

Conference Report: “The Whole is Greater Than Its Parts”
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From January 8-10 the World Religions World Church program of the University of Notre Dame hosted a conference in Rome, Italy, entitled “The Whole is Greater than Its Parts: Christian Unity and Interreligious Encounter Today.” The conference welcomed an audience of over 125 guests to Notre Dame’s Global Gateway in Rome, and featured keynote lectures by John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, and Bishop Brian Farrell of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

The opening address of the conference was offered by Peter Casarella, who spoke on “Wholes and Parts: Ecumenism and Interreligious Encounters in the Pope Francis’s *Teologia del Pueblo*.” Prof. Casarella analyzed the unique ecumenical and interreligious insights of Pope Francis, which are shaped around the principle that one can work towards unity by celebrating difference. He noted that Pope Francis envisions dialogue as a “polyhedron” and not simply as a set of concentric circles by which certain groups are privileged.

The opening address was followed by a panel on Christian ecumenism, sponsored by the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. Brian Daley of Notre Dame discussed the history of Orthodox-Catholic dialogue since Vatican II, noting its early, more pastoral and practical focus and its gradual shift, in the 1980s and 90s, towards central issues of theology and Church structure that still divide Orthodox and Catholic Christians. At present, this dialogue - both internationally and in its North American version - seems to have lost some of its original energy, as the Churches look for signs of a wider, effective desire among their leaders and people to affirm and express fundamental agreement in the apostolic faith. Bishara Ebeid (PISAI, Pontificio Istituto Orientale) analyzed the ecumenical and interreligious thought of the Antiochene patriarch Ignatius IV, emphasizing the importance to Ignatius of both the dialogue with the Catholic Church and the dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox. Prof. Ebeid also illustrated how Ignatius called on the Antiochene Orthodox Church to embrace its identity as a Church of the Arabs.

Jennifer Hevelone-Harper discussed strategies for engaging with the Global Church and world religions at Gordon College, an evangelical institution. She emphasized the importance of the pedagogical experience of visiting a diversity of churches and other places of worship including mosques in the Boston area. In a presentation entitled, “Revitalizing the Fading Ecumenical Memory and Reenergizing the Promise of our Ecumenical Future: Can Ecumenism be Taught?,” J. Jayakiran Sebastian (United Lutheran Seminary) emphasized signs of promise and hope in recent ecumenical dialogues. He noted the influence of major ecumenical documents ranging from *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982) to *The Church: Towards A Common Vision* (2013) produced by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and answered the question in his title with a resounding “Yes.”. Finally Russell McDougal, rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, offered a response to the panel in which he noted the importance of careful theological thought in the face of political and social challenges, highlighting recent articulations of Palestinian Christian theology.

The afternoon panels of the first day (January 8) of the conference were dedicated to Christian Muslim relations. Matthew Kuiper (Missouri State University) opened the first panel with a discussion of “Inter-Religious Relations: A Crucial Factor in the Emergence of Deobandi Reformism.” Prof. Kuiper discussed the historical roots of the Deobandi movement and the role which inter-religious polemics played with leading figures of the movement such as Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (d. 1880). His talk was followed by Abdulla Galadari of al-Maktoum College who offered a presentation on the Christology of the Qur’an and the Gospel of John. Prof. Galadari argued that a careful consideration of the Greek vocabulary of the New Testament, and the Gospel of John in particular and the Arabic vocabulary of the Qur’an allows for a reconciliation of certain Christological misunderstandings. Finally Diego Sarrio-Cucarella, of PISAI (Rome) discussed “Learning from History: the Legacy of Muslim-Christian Polemics.” Prof. Sarrio-Cucarella gave a wide ranging talk on the history of Muslim-Christian relations, beginning in the medieval period with both Muslim figures such as Salih ibn al-Husayn al-Ja’fari (1185-1270), author of *The shaming of those who have corrupted the Torah and Gospels* and Christians such as Tirso Gonzales de Santalla SJ (1624-1705), author of a handbook for the conversion of Muslims.

