own.”¹⁷

Specific historical events become catalysts of interfaith activities by symbolizing the consequences of a lack of dialogue and the necessity of removing the misconceptions about other religions. For example, the Holocaust and following the Nuremberg trials forced the Catholic Church to take steps to change its anti-Semitic image. Thus, the Holocaust became a catalyst for Jewish-Catholic Church dialogue.¹⁸

Similarly, post-Cold War developments, concerns about Islam as a new threat,¹⁹ predictions about a clash of civilizations,²⁰ the terrorist attacks of Al-Qaeda and similar radical groups, and the rise of Islamophobia in Western Europe and the United States increase religious groups’ desire to engage in interfaith activities. The subtitle of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’ *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*’ reflects a shared concern among religious leaders. For the proponents of interfaith dialogue, such dialogue can create a unified interfaith stand against the alleged clash of civilizations. Rabbi Sacks stresses that, for a unified stand, religious leaders should cultivate their capability to “see the presence of God in the face of a stranger,”²¹ like the Good Samaritan in Christian teaching. Rabbi Sacks warns that if religious leaders fail to accommodate other religions, with the increasing salience of religion in international politics, religions will continue to be a source of discord, not harmony. Rabbi Sacks is firm in his beliefs about integrating faith into the solutions of global problems: “If faith is enlisted in the cause of war, there must be an equal and opposite counter-voice in the name of peace. If religion is not part of a solution, it will certainly be part of the problem.”²² Proponents of interfaith dialogue suggest that their goal is to re-cast religion in the name of peace.

Critique of Interfaith Dialogue and Theologies

Reasons of structural (globalization) and strategic (international politics) factors explain religious leaders’ interest in and support for interfaith dialogue. These reasons are external to religion. If external reasons alone explain religious support for interfaith dialogue, a change in these conditions may decrease the support of the religious leaders. In other words, religious leaders’ endorsement of interfaith dialogue may reflect individual or group interests consistent with the current political environment rather than a moral commitment to the principle of dialogue.

There are four questions sceptics can raise against the possibility, sustainability, and benefit of interfaith dialogue. First, have these religious leaders the proverbial Atlantis. No. Rabbi Sacks, the late Pope John Paul II, and Gülen have been important Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim leaders. Their commitment to their respective religions and their influence on their co-religionists would prevent them from compromising their religious doctrines. Their explanations rely on religious doctrines and authoritative interpretations of their scriptures. These explanations, rather than significant re-interpretation, identify and magnify what is already in their tradition. Their justifications are anchored in their respective religious traditions and the earlier interpretations of leaders from their religion as opposed to fundamental, marginal,

17 Sacks (2002; 83)

18 Barnes (2002)

19 Esposito (1999)

20 Huntington (1996)

21 Sacks (2002; 59)

22 Sacks (2002; 9)

and controversial reinterpretations of their Scriptures.

Second, is the interfaith dialogue just rhetoric to hide the ugly face of religion and religious violence? No. These religious leaders are not developing theology for the sake of subterfuge, but are actively practicing what they preach. Jonathan Sacks, Pope John Paul, and Fethullah Gülen have been initiators and supporters of the interfaith dialogue. No pope before Pope John Paul II ever visited a mosque or synagogue; He visited both. Fethullah Gülen's activities have brought religious leaders, starting in Turkey and now with a global reach and influence, together in countless occasions.

Third, is this a monotheist conspiracy against non-Monotheists? No. While the interfaith theologies of Rabbi Sacks, Pope John Paul II, and Gülen accommodate Abrahamic religions more easily, their interfaith theologies can be generalized to other religions. In Rabbi Sacks' argument, all religions are particular languages God spoke to different communities. The Christian Holy Spirit can work in monotheistic as well as non-monotheistic faiths. In Gülen's case, prophecy and prophets existed in all communities of belief.

