Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

Volume 44 • Number 3 • August 2020

Published by

WEA

WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Department of Theological Concerns

Printed by

WIPF *and* STOCK *Publishers*
199 West 8th Avenue • Eugene OR 97401
wipfandstock.com

To order hard copies, contact orders@wipfandstock.com

ERT (2020) 44:3, 266–275

Interreligious Dialogue: Towards an Evangelical Approach

Simone Twibell

Engaging with people from other religious traditions, with respect and grace while also bearing witness to our faith, can be challenging for evangelical Christians but is also a crucial part of carrying out our mission. This article surveys various types and purposes of interreligious dialogue and offers practical guidance on how and why all of us should do it.

My doctor is Hindu; my neighbour is Muslim; my friend is Buddhist. Religious traditions that once were distant from each other now flourish side by side. The social fabric of society, now permeated by religious diversity, is rapidly changing and continually influencing how Christians think about their faith.

In many parts of the world, especially where Christians represent a minority, they have established a long history of friendly dialogue and cooperation with people of other faith traditions. However, in lands where Christianity has historically been a dominant cultural force, Christians have been compelled to think anew about what it means to witness in today's world. How should we love our neighbour if our neighbour is following a completely different set of religious guidelines and doctrinal understandings? Does loving our neighbour mean making them like us or converting them to our way of thinking?

The emergence of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious world makes dialogue among religious traditions fundamental to dismantle patterns of misunderstanding that often lead to resentment and unnecessary hostility among adherents of divergent faiths. Evangelicals can and should try to construct bridges of careful and thoughtful discourse, making it a priority to engage the 'religious other' with deep respect, sympathy, and interest.

Although practices of interreligious dialogue are both ancient and modern, the last few decades have seen a plethora of new developments in this field, calling for the formation of authentic encounters between various religious traditions.[1] Such developments and conversations have presented a series of chal-

1 Among the most recent efforts is *A Common Word Between Us and You* (www.acommonword.com), which called Christians to dialogue with Muslims. It was published in 2007, signed by prominent Muslim scholars and endorsed by a large number of Christian leaders from all over the world. For a response to this document by the World Evangelical Alliance to this statement, see Geoff Tunnicliffe, 'We Too Want to Live in Love, Peace, Freedom and Justice' (n.d.), http://www.worldevangelicals.org/We_Too_Want_to_Live_in_Love,_Peace,_Freedom_and_Justice.pdf. The World Conference on Dialogue, held in Spain in 2008, led to practical initiatives amongst Saudi

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lenges for evangelical Christians. Theologies of religious pluralism require an informed response from those who adhere to historic Christianity.

Is interreligious dialogue of any value to Christians who hold a Christ-centred view of reality? Is our only appropriate position one of proclamation? In a world that is constantly experiencing religious tension and conflict, should Christians adopt a more conciliatory attitude in their encounters with individuals of other religions? As Christians interact with people of other faiths, it becomes imperative to understand the intricacies of this important issue so that we can clarify our commitments in a globalized world.

This article provides a brief overview of discussions and perspectives (primarily from sources in the United States) surrounding interreligious dialogue, so as to explore the concept thoroughly from an evangelical perspective. First, I describe the nature and various types of interreligious dialogue, seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved. Second, I look at trends in the approaches that Christians have taken towards members of other religions. Finally, I propose some general principles that can guide Christians as they carry out dialogue as part of their commitment to bearing witness to the gospel and making disciples in all the world.

The essence of interreligious dialogue

Because interreligious dialogue has taken on different meanings, understanding its objectives is not a simple matter. Harold Netland has said, 'There is no general agreement today on just what is meant by dialogue.'[2] Evangelicals differ from Catholics and mainline Protestants with regard to the various assumptions and attitudes they bring to dialogue. As a result, many evangelicals have been hesitant to become involved in organized interreligious conversations at all.

Because some evangelicals tend to view non-Christian religions as examples of human blindness, the direct work of Satan, or distortions of the truth that threaten the church's mission, one common response has been a tendency towards disengaged withdrawal or inflammatory condemnation. However, for productive dialogue to emerge, the focus and point of departure should not be the other person's particular religious adherence, but the very 'otherness' of those who profess a different religious affiliation. Our deep concern to understand fellow human beings should beckon us to come to the table of dialogue.

