“Re-Imagining Interreligious Prayer as Creative Liturgies: From Resistance to Revelatory and Religiously Educative”

Abstract

This article re-imagines interreligious prayer as a creative or paraliturgical experience beyond and outside of the official liturgies and rubrics of a given religious tradition. It proposes that principles of inculturation, like dynamic equivalence, can guide interreligious prayer. Central to this research is an understanding of one revelation, proposed by Gabriel Moran, of one God that is uniquely and humanly expressed through the various religious traditions of the world. This understanding of revelation acts as a bridge and not a barrier to interreligious prayer. It allows each religious tradition to be faithful to its own ritual practices and beliefs, while learning about and respecting the ritual practices and beliefs of other religious traditions. The article will begin with the purposes and historical background for interreligious prayer, followed by an exploration of resistance to interreligious prayer and different understandings of revelation. Important principles of inculturation will be presented as guides to interreligious prayer and conclude with how the two sides of religious education can contribute to interreligious prayer being both revelatory and religiously educative.

The Two Trumpets of Interreligious Prayer

As a participant in the 2016 “Building Abrahamic Partnership” (BAP) program at Hartford Seminary I attended a Torah Study at Congregation Beth Israel with Rabbi Dena Shaffer in West Hartford, Connecticut. It was part of the program that involved a visit to a Jewish synagogue and an experience of a Saturday Sabbath service. One of the passages studied was from the book of Numbers 10:1-10. It records the directions God gave to Moses to make two trumpets and to blow them for different occasions. When both were blown everyone would gather at the entrance of the meeting tent. When one trumpet was blown only the princes and chief of the troops would gather. The sons of Aaron, the priests, were given the role of blowing the trumpets. When going to war against an enemy attacking the Israelites the trumpet was to be blown and God would remember and save them. On days of celebration and for festivals the trumpets would be blown to remind the people of God’s presence and that “I, the Lord, am your God” (Numbers 10:10).

These two occasions for blowing the trumpet often serve as occasions for interreligious prayer. Tragic occasions like 9/11, the Sandy Hook Shootings, the Orlando night club shootings, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters can all be reasons for various religious traditions gathering for prayer to console, comfort and strengthen one another. Civic occasions like Thanksgiving, New Year’s, World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Assisi Days of Prayer for Peace, and gatherings of different religious traditions for joyous reasons can also be occasions for interreligious prayer. While some of these occasions are based on the unpredictability of an event happening in real time and the aftermath of the event, some may have a historical past that is
recalled like the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the holiday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.. A few historical examples are provided that help contextualize the development and opportunities for interreligious prayer.

**Historical Milestones for the Interreligious Movement**

The 1893 gathering of the World’s Congress of Religions at the World’s Columbian Exposition, in Chicago, Illinois could be considered as the birth of the interreligious movement in the United States. Twenty-four speakers representing the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions of Christianity gathered together along with representatives from the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Shinto, Confucian, and Zoroastrian traditions. Various talks were given by the different representatives to help others understand their religious traditions (Hanson 1894, 15-16). This gathering would give birth to the Parliament of World’s Religions and the Global Interfaith Movement which gathered most recently in Salt Lake City, Utah, October 14-19, 2015 (Mangla 2015, 1).

A second milestone would be the impact of immigration found in the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which allowed people into the United States from countries other the Europe. A country perceived as Christian became one of the most religiously diverse countries with representatives that are often participants in interreligious services found in the Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Taoist, Jewish, Islamic, and Sikh traditions (Eck 2001 in Phan 2004, xix).

The Assisi World Day of Prayer for Peace was started by Pope St. John Paul II in 1986, and was followed by similar gatherings in 1993 and 2002. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI continued the tradition by convening a Day and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World entitled “Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace.” This gathering was attended by nearly 300 representatives from the world religions as well as non-religious/non-believers and marked the 25th Anniversary since the first gathering. As of the writing of this article, Pope Francis is scheduled to continue the tradition in Assisi, September 18-20, 2016, titled “Thirst for Peace: Religions and Cultures in dialogue” (Harris 2016, 2). Each of these Assisi events produced many more interreligious services in the United States and around the world.