Fourth, is interfaith dialogue a faith-based coalition to undermine secularism? Are supporters of interfaith dialogue in search of an interfaith theocracy? No. While concerned about the pervasive influence of politics on religion and vice versa, the religious leaders I examine do not engage with political issues directly. Each is avowedly apolitical. They share an apolitical religious position and express a common concern about the danger of the politicization of religion. Gülen is especially critical of the manipulation of Islam for politics:

When those who have adopted Islam as a political ideology, rather than a religion in its true sense and function, review their self-proclaimed Islamic activities and attitudes, especially their political ones, they will discover that the driving force is usually personal or national anger, hostility, and similar motives.²³

A Religious Overlapping Consensus on Interfaith Dialogue

In addition to the problems with each of the sceptics' critique, there is an even further reason to be hopeful for the possibility, sustainability, and benefit of interfaith dialogue: religious leaders are offering overlapping religious rationales accommodating the 'religious other' to substantiate such a dialogue. These internal (religious) rationales are more meaningful than external (globalization and international politics) reasons for religious leaders in their endorsement for interfaith dialogue. These leaders' justifications are tied to their religious doctrines of what mainstream Jews, Christians, and Muslims already believe. If religious leaders offer theologically sound and religiously convincing rationales to accommodate the presence of the divine in a religious other, that rationale will connect to the religious creed. Interfaith theologies reflect these religious leaders' commitment to interfaith dialogue as religious value, and not as self- or group interest.

John Rawls' concept of overlapping consensus provides a plausible framework with which to analyze religious leaders' interfaith theologies. An overlapping religious consensus on interfaith dialogue is emerging as Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders develop different underlying reasons, consistent with their religious doctrines, to accommodate the religious other and support interfaith dialogue.

Rawls develops the concept of overlapping consensus within political liberalism to explain

23 Gülen (2000; 243-244)

how “there can be a stable and just society whose free and equal citizens are deeply divided by conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines.”²⁴ An overlapping consensus means that groups with incommensurable comprehensive doctrines can agree to set of principles (in Rawls’ case this principle is what he calls ‘Justice as Fairness’) and can support those principles on moral grounds through their respective comprehensive doctrines. An overlapping consensus materializes when what Rawls considers “stability for the right reasons” emerges to “establish and preserve unity and stability” of a plural society without compromising its plural character.²⁵ Stability for the right reasons in a society exists when its citizens can agree to some principles of justice out of a moral, not practical or self- or group-centred, reasons.²⁶ Rawls expects that a reasonable plurality of conflicting and incommensurable doctrines will emerge through practical reason over time under enduring free institutions.

Although John Rawls’ develops his overlapping consensus approach for the domestic politics of constitutionally liberal states, his argument has significant implications for religious interactions in domestic as well as international society. For example, scholars of international relations try to explain how justice and stability can be achieved in a plural society with conflicting and incommensurable (religious) doctrines.²⁷ While Rawls’ uses his overlapping consensus concept to explain the possibility of consensus on a political concept (Justice as Fairness), there is no inherent reason to limit its application. Applying the lens of overlapping consensus is particularly useful in explaining religious consensus because it does not impose any value judgment about respective religious truths.

The religious threat to the stability of international society can be removed or mitigated when many of these religious doctrines are consistent with or supportive of the reality of the religious plurality of international society.²⁸ The existence of strong religious motivations for endorsing interfaith dialogue can contribute toward long-term support for, and thus the stability of, domestic liberal institutions as well as a peaceful coexistence in international society.

In what follows, I describe how Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the late Pope John Paul II, and the Muslim scholar Fethullah Gülen develop an overlapping consensus that accommodates ‘the religious’ other from their own religious doctrines to substantiate their support of interfaith dialogue.

Overlapping Theologies of Interfaith Dialogue

The separate interfaith theologies of Rabbi Sacks, Gülen and the late Pope John Paul II aim to reconcile Jewish, Catholic, Muslim belief in the unity of God with the reality of religious diversity. In his own way, each religious leader leads, inspires, and encourages his co-religionists to join in interfaith dialogue. While these three leaders agree on the importance of this dialogue, they offer different religious justifications for it, reflecting the differences of their religious doctrines.