What exactly constitutes interreligious dialogue? Leonard Swidler describes dialogue as a 'two-way communication' between individuals who hold differing views on a subject for the purpose of learning about the matter from

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Arabian universities and the West. Moreover, the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network convened a gathering in 2012 exploring the theme 'Where We Dwell in Common: Pathways for Dialogue in the 21st Century' with more than 250 participants. A grant from the U.S. Department of Justice from 2003 to 2006 enabled Fuller Theological Seminary to develop partnerships, manuals and other resources for cooperation with Muslims. Various societies are also dedicated to programs of interfaith dialogue, such as the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, the Islamic Society of North America and the Union for Reform Judaism.

2 Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 285.

one another.[3] Terry Muck offers a broad definition, affirming that 'dialogue is an attempt to understand one another's faith traditions accurately.'[4] Likewise, John Stott's general vision of dialogue is 'an activity in its own right, whose goal is mutual understanding'.[5] The Cape Town Commitment affirms the importance of bearing witness to the uniqueness of Christ as well as being respectful while listening to others.[6] Thus, broadly speaking, interreligious dialogue encompasses discussion and shared activities between people who self-identify with different religious traditions, for the purpose of mutual understanding and bearing witness to the particularities of their faith.

Types, modes and levels of interreligious dialogue

Scholars have applied a wide array of approaches to elucidate the nature and possible content of interreligious dialogue. Roger Schroeder, professor at Catholic Theological Union, mentions four types of dialogue often emphasized in church documents. The first is the *dialogue of life*, which concerns adherents of a religious group who hold no official position within their tradition and simply interact with one another in the context of their daily life. Second, the *dialogue of action* brings Christians and non-Christians together to collaborate for humanitarian purposes, such as responding to natural disasters, relief efforts and common social concerns for the betterment of society. Third, the *dialogue of theological exchange* centres on doctrinal issues and can be entered into by either scholars or ordinary Christians as they to accurately understand each other. Fourth, the *dialogue of religious experience* enables participants of various traditions to come together for prayer, a symbol of interreligious friendship.[7]

In addition to these four types, other scholars have also emphasized *diplomatic interreligious dialogue*, in which religious leaders are the central figures in a formal encounter.[8] Clearly, depending on the context in which the encounter occurs, dialogue can take on completely different meanings and expressions.

In a similar vein, Eric Sharpe narrows the typology to four major kinds of dialogue: discursive, human, secular and interior.[9] In *discursive dialogue*, the primary concern is to learn about other religious traditions. *Human dialogue* takes the interaction a step further, seeking to form relationships between adherents of different religious traditions to gain a deeper understanding of the truth claims embedded in each belief system. *Secular dialogue* centres on socio-political con-

3 Leonard Swidler, Khalid Duran, and Reuven Firestone, *Trialogue: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), 7.

4 Terry C. Muck, 'Interreligious Dialogue: Conversations That Enable Christian Witness', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 4 (2011), 188.

5 John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 123.

6 *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctcommitment), III. 1.e, 203.

7 Roger P. Schroeder, 'Proclamation and Interreligious Dialogue as Prophetic Dialogue', *Missiology: An International Review* 41, no. 1 (2013): 56.

8 See Marianne Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue', in David Cheetham et al. (eds.), *Understanding Interreligious Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203.

9 Eric J. Sharpe, 'The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue', in John H. Hick (ed.), *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), as cited in Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, 285–89.

cerns that bring people from various traditions together to focus on the struggles that humanity faces. Finally, *interior dialogue* concerns the subjective experiences and understandings of the divine that various religious individuals hold.[10]

In a recent article, Terry Muck affirms that dialogue has an important place in missiological commitments. However, Muck suggests that dialogue is 'only one of many possible ways of relating to people of other traditions'.[11] He introduces five other modes of interaction that should be utilized when appropriate: pronouncement, argumentation, discussion, apologetics and debate. Muck concludes that 'a missional theology of dialogue … must be built on the capacity for human beings to have meaningful conversations with one another.'[12] These are important considerations for constructing an evangelical approach to interreligious dialogue.