The second panel on Christian-Muslim relations began with Martino Diez (Catholic University of Milan) who analyzed the possibility of applying the theories of René Girard (d. 2015) to the origins of Islam. Prof. Diez suggested that a careful analysis of both the Qur’an and pre-Islamic poetry suggests that Arabian culture was at a moment of crisis at the origins of Islam, a crisis addressed in part through the sacrificial rituals of the pilgrimage. Adnane Mokrani of PISAI gave a moving presentation on how dialogue can contribute to theology. Prof. Mokrani proposed that a theology imbued with spirituality can achieve more than classical theological sciences shaped by polemics. He challenged the audience to engage other religious traditions with compassion. The final presentation was offered by Gabriel Said Reynolds, who spoke on “The Best of Schemers: Divine Plotting in the Bible and the Qur’an.” Prof. Reynolds described how the God of the Qur’an is said to deceive unbelievers as Satan seeks to deceive believers, and he analyzed how this theme of “divine deception” emerges from Biblical literature.

The keynote presentation on the evening January 8 was presented by Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria. Cardinal Onaiyekan reflected on what lessons the audience could learn from both ecumenical and interreligious relations in Nigeria. He noted the growing disunity of Christians arising from the spread of new, principally Pentecostal churches and lamented this disunity in the light of Jesus’ prayer that his followers be united. Regarding inter-religious relations Cardinal Onaiyekan began with the observation that Muslims and Christians alike must learn to appreciate more the heritage of African Traditional Religions. While lamenting the presence of militant Islamist groups in Nigeria (linked in part to outside forces) he expressed gratitude for the example of the great majority of Muslims who live lives devoted to God and show hospitality to their Christian brothers and sisters. Cardinal Onaiyekan also emphasize the importance of the Catholic position, seen in *Lumen Gentium*, that Muslims and Christians worship the same God: “One God many faiths,” he told the audience.

Day two of “The Whole is Greater than Its Parts” featured two sessions highlighting graduate student research, with one panel drawing on issues of inculturation and the other focusing on the

Qur'an in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Alison Fitchett Climenhaga (Notre Dame) began the first panel with observations of two Catholic groups in Uganda, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and Bakaiso, and how they see themselves in relation to the global Catholic Church. While both organizations share an emphasis on evangelization and gifts of the Spirit, they disagree on what is inclusive of or appropriately Catholic. The Renewal movement is part of an international organization and values how global connections provide knowledge as well as a sense of belonging in the global Catholic Church. Bakaiso members see themselves as serving the local church and understand the Ugandan Catholic Church to be the exemplar of authentic faith to international visitors. Fr. David Eilaona Lyimo (Notre Dame) also spoke of African Christianity, specifically in two Tanzanian parishes, focusing on Emmanuel Katongole's (Notre Dame) narrative methodology as a model for contemporary re-imagination to cover gaps in African christology. Through ethnographic studies and participant observation, Fr. David examined the role of Christ in these two communities, raising the question from Matthew's Gospel, "who do you say that I am?" Through Fr. Emmanuel's narrative approach, Fr. David presented a model of African Christology that is deeply Christian and thoroughly African.

Taking an abductive approach, Audrey Seah (Notre Dame) outlined her research on postmodern inculturation in Deaf Catholic liturgical practice. She noted confusion around the meaning of culture, drawing out the post-modern features of Deaf culture in the liturgy as fluid, de-territorialized, and multiple, incorporating people with diverse language backgrounds, ethnicities and various levels of hearing status. Taking an abductive approach toward the construction of a postmodern theology of inculturation, she demonstrated how the dynamism of a visual-spatial language in contrast to "frozen" liturgical texts requires us to rethink culture with regard to liturgical inculturation as functional wholes..

The final two papers of the first graduate panel examined Christian activity in China. First, John Lindblom (Notre Dame) explored the value of John C. H. Wu's (1899-1986) Bible translation for interreligious dialogue and evangelization. Asked to translate the Bible into Chinese by President Chiang Kai-shek and his wife Soong Meiling, Wu incorporated terminology from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism into his translation, most notably using "Dao" for the Logos of John 1:14. Wu held the conviction that all truth comes from the same source, whether it is found in the Chinese classics or in the Scriptures, and while his translation has been out of print for quite some time, his work as a legal scholar and drafter of China's first constitution is drawing renewed attention to his faith. Finally, Rui Zhang (La Sapienza) explored Jesuit policies of accommodation and inculturation during the rites controversy in China. Given that Chinese society had no established religion but were ruled by a culture of "philosophical pagans" interested in ethical doctrine, Jesuit missionaries allowed the maintenance of some cultic practices among Chinese Christians, specifically the cultural rite of honoring ancestors. Zhang noted that European ecclesiastical conflicts of jurisdictions in China, specifically with the arrival of the Mendicants who opposed Jesuit policy, led to the rites controversy, which effectively ended missionary activity in China.