24 Rawls (1996; 133)

25 Rawls (1996; 133-134)

26 Rawls (1996; 142-143)

27 Rawls (1999) develops international implications of his overlapping consensus, but his state-centric approach does not fit for interfaith dialogue because interfaith dialogue is being developed and advocated by religious leaders/groups outside of public realm.

28 Rawls (1996; 169)

Rabbi Sacks' Theology of Difference

The distinctive aspect of Rabbi Sacks' interfaith theology is his emphasis on the divine nature of religious plurality. He argues that the complexity of nature is the best proof of God's preference for diversity over uniformity, particularity over universality. God sent different Prophets with varying messages to different communities. Despite this diversity of revelations, a core set of tenets revealed in the Noahide Covenant should establish universal standards to prevent moral relativism.

Partially due to their Diaspora and minority experience, Jewish philosophers and scholars have been active in developing an interfaith theology. For example, the most important Medieval Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides, offers an inclusivist Jewish theology. In his theology of religions, Islam and Christianity are imperfect but important faiths nonetheless. Maimonides links Christianity to Judaism through the Christian acceptance of the Jewish Scripture as authentic and intact. Maimonides notes that Christians, unlike Muslims, misinterpret monotheism through trinity. He links Judaism and Islam through their rejection of idolatry, but acknowledges that, unlike Christians, Muslims do not accept Jewish Scripture as authentic or intact. Despite these imperfections, Maimonides stresses that Christians and Muslims are important for the fulfilment of the universal reign of the Messiah and the triumph of monotheism.²⁹

While drawing on the Jewish tradition to develop his interfaith approach, Rabbi Sacks' interfaith theology differs from Maimonides' as Sacks' argument is not teleological in that it does not envision an end of history with the commencement of Messianic reign. In fact, quite contrary to Maimonides' vision for the convergence of faiths under the Messianic reign, Rabbi Sacks contends that a diversity of faiths is the Divine Will. Rabbi Sacks suggests that monotheism is compatible with the diversity of religions. One God has created natural and religious diversity. In this way, by emphasizing distinctiveness of Judaism—its rejection of religious uniformity—he acknowledges the religious foundation from which other religions can be constructively engaged.

For Rabbi Sacks, the danger lies with universalist ideologies (a notion he traces back to Plato's *Republic*) which can have non-religious as well as religious roots. Rabbi Sacks identifies the Western universalist cultures that propagated the idea of the existence of one universal truth: ancient Greece and Rome, medieval Christianity and Islam, and the Enlightenment. In addition to these five universalizing cultures, the world is going through a sixth—global capitalism. These attempts to unify the world under one truth are not compatible with the Divine Will that has been revealed by the diversity and complexity of the natural and social world. In other words, by creating complexity and plurality in the universe, God is teaching humans a lesson on the dignity of difference.³⁰

Despite his criticisms of universalist ideologies and support of particularism, Rabbi Sacks is not a moral relativist. He believes that some universal moral truths exist. One important set of universal truths is the Biblical 'the covenant with Noah.' Like some earlier Jewish scholars, including Maimonides, Rabbi Sacks argues that Noahide Covenant creates a theological space within Judaism to accommodate people of other faiths. The Noahide Covenant includes seven commandments: avoid idolatry, blasphemy, sexual immorality, bloodshed, theft, and

29 Novak (1989); Coward (2000)

30 Sacks (2002; 50)

animal cruelty, and obey the rule of law.³¹ Going even further, Rabbi Sacks suggests that the Noahide Covenant sanctions the modern understanding of human rights. In this way, Rabbi Sacks is able to establish universality on secular —not religious— grounds. The existence of these secular and moral universal precepts of human rights is compatible with a diversity of faiths. Beyond this moral universal, diversity is the Divine Will, and Rabbi Sacks is firm in his rejection that one God requires “one faith, one truth, one way.”