A final milestone that provides opportunities for interreligious prayer is the United Nations resolution passed on October 20, 2010, declaring the first week of February World Interfaith Harmony Week. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave this statement: “Interfaith Harmony Week celebrates the principles of tolerance and respect for the other that are deeply rooted in the world’s religions. The observance is also a summons to solidarity in the face of those who spread misunderstanding and mistrust” (Ban Ki-moon 2015). Like the Assisi Days of Prayer, World Interfaith Harmony Week has produced hundreds of interreligious events around the world, including an interreligious prayer service facilitated by this author.

---

1 The 2015 parliament in Utah included Mormons/LDS for the first time. The 1893 gathering in Chicago excluded Mormons. This raises the issue of who is invited and who is not to an interreligious prayer service.

2 Today over 60 million displaced refugees, the worst refugee crisis since World War II, are contributing to the religious diversity in the United States and Europe, with increases in incidents of Islamophobia and xenophobia.
It is at some of these celebrations that resistance to interreligious prayer is found with some religious traditions prohibiting participation or viewing the services with suspicion that promote syncretism and relativism (Bell 2013, 2). Both words require further exploration given the frequency used when negatively and pejoratively applied to an interreligious prayer service.

**Re-imagining Syncretism and Relativism and Resistance to Interreligious Prayer**

Syncretism is “the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties, as in philosophy or religion” (Dictionary.com 2016). And, “the blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions” (Wikipedia contributors 2016). Michael Amaladoss views syncretism as the mixing of elements and symbols from different religions resulting in a deleterious way. In his book *Beyond Inculturation: Can the Many Be One?* (1998) he identifies leadership within a religious tradition that typically condemns practices that would be considered syncretistic and those who incorporate a variety of religious symbols as syncretists (1998, 124-125).

Re-imagining interreligious prayer as a creative liturgy outside of the official prayer of a religious tradition could reinterpret the syncretistic as having a positive and not deleterious impact. The bringing together of different religious traditions does attempt an experience that fosters reconciliation or union between the participating religious traditions while acknowledging and respecting the differences that exist and do not disappear within the service or afterwards. Amaladoss sees syncretism in today’s religiously diverse world as unavoidable and claims many people today have a positive appreciation for other religious traditions that fosters dialogue and relationships with other religious traditions rather than viewing other traditions as a threat (1998, 124-125).

While relativism, paired with syncretism, can be a concern that views all religious traditions as the same, without recognizing the differences found in different religious traditions, interreligious prayer can be viewed as an expression of religious pluralism. Each religion can be “affirmed as important but only in relation to the others” so that “the plural and the relative are understood positively” (Moran 1998, 229). Rephrased or reinterpreted, interreligious prayer can result in the syncretistic and relativistic understood positively. Amaladoss describes an illegitimate syncretism as one that produces rituals that can be “instrumentalized and objectified by people” and can be a “danger in secularized societies where religions become private and individualistic” (1998, 125). Ritual becomes something that meets an immediate need or is reduced to magic and people pick and choose what they want or need while losing a sense of the community. Interreligious prayer can affirm a sense of community that extends beyond one

---

3 The Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod (LCMS) prohibit joint worship services and suspended Pastor David Benke after participating in an interreligious prayer service after 9/11. Rev. Rob Morris was reprimanded after participating in interreligious prayer service after the Newtown school shootings.

4 The “many” Amaladoss refers to may not be representative of the “few” in many religious traditions that are open to interreligious dialogue and prayer given the increase in None’s, those claiming no religious affiliation, or SBNR’s (Spiritual But Not Religious).
religious tradition and is inclusive of other religious traditions. It can be re-imagined as a prayer that celebrates what is most important to a worshipping community “what moves them most” what reveals “the deep convictions and experiences of a community”—the praising of God and promoting right relationships among the various religious traditions of the world (Warren 1997, 12, 19-20).