Furthermore, interreligious dialogue should be structured into levels of discussion to facilitate its practice. Jerald Gort proposes a fourfold structure for any interreligious encounter. The first level is the 'dialogue of histories', in which a serious analysis of previous socio-political and economic relations between dialogical partners is properly recognized. Such dialogue acknowledges the painful injustices and misguided objections that people have committed against each other in the name of religion. The second tier is the 'dialogue of theologies', which aims to foster respect amongst people of various faiths while removing faulty assumptions based on opinion rather than knowledge. The third level is the 'dialogue of spiritualities', which includes mutual interfaith witnessing of one's experiences of reality and the sacred. Finally, there is the 'dialogue of life', which involves aspects of social concern where various faiths should collaborate towards ameliorating social conditions.[13]

As another means of clarification, Harold Netland differentiates between formal and informal dialogue. The former consists of official events and consultations in which participants of various religious traditions come together to pursue defined objectives. The latter, on the other hand, occurs between two or more followers of different religions in unofficial settings. Netland argues that 'informal dialogue is not only an option for evangelicals but is essential if the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is to be carried out effectively.'[14] Thus, careful participation in informal interreligious dialogue becomes a vital opportunity for evangelicals not only to broaden their own understanding of the religious other, but also to share their faith convictions and hope in the redeeming work of Christ.

I will conclude this section with a few evaluative remarks. First, the tiers provided by Gort are helpful parameters and principles for structuring interreligious dialogue. An awareness of the history of detrimental interactions between groups is vital for interreligious dialogue to occur authentically. Towards this end, David Shenk notes that, in light of the pain stored in a religious community's collective memory, extending and receiving mutual forgiveness is essen-

10 Ibid., 290.
11 Muck, 'Interreligious Dialogue,' 188.
12 Muck, 'Interreligious Dialogue,' 190.
13 Jerald D. Gort, 'The Search for Interreligious Convivance, Ongoing Challenge and Charge', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29, no. 3 (2008): 758–61.
14 Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, 296.

tial before honest conversation can occur.[15] In fact, when Muslims were asked for ways to improve relations between the United States and Iran, the responses provided could be succinctly summarized in one sentence: 'Apologize for what you have done to us and respect us.'[16] Apologizing for the mistakes and failures of the past may be the first step in building a suitable bridge to proclaiming the hope and transformative grace of Christ in a hostile world.

Second, engaging in informal dialogue can be a healthy sign of one's interest and commitment to breaking down barriers of animosity and ignorance while coming face to face with individuals who need the reconciliation that only Christ can offer. As Netland affirms, 'Informal dialogue can be a demonstration of one's willingness to take the other person seriously as a fellow human being.'[17] Properly carried out, dialogue should not be a stumbling block to evangelicals, but rather an opportunity to witness to the power of the Spirit.

Finally, further discussions on the nature, tasks, objectives and purpose of interreligious dialogue should take place among Christians of all traditions and backgrounds. As will be discussed in the following sections, the debate has often centred on issues of revelation, truth and salvation. As such, evangelicals must resist both drowning in fundamentalist waves of disengagement and being swept up by the pluralist winds of relativity. As Netland wisely states, 'Evangelicals can and should make a contribution to this debate.'[18]

Theological discourse concerning dialogue

At this juncture, one must grapple with the theological question of how to approach interreligious dialogue while maintaining and sharing one's faith convictions. Without mitigating the complexity of the various positions held over time, a brief account of the major Christian perspectives on non-Christian religions helps to clarify the approach needed. Gerald McDermott and Netland distinguish three main approaches to other religions: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.[19]

In theological considerations of world religions, evangelicals have generally focused on questions of truth and salvation rather than on matters of revela-

15 David W. Shenk, 'The Gospel of Reconciliation Within the Wrath of Nations', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 1 (January 2008): 8.

16 Shenk, 'Gospel of Reconciliation', 8.

17 Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, 297.

18 Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, 299.

19 Gerald R. McDermott and Harold A. Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12. I will describe only these three options in the paper, even though the traditional paradigm does not include the postmodern or acceptance option. The traditional terms assigned to these three models have received fervent criticism, resulting in various proposed revisions. See Craig Ott and Stephen Strauss, eds., *Encountering Theology of Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) for further treatment of this issue. Other alternatives have also been proposed, such as Moyaert's particularism, which moves away from the soteriological approach and turns to hermeneutics as a way to appreciate the otherness of the religious other. See Marianne Moyaert, 'Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: From Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness', *Modern Theology* 28, no. 1 (January 2012): 26.