The second graduate panel examined historical and contemporary questions about the role of the Qur'an in Muslim-Christian interreligious encounters. Andrew O'Connor (Notre Dame) began with a critique of current scholarship on the Qur'an's prophetology. Andrew argued that the Qur'an does not have just one perspective on the function of a prophet, but rather preserves

different understandings throughout the text--thus calling for explorations of Qur'anic distinctive *prophotologies*. Fr. Rufino Enno Dango (Notre Dame) presented on Muhammad Asad's (1900–1992) rational interpretation of the Qur'an, illustrating Asad's demythologizing approach to translating specific passages. Through examples of Asad's translation technique, he raised observations of how this might serve interreligious relations as well as further the study of Qur'anic exegesis.

In keeping with explorations of non-doctrinal points of entry into dialogue, Fr. Levi Nkwocha (Notre Dame) presented his research on the dialogue of life via the shared Muslim-Christian value of hospitality. Through the connecting point of the Abrahamic pilgrim model, Fr. Levi drew on examples in Nigeria, where Muslims and Christians might be encouraged to “outdo” one another in serving the other hospitably. This approach was built off of the work of Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), and highlighted a broader theme of finding new access points in interreligious encounters raised at the conference.

The last two graduate student presentations noted historical reception of the Qur'an among Christians communities in the East as they interacted with their Muslim neighbors. Mourad Takawi (Notre Dame) examined early Arabic (8th–10th century) Christian exegesis of the Qur'an, noting that while approaches to the Islamic Scripture varied, Arabophone Christians displayed a knowledgeable engagement of Islamic theology and contemporary Muslim debates. Finally, Ryann Craig (Catholic University of America) outlined a case study of the Qur'anic crucifixion account in Christian and Muslim polemical works from the 7th–14th centuries, observing Eastern Christians use of the Qur'an as a proof-text to defend Christian doctrines. Both Mourad and Ryann's presentations highlighted the need for more study of the ways in which Arab-speaking Christians understood the Qur'an and engaged with their Muslim contemporaries.

The first afternoon panel on January 9 initiated a theme of “Theology of Religions.” Francis X. Clooney, S.J., of Harvard University began with a discussion of five Jesuits who worked in India for decades, using them as case studies to demonstrate that interreligious learning is always ecumenically inflected, while interreligious realities reshape attitudes toward Christian identity. Their engagement with Indian Hinduism shaped and was shaped by their understanding of Catholicism, Protestantism, and key debates in the Europe of their time. Even today, different perspectives on Christian identity, across the globe, predict attitudes toward religious others. David Marshall followed with a presentation on the Qur'an's self-referentiality, arguing that the text's frequent statements about its own status as divine scripture is unlike anything we encounter in the Hebrew Bible or New Testament. He reasoned that the Qur'an engages in self-canonization as a strategy of self-legitimation, and also contrasted the Qur'an's repeated emphasis on its Arabic-ness in inimitable speech, versus traditions that the Bible is “without splendour” in its language as to not distract from its message.

Professor Robert Gimello of Notre Dame next turned to the topic of Christian-Buddhist dialogue. Prof. Gimello traced traditions of the “Unconditioned” in Buddhist texts and highlighted later traditions of an “ur-Buddha” or “Buddha-embryo” that resides in all beings, pointing to language that echoes the language of Chalcedonian Christology. Vasudha Narayanan of the University of Florida gave a presentation entitled “Idioms of Worship: Shared Cultures, Common Ground, and Contested Territories.” Prof. Narayanan addressed the question of why Hindus frequently visit

Christian and Muslim holy sites, which she argues is for practical reasons (these places are seen as places of power), and yet most do not view this as betraying their own Hindu traditions.