Anscar Chupungco (1939-2013) in his book *Worship: Progress and Tradition* (1995) recognizes the tension between inculturation and the danger of eclectism and syncretism from a Roman Catholic perspective. He uses the term “eclectism” rather than syncretism and defines it as “a random, indiscriminate, and undigested borrowing of alien doctrines and practices regardless of whether or not they accord with the faith received by the Apostles,” and, describes it as “a kind of multiple choice whereby each one may select elements that one finds suitable or convenient” (1995, 3). He calls for the rejection of this and any form of eclectism in Christianity.

At the same time he recognizes principles of inculturation that involve not just the juxtaposition of unrelated elements, but the incorporation of elements that enhance the meaning of the official liturgy of the Church without danger to the original meaning (Chupungco 1995, 3). He states, “If the liturgy must communicate the church’s faith to people, it had to be experienced with words, rites, and symbols that were familiar to them. It had to become recognizably incarnate, that is, as having taken flesh in the cultural milieu of the worshipers. What inculturation means is that worship assimilates the people’s language, ritual, and symbolic patterns” (Chupungco 1995, 2). This author would apply these same principles to interreligious prayer. Interreligious prayer assimilates the language, ritual, and symbolic patterns of other religious traditions that re-imagines prayer as a creative prayer and promotes greater understanding and respect of other religious traditions.

A final re-imagining of syncretism in a positive way is found in the concept of *hybridity* in Jeannine Hill Fletcher’s book *Monopoly of Salvation? A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (2005). Fletcher views hybridity as all of the factors that influence our identity as Christians, including the influences of other religious traditions that have occurred over the course of Christian history (2005, 26-52, 82-101). This understanding of hybridity is based on an understanding of God as an incomprehensible mystery that no religious tradition can fully grasp. Examples of the influence of mystery religions of the ancient world and the cultural contexts that included the sports and legal arenas can be found in the development of the Christian rite of baptism. Every element including water and words, and the symbols of oil, chrism, white garment, lighted candle, and a process of initiation are borrowed from the mystery rites of the ancient world (Chupungco 1995, 17). Church fathers familiar with these mystery rites, or cultural practices like Justin Martyr, Hippolytus, Ambrose, and Tertullian incorporated these elements to enhance the rite of baptism to make it more meaningful for the Christian community. They aligned these beliefs and practices with Christianity while rejecting any form of idol worship (1995, 7-8). Interreligious prayer holds the possibility of a similar development that can lead to
the incorporation of elements from other religious traditions into the official prayer of a given religious tradition that enhances the meaning of the prayer.⁵

If an understanding of syncretism and relativism can be re-imagined in a positive way to act as a bridge and not a barrier to interreligious prayer, an understanding of revelation needs to be explored in the same way. The next section will survey various understandings of revelation and how revelation can be an important concept to explore among the various religious traditions of the world as a bridge and not a barrier to interreligious prayer.

Re-Imagining Revelation as Bridge and not Barrier to Interreligious Prayer

Within the Roman Catholic tradition a major shift took place regarding an understanding of revelation between the Vatican I Dogmatic Constitution Dei Filius (1870) and the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum (1965) and other Vatican II documents. The Vatican I Dogmatic Constitution Dei Filius (1870) expressed an understanding of revelation as the communication of divine mysteries, the doctrine of faith, the deposit of faith and revealed truths. A distinction was made between a natural and supernatural revelation. Natural revelation was the understanding that God could be known through human reason, which challenged fideism as the belief that reason was not necessary given the primacy of faith and conviction of heart. Supernatural revelation was understood as God being known in the sacred scriptures of the Church and “the unwritten traditions which have been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself; or, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have been handed down by the apostles themselves, and have thus come to us” (Manning 1871, 210). This understanding challenged rationalism as the belief that nothing could be perceived as true unless it is true according to human reason. Understanding of the scriptures was to be determined by the teaching office of the Church and no one else was permitted to interpret the scriptures apart from the teaching office of the Church.