tion.[20] The issue of ultimate truth and salvation has become a point of contention between evangelicals and those holding to more liberal Christian views. Most evangelicals have taken the exclusivist position, affirming three 'non-negotiables'.[21] First, for evangelicals, the authority and final supremacy of Jesus Christ is the normative standard by which other claims to revelation must be assessed. Second, the Christian faith must be centred on the proclamation of the Christ-event. Third, salvation comes through repentance and faith in the redemptive work of Christ, and no one can be saved apart from him. While advocating for these three non-negotiables, exclusivists also hold that God provides truths about himself and humanity through general revelation which may be present in other world religions. Such general revelation may thus provide points of continuity as long as it is consistent with biblical revelation.[22]

Inclusivists, while affirming the first two aforementioned non-negotiables held by exclusivists, differ slightly in their understanding of the final point. For inclusivists, the redeeming work of Christ on the cross is ontologically necessary but not epistemologically necessary. In other words, one need not know about Christ to receive the grace offered through his work on the cross. As Timothy Tennent notes, the best-known articulation of this view comes from a Vatican II document called *Constitution on the Church*.[23] This view articulates a soteriology based on universal access, claiming that people who are not cognizant of the gospel of Christ can be saved if they are aware of God and move toward Him through general revelation.[24]

Pluralists, on the other hand, reject all three non-negotiables. While affirming that every world religion provides a path toward salvation, pluralists also maintain that conflicting truth claims can be reconciled by adopting an experiential rather than a normative vantage point. John Hick, for example, believes that religions 'embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human'.[25] Thus, according to pluralists, Christianity is just one of many religions that provide access to salvation and should not be perceived as holding any final authority over any other belief system.

When Christians are invited to the religious roundtable, discussions on how to approach the religious other can understandably become controversial. Some Christians believe their faith commitments would be compromised through engaging in interreligious dialogue because such conversations, if not closely circumscribed, could lead to syncretism. Others are afraid of offending the religious other by sharing their particular understanding of faith. What then should be the way forward?

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20 Clifton Clark, 'Dialogue or Diatribe: Toward a Renewal Approach to Interreligious Conversation,' in Amos Yong and Clifton Clark, eds., *Global Renewal, Religious Pluralism, and The Great Commission* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2011), 25.

21 Timothy Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 16–17.

22 McDermott and Netland have promoted this view in *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*.

23 Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, 20. This view was also held by Catholic theologian Karl Rahner and Protestants John Sanders and Clark Pinnock.

24 Craig Ott, *Theology of Missions,* 298.

25 John H. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 240.

One recent approach to interreligious dialogue is Amos Yong's 'pneumatological approach',[26] which goes beyond a Christocentric paradigm and locates the Holy Spirit as a cosmic divine presence that extends beyond the ecclesiastical boundaries of the visible church. Yong maintains that as opposed to framing the discussion around Christology, a 'foundational pneumatology' should guide interreligious dialogue. That is, one must see God, self, and the world in a way inspired by the movement of the Spirit.[27] In short, Yong argues that the particularities of the Christ-event should be heightened by the universality of the Spirit. This approach is beneficial in its emphasis on God's power to draw people to himself through the Spirit in ways we may not be fully aware or cognizant of. Ignoring this reality could lead to a fundamentalist perspective in which we become the arbiters and judges of finality. However, Yong's approach has also received a fair share of criticism, particularly due to his inherent lack of a Christocentric focus, which could ultimately open the door to relativism.

Tennent, on the other hand, keeps Christology at the centre of the discussion. He proposes that 'the way forward is to embrace our convictions regarding the truthfulness and uniqueness of the Christian gospel while fully engaging in honest, open interactions with members of other religious traditions.' Tennent suggests the term 'engaged exclusivist' as a preferred orientation for the evangelical seeking to dialogue with the religious other. That is, while affirming the three non-negotiables, Christians should also emphasize a 'more open stance regarding general revelation as a *preparatio evangelica*' and seek to become missiologically intentional and focused.[28] Without denying the complexities at play, Tennent argues that Christians can indeed maintain and express their faith without having to suspend or ignore their own convictions in the process.

Contrasting two divergent positions can help us draw some preliminary conclusions. Paul Knitter, a Catholic theologian and one of the leading voices among pluralists, describes 'interreligious dialogue as the confrontation with utter, bewildering, often threatening *differences* and at the same time, the *trust* that such differences are, for the most part, friendly rather than hostile'.[29] On the other hand, the late John Stott, a widely respected representative of the evangelical community and an exclusivist, believed that just as there is 'an important place for "dialogue" with men of other faiths … there is also a need for "encounter" with them, and even for "confrontation"'.[30] Interestingly, both leaders utilize the word 'confrontation' in their discussion of interreligious dialogue. Although this term may sound alarming in today's fragmented world, it also highlights an important point of departure for engaging credibly in interreligious dialogue.