According to Rabbi Sacks, Judaism represents the best example of a monotheistic accommodation of religious pluralism. In contrast to the universalistic monotheisms of Christianity and Islam, Judaism is a particularistic monotheism that “believes in one God, but not in one religion, one culture, [or] one truth.” The God of Abraham is the God of all mankind, but the faith of Abraham is not the faith of all mankind. God and religion are uncoupled: “God is universal, [but] religions are particular” translations of God in a “specific language in the form of a specific life, nation, and community of faith.”³² One God shows majesty and mercy through diversity in nature and faiths.

While criticizing Christian and Muslim universalism, Rabbi Sacks’ account puts the Abrahamic religions on an equal ground. Stressing that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all religions of revelation, Rabbi Sacks argues that

In the course of history God has spoken to mankind in many languages: through Judaism to Jews, Christianity to Christians, and Islam to Muslims. Only such a God is truly transcendental—greater not only than the natural universe but also than the spiritual universe articulated in any single faith, any specific language of human sensibility.³³

Rabbi Sacks does not answer how God actually ‘spoke different languages to different communities’ to sustain his claim of God’s hand in religious diversity. Such a theology would require a theology of revelation and prophecy. Rabbi Sacks has an implicit theology of revelation, but he fails to clarify and substantiate it within Judaism. Lacking a clear theology of revelation as a foundational theology for God’s speaking to different communities with different religions, Rabbi Sacks’ claim for God’s complex creativity in nature and religion remains fragile. His pluralist interfaith theology, placing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam on *equal theological* grounds, incited criticisms from other Jewish scholars.

These criticisms led him to rephrase and remove statements of Abrahamic equality.³⁴ For example, in the subsequent editions of his book, Rabbi Sacks removed this statement included in the first edition: “Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are religions of revelation—faiths in which God speaks and we attempt to listen.” He also revised the statement “God has spoken to mankind in many languages: through Judaism to Jews, Christianity to Christians, Islam to Muslims” to read

“As Jews we believe that God has made a covenant with the singular people, but does not exclude the possibility of other peoples, cultures and faith finding their own relationship with God within the shared frame of the Noahide laws.”³⁵

These omissions and revisions suggest that Rabbi Sacks’ interfaith theology moved from a pluralist (equality of faiths) to an inclusivist (there-is-divine-truth-in-all-religions but mine

31 Solomon (2005)

32 Sacks (2002; 55)

33 Sacks (2002; 55)

34 Harries (2004). For a sympathetic review of Sacks (2002), see Dallmayr (2003).

35 Harries (2004)

is superior) theology. From an interfaith perspective, these criticisms and Rabbi Sacks' response indicate interfaith dialogue may require an *intra*-faith dialogue in order to clarify interfaith relevant concepts such as revelation and prophecy.

In conclusion, Rabbi Sacks' interfaith theology goes beyond emphasizing shared beliefs and practices, as it also offers a divine origin for religious differences. Voices for interfaith dialogue from Judaism are particularly important for religious and political reasons. As the representatives of the oldest living monotheistic religion, Jewish scholars' accommodation of other religions may influence the followers of other Abrahamic religions. Politically, it is important because Jewish voices for interfaith dialogue can moderate the ongoing tensions in the Middle East and reduce anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

The Pope's Hope through the Holy Spirit

Compared to Judaism's traditional quest to develop interfaith theologies, the Catholic Church's attempts are rather recent. The recent attempts are mostly related to Church efforts to respond to charges of anti-Semitism at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) following the Holocaust. The political concerns of bishops working in Muslim states prevented a Catholic attempt to prepare a document solely on relationship between the Church and Judaism.³⁶ The result was *Nostra Aetate*: an authoritative and comprehensive interfaith document. The Catholic Church's formal, hierarchical structure facilitates the preparation of authoritative, binding statements on its members. Lacking a formal hierarchy, Jewish and Muslim leaders attempt to offer authoritative statements based on scholarly and sectarian credentials.