This understanding of revelation can be identified as a propositional model of revelation found in other religious traditions. In this model God communicated basic truths to a specific group of people in history, who wrote down the truths in human language conditioned by culture and religious experience and contained in the scripture and tradition of the Church. This understanding of revelation does not consider other religious traditions as part of God’s revelation except to view them as excluded as receivers of this revelation and deposit of truths which “must be jealously guarded and defensively protected by the Church” (Lane 1981, 29).

The Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum (1965) made an important shift in the understanding of revelation as found in Dei Filius. Revelation was more than simply a body of supernatural truths contained in scripture and tradition and taught by the Church. It emphasized the personal and relational self-communication of God and God’s self to humanity in Christ. This understanding expressed an indissoluble relationship “between the experience of revelation and the faith interpretation of that experience” (Lane 1981, 47). Vatican II used language that

⁵ This has already happened in the Roman Catholic tradition as it pertains to initiation and marriage rites in different cultures. The Eucharist continues to be vigilantly protected against the incorporation of elements from other religious traditions.
was dynamic, experiential and personalist. The little written about the role of Jesus Christ as a source of revelation in *Dei Filius* was emphasized in *Dei Verbum* along with a Trinitarian understanding of revelation as an act of God’s love expressed through Christ so humanity could share in God’s divine nature in and with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, revelation is a personal invitation to humanity calling for a response to enter into the divine life of God in the present life of believers (1981, 46). While *Dei Verbum* (4) stated “no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ” (Flannery 1975, 751) it expressed the idea that growth and development can be experienced through: listening to the Word of God in scripture, the celebration of the sacraments, the teaching of the Church by the Magisterium, and the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community and the world at large (Lane 1981, 47). This statement does not express the belief that God is no longer active in the world or that God is no longer communicating God’s self through the personal experience of humanity.

Other Vatican II documents affirm an understanding of God’s present activity in the world and the call for a human response and responsibility. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Guadium et Spes* (1965) states that the Church has a responsibility to read and interpret the signs of the times in “language intelligible in every generation,” “in light of the Gospel (4)” (Flannery 1975, 905). This discernment of the signs of the times “may be genuine signs of the presence of the purpose of God” (912) expressed through events, needs and language in the present life of the community of faith. The call, response, and responsibility applies to the whole people of God, who “with the Holy Spirit,” are called upon “to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented” (946).

*Nostra Aetate* (2) Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965) expressed the Church’s relationship with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. It states: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men” (Flannery 1975, 739). Rephrased positively, the Catholic Church accepts what is true and holy in these religions. It affirmed the special relationship between Christianity and Judaism by acknowledging the “spiritual ties which link the people of the new covenant to the stock of Abraham. The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God’s plan of salvation the beginnings of her faith and election are to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets” (1975, 740). *Nostra Aetate* (4) addressed the historical anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism that has been part of Jewish-Christian history, and rejects any charges of deicide brought against the Jews.

This document reversed previous statements of the Church that condemned other religious traditions. The Decree for the Jacobites of the Council of Florence in 1442 states: “those who remain outside the Catholic Church, including pagans, Jews, heretics, or schismatics, will go to the ‘eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ unless before their death they join the Catholic Church” (Phan 2004, xxix).
The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium* (16) (1965) affirms the possibility of salvation for Jews, Muslims, and those from other religious traditions and others “who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience”—those too may achieve eternal salvation (Flannery 1975, 367).

The *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity* (*Ad Gentes Divinitus* 3,9) (1965), speaks of God’s universal plan of salvation for mankind (Flannery 1975, 814). It recognizes the presence of “elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God” (823). In Article I: Christian Witness (11), Christians are called to be familiar with the “national and religious traditions and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them” (825). This document encourages interreligious dialogue when it states through “sincere and patient dialogue” with other religious traditions Christians might “learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations” (825). Further collaborative efforts that can occur as a result of interreligious prayer are encouraged between the Christian and non-Christian religions “in the right ordering of social and economic affairs” (826).