Stott chose the word *confrontation* to imply that in dialogue one must not only listen to the other, but also seek to disclose the inadequacies and falsities of the non-Christian religion in order to demonstrate the truth and finality of the

26 Clark, 'Dialogue or Diatribe', 30.
27 Clark, 'Dialogue or Diatribe', 30.
28 Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, 26.
29 Paul F. Knitter, 'Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?' in Christoffer H. Grundmann (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: An Anthology of Voices Bridging Cultural and Religious Divides* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2015), 25.
30 Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 105.

Lord Jesus Christ. For Knitter, however, confrontation does not mean the bifurcation of truth into opposite polarizations. Rather, it should serve as a means of awareness that our knowledge and experience of God are only partial. Therefore, 'we must be open to discovering other parts'[31] in the quest for truth. In other words, Knitter argues that interreligious dialogue serves to complement one's perspective of reality since 'dialogue is not the conviction that you are lost without my understanding of truth, but that there is something missing in your life until you have seen what I have seen.'[32]

For the evangelical Christian, however, confrontation need not be understood as either an attack or an effort to complement what is missing in one's epistemological and theological self-understanding. Rather, confrontation should be considered as a prophetic encounter, an 'engaged exclusivism' that comes face to face with another to reveal the power, hope and glory found in Christ. In this confrontation, one remains open to discovering new insights from the dialogue partner but holds on to the non-negotiable commitment that the only path to salvation is through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

Ultimately, the *telos* or goal of all theological and doctrinal discussions should be to glorify God. To do so requires what Schroeder calls a 'prophetic dialogue',[33] entailing a 'spirit of listening, learning, respect, and empathy' along with 'honesty, conviction, faith, and courage to speak the truth as one knows it.'[34] In this way, prophetic engagement with the religious other centres on critiquing that which is contrary to God's reign in every cultural system.

This result is unlikely if we enter into dialogue with a hard-nosed exclusivism, with the sole purpose of bearing witness to our own faith. Rather, we should anticipate a dynamic exchange in which each party is enriched by interacting with the other, and through which all participants both give and receive and are mutually challenged. The benefit of such reciprocity is that stereotypes and misunderstandings are dispelled. Each time we engage in conversations with the religious other, we enter into an opportunity for both enrichment and challenge, delving more deeply into theological understandings that formulate better questions and offer more adequate answers.

By way of summary, first, a Christocentric approach should be at the forefront of the discussion for Christians in dialogue, but it should be positioned within a Trinitarian framework, as Tennent and Yong advise. Our affirmation of Christ as Lord and Saviour of the world must not be diluted (Jn 14:6), but we should also acknowledge the role of the sending Father whose prevenient grace works in people's hearts in ways of which we may not even be aware, continually drawing people to Himself (Jn 6:44). Finally, we must heed the Spirit who guides us into all truth, recognizing that the Spirit moves in ways and in places that are least expected (Jn 16:13–14).

Second, the use of apologetics is certainly necessary in any interreligious dialogue encounter. We should not only develop the skill of listening and seek-

31 Knitter, 'Interreligious Dialogue', 30.
32 Knitter, 'Interreligious Dialogue', 29.
33 Schroeder, *Proclamation and Interreligious Dialogue*, 57.
34 Schroeder, *Proclamation and Interreligious Dialogue*, 57.

ing to understand but should also acquire the proper tools that will help us 'give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (I Peter 3:15). McDermott and Netland contend that appropriate forms of apologetics are an essential part of Christian witness. However, they also advise wisely that 'given the deep ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions in our world today, those engaging in interreligious dialogue must be especially careful not to inflame such tensions unnecessarily.'[35] Thus, a defence of the gospel must be presented in a spirit of humility, patience and love.

Finally, our understanding of the way to salvation (soteriology) must not be divorced from a proper understanding of the church's function (ecclesiology). Focusing only on soteriology can become reductionistic and can imply that we are interested only in making converts, not disciples. Although maintaining the evangelical non-negotiables is essential, our approach must be engaging, prophetic, and dynamic in scope and must remain connected to the overarching mission of the church.