The second panel on “Theology of Religions” began with Gavin D’Costa offering an interpretation of the Catholic Church’s direction toward an affirmation of the continual validity of God’s covenant with the Jewish people. He called this a “tentative creep toward minimalist Zionism,” suggesting that the Church *may* view the state (*medinat*) of Israel as confluent with the land (*aretz*) of Israel promised to the Jewish people, but doing so in a way as to not negate the Palestinian claims to the land or questions of justice. Vazha Vardidze of Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani University followed with “Christian Faith and Multiplicity of Religions: After the Question of Exclusivity, Inclusivism and Pluralism.” Prof. Vardidze highlighted the limitations of these standard categories, as theoretical approaches to religions are necessarily artificial. More attention is needed to the conditions of religious cognition and the human activity and frameworks that underlie our religious imaginaries and practices. John Cavadini of the University of Notre Dame concluded the panel with a proposal for employing the lives of saints or comparable revered figures as the subject of interreligious study, on the model of Scriptural Reasoning--thus suggesting a “Hagiographical Reasoning” approach to dialogue. He suggested that this might be a better starting point for dialogue than doctrine, and thematized the validity of this approach from a Catholic perspective drawing upon the thought of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Gabriel Marcel.

The keynote address on the second night (January 9) of the conference was provided by Bishop Brian Farrell, L.C., Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. He began with the question, “What is ecumenism as seen from the perspective of the Pontifical Council?” Here he spoke of Pope Francis’s statement that ecumenical relationships are an essential requirement of our faith, which flows from our devotion to, and faith in, Christ. Francis also seems to prefer a “dialogue of life” for our journey toward one another. Bishop Farrell mentioned the beauty in diversity, a lesson which took the Church a long time to learn, as there was once a time in which the Catholic Church thought that it was the “Whole.” He also provided some insight into the inner-workings of the council, sharing that it is split into two sections: one that seeks to advance ecumenism in the West, and another that does so in the East. He spoke further of the recent 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the debate within the Church of whether this event should be celebrated or commemorated. The Bishop suggested an approach of the “purification of memory,” stating that “while the past cannot be changed, what is remembered, and how it is remembered, can be transformed,” allowing churches to move toward one another despite painful histories. He further commented on some challenges facing the ecumenical movement, such as different views of what the goal of the movement is or should be, and Christian disunity on moral issues.

January 10, the third and final day of the conference, started with a panel on Mission and Dialogue. Ilaria Morali of the Pontifical Gregorian University began with “Doctrinal Principles of Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes* (chap.I) and Present Theological Trends.” Prof. Morali discussed the complexity of the process in the formation of the document *Ad Gentes* and concluded with its principles and importance for contemporary trends, in which a crisis in Catholic missiology has led to a relativization of the missionary activity of the Church. This was followed by two presentations by faculty from Notre Dame. Paul Kollman, C.S.C, used the history of the

evangelization of Eastern Africa to demonstrate that missionary activity has a deep impact on both ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, and although we have many negative examples from the past, future missions can hold proclamation and dialogue together. He also pointed to the curious observation that in the context of East Africa, the fastest Christian growth often happens when two or more churches are in close competition and proximity with one another. Finally, Paulinus Odozor, C.S.Sp., concluded the panel with “Disputed Moral Truth? Revisiting a Neglected Aspect of Christian Ecumenical Dialogue.” Fr. Odozor spoke of the manner in which contest moral truths between Christian churches and traditions hinder our ability to dialogue, and need to be addressed honestly with an eye to questions of inculturation and authority before ecumenical progress can be made.

The final session of “The Whole is Greater than Its Parts” was dedicated to an open discussion in which presenters and members of the public reflected on the contributions made over the three days of the conference. A concluding prayer of Fr. Brian Daley challenged the audience to listen to God’s voice and discover their own vocation. Conference participants then together toured the Basilica of St. Peter guided by a representative of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

The organizers would like to recognize Paola Bernardini and Elena Narinskaya for their role in chairing sessions at the conference.

An article on the conference at the website *Crux*:

<https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/01/10/ecumenical-interfaith-experts-rome-ponder-promise-perils-division/>

Titles and abstracts of conference presentations:

theology.nd.edu/wrwc2018

The conference, “The Whole is Greater than Its Parts” was sponsored by Notre Dame’s Department of Theology, the Center for Ethics and Culture, the Institute for Church Life, the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, the Office of Mission Engagement, and the Office of Research, all at Notre Dame, along with the Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica (Rome) and the Tantur Ecumenical Institute (Jerusalem).