Peter Phan (2004) argues that Judaism and other religious traditions are “part of the plan of divine providence and endowed with a particular role in the history of salvation. They are not merely a ‘preparation’ for, ‘stepping stones’ toward, or ‘seeds of Christianity’ and destined to be ‘fulfilled’ by it. Rather, they have their own autonomy and their proper role as ways of salvation at least for their adherents” (Phan 2004, 143). He acknowledges that “Vatican II self-consciously refrains from affirming that these religions as such function as ways of salvation in a manner analogous, let alone parallel, to Christianity” (139).

While the Vatican II documents and post-Vatican II documents fail to explicitly recognize other religious traditions as revelatory and having a path or way of salvation that is analogous to or parallel to Christianity, the role of the Holy Spirit can support an understanding of one revelation of one God that is uniquely and humanly expressed through the different religious traditions of the world.

*Ad Gentes Divinitus* (4) (1965) speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit “at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (Flannery 1975, 816). *Gaudium et Spes* (22) (1965) states that “the Holy Spirit that offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery” (924) can support such an understanding of revelation. In *Redemptoris missio* (28) (1990) St. John Paul II states that the Holy Spirit is present “not only in individuals but also in society and history, peoples, cultures, and religions.”

Resistance to these ideas was expressed in *Dominus Iesus* (*DI*) (2000) issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The concern of the congregation was that religious plurality and diversity may lead to relativism. It rejected the idea as “contrary to the faith to consider the church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complimentary to the church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the church toward the eschatological kingdom of God (*DI* 2000, 21). While respecting other religious traditions it “rules out in a radical way that mentality of indifferentism
“characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that ‘one religion is as good as another.”’ “If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the church, have the fullness of the means of salvation (DI 2000, 22). This concern for relativism fails to re-imagine the relativistic nature of interreligious dialogue and prayer that affirms relationships with other religious traditions and views plurality and diversity in a positive light rather than viewing other religious traditions as being in a gravely deficient situation.

In his book *Models of Revelation* (1983, 1991) Avery Dulles surveys five models of revelation that are understood as: doctrine, history, inner experience, dialectical presence, and new awareness. Various theologians are identified with each model. While the models contain some elements helpful to understanding revelation, all of the models are located within a Christian context and critique. Except for the new awareness model all of them give very little attention, if any, to nonbiblical traditions being revelatory of one God. Some even take a hostile view towards nonbiblical religious traditions. These models of revelation are often a barrier to interreligious prayer given the lack of consideration and inclusion of nonbiblical religious traditions as being revelatory.

Revelation as doctrine was explored in the propositional truth model that was expressed in the Vatican I Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*. This understanding is expressed through propositional statements that affirm attributes of God and beliefs in God as authoritative teacher and Supreme Being. Emphasis is placed on God’s activity in the past. Protestants claim the Bible as a primary source of inspired and inerrant teachings, and Roman Catholics claim revelation expressed through Scripture and Tradition. As previously mentioned, Vatican II documents shift the emphasis from past truths to present experiences and everyone’s responsibility to read the signs of the times in light of the Gospel and the self—communication of God that is personal and relational. All members of the Church are called to be in relationship and dialogue with other religious traditions. A limitation to this model is a failure to consider how historical, social, and cultural circumstances have shaped and influenced biblical narratives. This can be found in a sexist interpretation of the Bible and the sacramental system in the Roman Catholic Church that did not take into consideration the lived experience of women (Hilkert 1993, 71). 6 Three helpful contributions from a Christian feminist perspective for an understanding of revelation as a bridge to interreligious prayer is the acceptance of sources of revelation in other religious traditions beyond Christianity, the recognition of Jesus as a unique and definitive revelation of God while emphasizing his liberating and inclusive love that was embodied and preached, and the limits of “any historical revelation of the mystery of the unknown God” (1993, 65).