Nostra Aetate shaped the late Pope John Paul II's understanding of the purpose, conduct, and goal of interfaith dialogue. A turning point for the Church's relations with non-Christians,³⁷ the document stresses shared beliefs and practices with the aim of interfaith dialogue and cooperation, rather than an emphasis on the differences for the condemnation of the other. *Nostra Aetate* consists of five articles. The first article explains the rationale for fostering unity and charity in an increasingly global community by stressing shared principles among religions. The second article refers to Hinduism and Buddhism, and proclaims: "the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions." Following this statement, the declaration then encourages the members of the Church that "through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, [the followers will] recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as socio-cultural values found among men". The third article identifies shared beliefs (monotheism, the virgin birth, and the judgment day) and practices (prayer and fasting) with Muslims without commenting on the authenticity of Quran or prophecy Muhammad. The fourth article extols Judaism as Christianity and Judaism share a common spiritual heritage. It also condemns anti-Semitism. The fifth article makes a general plea for religious tolerance.

Following *Nostra Aetate* (and unlike Rabbi Sacks, but similar to Gülen), the late Pope John Paul II's *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* emphasizes similarities between religious traditions.

36 Barnes (2002)

37 Race (1983; 45) suggests: "As official statements by the Roman Catholic Church the documents of Vatican II do not submit a detailed theory of the relation between Christianity and the other faiths. Their role in the catholic theology has been to a signal a change from exclusivism to inclusivism in the approach to other faiths at a fundamental theological level." For the text, see Flannery (1996)

³⁸ He argues that diversity of religions should not hide the commonalities that unite these religious traditions:³⁹ “Instead of marvelling at the fact that providence allows such a great variety of religions, we would be amazed at the number of common elements found with in them.” The most important common element in these religious traditions is functional: they all try to answer humankind’s question about eternity and ultimate destiny.⁴⁰ Honouring these various religious attempts, the late Pope cites *Nostra Aetate* which emphasized that the “Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions.”⁴¹ This blanket statement, however, does not offer a theological argument about what and how truth and holiness may be part of non-Christian religions.

Rabbi Sacks implicitly, and Gülen explicitly, link the faith traditions through the notion of revelation—God’s speaking to different communities through a variety of prophets. Yet, the Christian notion of Incarnation dominates the concept of revelation. Reducing revelation to God’s self-revelation in Jesus (a particular time and space bound self-revelation) limits revelation as a tool to link the religious traditions.⁴² One way that John Paul and *Nostra Aetate* circumvent this limitation and link religious traditions is to rely on the notion of Holy Spirit. Revelation in the form of Jesus does not ‘travel’ across time and space, but the Holy Spirit works “effectively even outside the visible structure of the Church.” The Holy Spirit places truth and holiness in other religions, bringing them to Jesus Christ—whether members of these religions are aware or not (anonymous Christians). By linking other religions to Jesus Christ through Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church creates an inclusive interfaith theology. In the late Pope John Paul II’s terms,

The Church is guided by the faith that God the Creator wants to save all humankind in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man, inasmuch as He is the Redeemer of all humankind.⁴³

Furthermore,

Christ came into the world for all these peoples. He redeemed them all and has His own ways of reaching each of them in the present eschatological phase of salvation history. In fact, in those regions, many accept Him and many more have an implicit faith in Him.⁴⁴

More than Judaism and Islam, Christianity puts salvation at the heart of its theology. Thus, for its interfaith theology to succeed, Christianity must have an interfaith theology of salvation. Different religions may include elements that are true and holy, but could the followers of other religions be saved for an eternal life in the (Christian) hereafter? The answer is a qualified yes: other religions can provide help along the way toward eventual salvation, but they are not an independent way of salvation. This view was clarified with other Church proclamations on interfaith dialogue (*Dialogue and Proclamation*):

Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is Good in their own religions traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize him as

38 John Paul II (1994)

39 John Paul II (1994; 77)

40 John Paul II (1994; 78)

41 John Paul II (1994; 80)

42 John Paul II (1994; 92). Among other factors, the problem of revelation makes it difficult for the Church to accept Muhammad as a prophet and Quran as revelation. Paul II (1994; 94) refers to the fundamentalism and persecution of Christians in Muslim states as an obstacle with dialogue with Muslims.

43 Paul II (1994; 81)

44 Paul II (1994; 83)

their saviour.