Missiological and dialogical implications

In a constantly changing world, Christians must learn how to 'surf the wave without falling into the ocean', as the Buddhist monk Khenpo Sodargye has said. We are called to the faithful exercise of theological reflection and interreligious dialogue in a world where faith claims and religious traditions often clash. I close this essay with reflections on the missiological implications of relating to and dialoguing with individuals who profess a different faith.

First, *everyone is worthy of respect and dignity, regardless of what they believe.* In a diverse and fragmented world, we must continually care for and love our neighbours. The fact that every human being has been created in God's image has serious implications for respecting and honouring others. As Richard Mouw has stated, 'In affirming the stranger, we are honoring the image of God.'[36] Affirming the religious other requires us to develop 'an attitude of empathy, repentance, forgiveness, and willingness to be forgiven, even for the things for which we do not feel responsible.'[37] Christians must make the most of every opportunity to dispel the stench of hostility ingrained in assumptions about the religious other. Instead, we should develop a sense of love for dialogue driven by 'many cups of tea—and the Holy Spirit.'[38]

Second, *to fail to understand the faith claims of other religions will prevent us from keeping up with the changing context of the modern world.* Not long ago, while visiting a mosque, I met a Muslim couple who gladly welcomed me into their place of worship. After spending nearly three hours in dialogue with this couple, seeking to learn more about Islam while sharing my personal faith, I felt both overwhelmed and enriched by the experience. I was reminded that my faith should not be locked up inside a vault but should be shared with others, includ-

35 McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 288.
36 Richard Mouw, quoted in McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 272.
37 J. Dudley Woodberry, 'Terrorism, Islam, and Mission: Reflections of a Guest in Muslim Lands', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 1 (January 2002): 6.
38 Shenk, 'The Gospel of Reconciliation', 4.

ing those who adhere to a completely different belief system. As Tennent affirms, 'Christianity is a faith for the world. It flourishes when challenged by unbelief, ridicule, and skepticism.'[39] Ignoring the challenges inherent in our changing context snuffs out opportunities for us to grow in our own faith. It would be easier to remain isolated from other religious traditions, but this is a pathway to xenophobia. Christ has commissioned us to the higher calling of loving our neighbour, including the religious other.

Third, *interreligious dialogue calls for a deep sense of commitment and patience in listening to one another.* In the modern, fluid and globalized religious context, we need more than ever a humble spirit that engages the religious other with a commitment to listening and learning before seeking to be heard. With John Stott, we affirm that 'dialogue is a token of genuine Christian love, because it indicates our steadfast resolve to rid our minds of the prejudices which we may entertain about other people.'[40] As we strive to understand other faiths, we must be ready, as Netland asserts, 'to reject violence and the abuse of power in witness'.[41] We must also actively reject faulty, preconceived notions about others that are often accompanied by prejudice and discrimination, resulting in unnecessary misunderstandings. As Terry Muck notes, 'Dialogue cannot take place in a climate of hostility but only in a climate of love.'[42]

Finally, *despite the differences and the heterogeneity of religions around the globe, certain elements in each religion are worthy of respect and may help to renew our own faith commitments.* In Islam, for example, the motivation for worship clearly arises out of a deep sense of devotion and desire to connect with the divine. We can be inspired and challenged by Muslims' desire for unity, zest for uniformity, pursuit of purity, and passion for divine revelation. Similarly, the ideals most prominent in Buddhism—compassion, emptiness, selflessness and detachment—can remind Christians to more diligently take up their cross, deny themselves and follow Jesus more closely.

One does not need any special prophetic inspiration to realize that multiple religions will continue to exist. Finding ways to navigate the subtle streams of bigotry and the turbulent storms of relativism that surround us is imperative for evangelical Christians. We must continually remember that, regardless of the culture or climate around us, we are called to stand firm and 'hold fast to the teachings passed on' to us (2 Thess 2:15). This call, however, is not simply to stand up for what we believe. We must also stand in the gap on behalf of a globalized world that desperately needs the hope and peace offered only in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, interreligious dialogue is a means by which Christians can attempt to build bridges of mutual understanding as we travel along the 'narrow road'. Perhaps in this way we can help to tear down the walls we have constructed around our 'city on a hill' so that all may see the glory of our King.

39 Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, 11.
40 Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 122.
41 Harold A. Netland, *Christianity and Religious Diversity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 241.
42 Muck, 'Interreligious Dialogue', 192.