Gabriel Moran’s understanding of an exclusive and inclusive revelation will be explored that can result in an understanding of one revelation of one God that is humanly expressed through the various religious traditions of the world. Martin Buber helps summarize this understanding of revelation as call, response, and responsibility (Buber 1957, 39) and Gabriel Moran as revelation found “in the present, personal, and more than personal experience of all peoples” (Moran 1992, 56).

6 Pope Francis has recently appointed a commission to explore the possibility of women to the deaconate, an ordained ministry in the Roman Catholic tradition.
Revelation as Inclusive and/or Exclusive: Bridge or Barrier to Interreligious Prayer?

The background to understanding revelation as exclusive and inclusive comes from an understanding of uniqueness that contains the same paradoxical meanings. For Moran, uniqueness can be understood by that which is most exclusively particular and most inclusively universal. What is most particular can be the most nearly universal (Moran 2002, 222). What most people understand as unique or most different from others also contains elements that place the object, or subject of uniqueness in relation to other things that are similar. The comparison can always go in two ways, increasing exclusion or increasing inclusion.

When uniqueness is applied to human beings it is increasingly inclusive. While everyone is born of a particular culture, race, language, and religious tradition there is an inclusive uniqueness among all human beings belonging to a human family. An exclusive revelation is one based on the possession of truths. Other traditions would be viewed as threats (Moran 1992, 46). An inclusive revelation is one that is in relationship with other religious traditions and the meaning of revelation is discovered or rediscovered through important experiences of life and communication and dialogue with other people (46).

For Moran, three terms help orient an inclusive understanding of revelation: community, experience, and the present. “Revelation is not the moments, the rituals, the texts; but revelation needs concrete embodiment in moments, rituals, and texts” (Moran 1992, 53). Revelation is not something that a religion possesses, but revelation has a need for people or community with symbols, expressions, forms, and embodiments of revelation (53). Within the Jewish tradition revelation is understood by Gershom Scholem (1961) who states, “instead of one act of Revelation there is a constant repetition of the act” (Scholem 1961, 9 in Moran 1992, 54).

Moran relies on Martin Buber Eclipse of God, to connect the person and their actions as essential to the revelation that takes place (Buber 1957). While the world of nature reveals the divine teacher, the one who witnesses it and responds makes it revelatory. The role of sacred texts does not need to be denied, but revelation is located in the present experience. The past truths of sacred texts provide an interpretation of a never-ending process of revelation (Moran 1992, 55). Rather than describe a Christian revelation or a Jewish revelation. “the only revelation there is, the one in Jews and Christians participate” (Moran 1992, 56). This understanding is very conducive for the ongoing conversations with other religious traditions. A basic start to the conversation is a discussion of the meaning of revelation and finding words that are similar to revelation. The language and prayers that are recited and shared within an interreligious prayer service can be recited as a formal prayer or scripture from a given tradition, or they can be re-imagined as a creative prayer based on principles of inculturation found in the following section.

Principles of Inculturation as a Guide to Interreligious Prayer

One of the results of Roman Catholic missionary experiences in China and India was the development of principles of inculturation. An instruction written by Propaganda Fide in 1659 under Pope Alexander VII addressed the incompatibility and absurdity of transplanting a European culture onto a Chinese culture (Chupungco 1982, 39). The instruction affirmed the rites and customs inherent to a particular people and culture “be preserved intact, in order, no doubt, to make use of them as cultural vehicles of the Christian message in those places” (Ibid).
The Vatican II document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37, addressed the matter of uniformity as it relates to the official liturgy of the Church and elements of other religious traditions that one encounters during missionary activities. “Even in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or good of the whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these people’s way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit (Flanner 1875, 13).

These principles would lead to the incorporation of ancestral rites into the Christian liturgy in Taiwan after Vatican II by the Catholics of Nationalist China (Shorter 1988, 159). In the same way that ancestral rites were incorporated into the official liturgy of the Church, creative interreligious prayer brings different religious traditions together without the necessary approval from Church or religious leadership. Does this prayer offer a personal encounter with God (Chupungco 1982, 63)? How and what does the liturgy teach or instruct the faithful? Does the prayer praise God and/or promote right relationships with others? This last question can be used as criteria for those wishing to participate in an interreligious prayer service. It allows for both theistic and non-theistic traditions, and humanist traditions that promote right relationships between human beings.