An interfaith theology of salvation is the weakest link in the Catholic Church's interfaith theology.

Starting with Vatican II and under the leadership of the late Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Church has been active in seeking common ground with other religions. The Church's formal and authoritative nature facilitates interfaith documents like *Nostra Aetate*. While conceding the possibility that other religions can contain what is true and holy, the Church only narrowly opens the door of heaven to non-Christians.

Gülen's Interfaith Theology through Revelation and Prophecy

Unlike Rabbi Sacks and the late Pope John Paul II, Fethullah Gülen does not have an official status; His authority is based solely on his religious and scholarly credentials. Gülen bases his interfaith approach on Turkish Islamic tradition such as the medieval Sufi poet and theologian Rumi (1207-1273), the Ottoman Empire's religious tolerance (such as the Empire's community self-governance, or Millet, system), and the twentieth century Islamic revivalist Nursi (1878-1960). Growing out from this tradition, Gülen's interfaith approach has three religious bases: a history of revelation and prophecy, the commonalities among faiths, and the Qur'an's explicit sanction of interfaith dialogue.

First, Gülen is unequivocal about his commitment to the interfaith dialogue simply because "the very nature of religion demands this dialogue." According to Gülen, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and even Hinduism and other world religions accept the same source for themselves, and including Buddhism, pursue the same goal.⁴⁵ This accommodating approach to other faiths is rooted in Gülen's understanding of the spiral history of religion. Embedded in an Islamic understanding of religion and history, this spiral history suggests that God sends prophets and revelations to re-establish the universal principle of the existence of God. The spiral history of religion assumes the "oneness and basic unity of religions." While there may be some variations, the divine revelation establishes an axis for religious unity. In Gülen's words, any religion reflects the universality of religion, which is "a system of belief embracing all races and all beliefs, a road bringing everyone together in brotherhood."⁴⁶ Using this singular and inclusive conceptualization of religion, Gülen relates all major religions to each other via the same divine revelation.

Second, the basic unity of religions derives its existence from the chain of prophecy and scripture, and is reflected in the similarity of religious teachings:

Regardless of how their adherents implement their faith in their daily lives, such generally accepted values as love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood, and freedom are exalted by religion. Most of them are accorded the highest precedence in the messages brought by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, as well as in the messages of Buddha, and even Zoroaster, Lao-Tzu, Confucius, and the Hindu Scholars.⁴⁷

The fundamental universal values of love, compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness are the basis of all religions.⁴⁸ According to Gülen, the similar teachings of these religious leaders, but not necessarily practices of their followers, indicate the presence divine in other religions.

45 Gülen (2000; 243)

46 Gülen (2002; 243)

47 Gülen (2000; 242)

48 Gülen (2000; 253)

Gülen, over-emphasize these shared common denominators across religions to establish the foundations of an Islamic interfaith theology and to offer a rationale for interfaith dialogue for common goals of humanity such as peace and justice.

Third, according to Gülen, the Quran is a universal call for dialogue. The call primarily—but not exclusively—targets Abrahamic religions.⁴⁹ The dialogue between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is the first pillar of interfaith dialogue. The Quran provides scriptural support for a Muslim dialogue with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), saying

O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you” that we worship non but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we take not, from among ourselves lords and patrons other than God. “If then they turn back, say you: Bear witness that we are Muslims (surrendered to God’s Will).⁵⁰

The Qur’an’s twenty four references to Jews and Christians as “People of the Book” sanctions the Islamic accommodation of them.⁵¹

Fethullah Gülen stresses that Muslims are required to believe “...in what is sent to you and what was sent before you...”⁵² From this particular verse, Gülen argues that, in the beginning, the Qur’an calls Muslims to accept “the former Prophets and their Books.” By establishing a belief in former prophets and revelations, Islam establishes the foundation of interfaith dialogue. Believing in early prophets is supported by procedural encouragement given to Muslims in the Qur’an: “And discuss you not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation).” Gülen suggests that the Quran establishes that dialogue that should concentrate on finding common points rather than refuting others religious beliefs.⁵³ Gülen’s approach does not address to what extent and how to legitimize religious differences.⁵⁴

The unity of the chain of prophecy, revelation, and commonalities of the religious traditions do not necessarily translate into dialogue, particularly between Muslims and Christians. Gülen gives four reasons for Muslim difficulties in this situation: Western assault on Muslims since the crusaders; domestic political repression of Muslims; politicization of Islam; and the misrepresentation of Islam in the West.⁵⁵ These mostly political factors are compatible with the general scepticism Gülen has about politics. Politics, with its focus on the allocation of (mostly material) resources, divides people, while religion unites them. These difficulties should not discourage the faithful from participating in dialogue, but, rather, motivate them to advocate for it more strongly.

In conclusion, the Muslim scholar, Fethullah Gülen, develops an interfaith theology using resources within the Islamic tradition. Gülen’s interfaith theology establishes a theology of revelation and prophecy as an axis to link faith traditions. The existence of this axis is supported by shared beliefs and practices across faiths. He also relies on the Quran, particularly the Quran’s positive references to “Peoples of the Book,” to support his inclusive interfaith

49 Gülen (2000; 249)

50 Quran (3: 64)

51 Saritoprak and Griffith (2005)

52 Quran (2: 3-4)

53 Gülen (2000; 251)

54 One reason for this may be his emphasis on the practical reason of interfaith dialogue that he expects what is religiously acceptable to Muslims with regard to other religious doctrines to emerge in the practice of interfaith dialogue.

55 Gülen (2002; 243-244)

theology. Gülen emphasizes the shared beliefs and practices among religions to substantiate both of his claims: the divine origins of all major religions and possibility of interfaith cooperation. He is silent about differences among faiths, reducing the religions to a least-common denominator for an interfaith agenda.

Conclusion

There are three caveats about my argument for the growing presence, possibility, and promise of interfaith theologies. Interfaith dialogue presents the glass of religious diversity half-full rather than half-empty. There are preachers of hate as well as preachers of dialogue. This paper explicitly focuses on the latter. My partiality reflects my displeasure with the political science literature that over-emphasizes and over-predicts religious violence and hostility. I have drawn attention to selected religious leaders who preach and support interfaith dialogue. While showing inclusive interpretations of Abrahamic religions, I ignored the exclusivist interpretations of these religious traditions. An intra-religious debate exists within religions between proponents of exclusivist and inclusivist interpretations of religions. Each religious tradition holds the seed of war and the seed of peace. The competition between the preachers of hate and the preachers of dialogue will certainly not end any time soon.

Second, overlapping consensus is not the combination or homogenization of religions. There are multiple roads taken by religious leaders I examine toward an understanding of the value of interfaith dialogue. Given the tendency that religious people reject attempts for the homogenization or unification of religion, taking different routes is natural. Each of these religious leaders takes a separate route, anchoring their rationales within their own faith doctrines. The better justified one's interfaith theology is within its broader religious doctrine, the more it will appeal to the believers, and the greater its chances of success will be.

Third, these religious leaders reject exclusivist (all-or-nothing) interpretations but they do not support pluralist (all-equally-valid) interpretations. While they are not the preachers of exclusion and hate, they are not prophets of cosmopolitan ethics either. They do not support relativism. First, they emphasize the superiority of their traditions. Second, they establish minimum universal standards for what counts as divine truth. What they develop is a theologically acceptable (reasonable) religious pluralism.

These reservations about interfaith dialogue do not invalidate its vitality, possibility, or promise of a global peaceful co-existence. Interfaith activists claim that religion can and does bring people together and fosters shared values rather than creating inevitable division and fear. Works of such prominent Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious leaders as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, late Pope John Paul II, and Fethullah Gülen indicate interfaith dialogue is not a spiritual whim but has a rigorous theological framework and value.⁵⁶ Their theological leadership thus validates, accommodates, and humanizes the 'other' in order to open up religious space for interfaith activities and to establish religious grounds to complement humanity's quest for peace, tolerance, and care for God's creation.

⁵⁶ Gülen. (2000)