*Dynamic Equivalence* involves replacing an element of the Roman liturgy with something in the local culture that has an equal meaning. These changes in an official liturgy require approval from the local conference of bishops in the Roman Catholic Church and the incorporation into the typical editions of the liturgical books and not subject to one’s imagination (Chupungco 1992, 37-38). He also identified *static equivalents*, which would be hard words to translate.

Some of the words that demonstrate dynamic equivalence and that can be incorporated into a prayer are: shalom, salam, shanti, and peace. All of these words mean peace. Inclusive God language can be examples of dynamic equivalence that theistic religious traditions could reflect on as words for a creative prayer: Absolute Being and Supreme Power. An example of a creative prayer that was meant to address Jews, Christians, and Muslims was recited by Saint John Paul II at one of the Assisi days of prayer: “Peace to all of you, peace from the God of Abraham, the great and merciful God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ‘God of peace’ (cf. Rm. 15,33, etc), whose name is just ‘peace’ (cf. Eph. 2:14)” (John Paul II 1993, 1).

While some would critique a creative prayer using the principles of dynamic equivalence as a compromise of Christian beliefs or a lowest common denominator quality to the prayer, Jacques Dupuis finds justification for this prayer in the “Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue” (#82) of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI). It states: “The purpose of such common prayer is primarily the corporate worship of God of all who has crated us to be one large family. We are called to worship God not only individually but also in community, and since in a very real and fundamental manner we are one with the whole of humanity, it is not only our right but our duty to worship him together with others (CBCI 1989, 68 in Dupuis 2002, 237).
Dupuis adds theological considerations to support this creative common prayer. He states, all human beings are created in God’s image and likeness, all religions are part of the universal Reign of God established by God in Jesus Christ; that the religions of the world are God’s gift to humanity, and together, each religious tradition can pray and worship God in a corporate manner (Dupuis 2002, 240-241). The acceptability of the creative common prayer can be greatly enhanced by the two sides of religious education that prepare people for participating in an interreligious prayer service. Knowledge about one’s own religious tradition, or learning to be religious by participating in the liturgy and acts of service in one’s own tradition can be enhanced by learning about the other religious traditions and what they have in common. This can help provide a greater understanding of what takes place at the interreligious prayer.

The Two Sides of Religious Education

It is important to remember that the term “religion” suggests plurality. Interreligious education is inherent to religious education because the goal is to understand one’s own religious tradition in relation to other religious traditions. If education does not involve a conversation between other religious traditions it would not be deserving of the term “religious education” (Moran 1989, 228). Krister Stendahl provides three rules of religious understanding helpful to the task of understanding other religious traditions within the context of the classroom or other learning environment. When trying to learn about another religious tradition ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies. This promotes interreligious dialogue and the possibility of team teaching, and site visits. This dialogue is enhanced if an understanding of one revelation of one God humanly expressed in various ways is embraced. Do not compare your best to their worst. This promotes a critical self-examination of one’s own religious tradition. Finally, leave room for “holy envy” which is the recognition of elements in another religious tradition that are admirable and desirable.

Conclusion: The Two Amens of Interreligious Prayer

This article began with the two trumpets blowing on different occasions that are conducive for interreligious prayer. It concludes with re-imagining the traditional word that concludes a prayer: Amen. Part of the discernment and sensitivity to planning a creative liturgy is the content of the prayers. If they are specific to a particular tradition or created as a common prayer using principles of dynamic equivalence can the participants say “Amen” at the conclusion of the prayer? This author proposes a second amen, an “amen” of acknowledgment and affirmation of the beliefs of the other even if not shared by all those gathered for prayer.

Amen! Amen!
References


Ban Ki-moon. 2015. “Secretary-General’s Message for 2015.”


