Fundamentalism and Post-Modernism: Two Threats to Interreligious Dialogue

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Interreligious dialogue has an impressive record. In a way it started already when religions first encountered each other, for even the most staunch exclusivist believer cannot avoid having being influenced by the religiously 'other'. However, if we take the word 'dialogue' as a conscious abandonment of the one-way approach to other religions, then it may be right to point to *Nostra Aetate*, the well-known declaration on the non-Christian religions, promulgated toward the end of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), as the start of religious dialogue *per se* as far as the Catholic Church is concerned. It might be interesting to search for a similar foothold for dialogue in other religions. When did the dialogue start at the Jewish side, for example? Does Judaism still maintain the official (ultra-orthodox) approach that no dialogue is possible for a Jew (Feinstein), or that the dialogue can only deal with matters of social interest, but should avoid the intimacy of religious convictions (Soloveichick)?

Interreligious dialogue advocated by Islam has taken a longer time to develop.[1] Perhaps the 2007 promulgation of *A Common Word* should be regarded as the first milestone of an Islamic-Christian dialogue initiative arising from the Muslim world, comparable in scope and importance with *Nostra Aetate* as a position statement on dialogue with other faiths emanating from the Christian world. There is, however, a question which is far more urgent than the matter of how fast the dialogue develops and which stumbling blocks it faces. Implicitly this presupposes that there still is a development taking place. Another underlying assumption is that the past still contains some stumbling blocks such as conservatism and dogmatism that may be cleared in the process of development. The challenge we face today goes, however, further and comes down to the following critical question: *Is interreligious dialogue still relevant, or has it become in itself something of the past?*

In this article, I want to argue that two new phenomena constitute a serious threat to interreligious dialogue as such. Although they seem to be completely opposites, they join forces in undermining interreligious dialogue. I refer to fundamentalism and post-modernism. After dealing with these two I offer some recommendations for the interreligious dialogue.

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[1] It is worth noting that *Nostra Aetate* benefited from pioneers in Jewish-Christian dialogue as well as from pioneers in Islamic-Christian dialogue simultaneously, which may explain its remarkable 'richness'. See my article: 'The Theology of Nostra Aetate on Islam and Judaism, or: How Converts Introduced a New Thought into the Vatican', in: P.J.J. van Geest & R. Regoli (eds.), *Suavis Laborem memoria. Chiesa, papato e curia romana tra storia e teologia* (Vatican City: Archivio Segreto Vaticano 2013), 317-335.

Fundamentalism

The importance of fundamentalism has been obscured by the fact that people tend to associate it with extremist Islamism exclusively and, in addition, consider it as a regression into a pre-critical past. Both options are wrong: fundamentalism can be traced in many religions and should be considered a modern development, as a conscious reaction to modernity itself, and utilising modern means. It is well-known that fundamentalism derives its name from early 20th century American protestants who boasted that they lived by 'fundamentals'. They regarded the Bible as a book of Principles, not as a book of stories. It's infallibility in all matters of life, and not just of religion as such, was for them beyond dispute. Interestingly, modern science had exercised its influence in their adoption of a matrix of absolute truths at the expense of a more hermeneutical and historical approach. Stating that fundamentalism is merely anti-scientific obscures this very fact. In addition, fundamentalism uses elements from the scholarly world such as religious studies, archaeology, cosmology, and Biblical scholarship, be it in a highly selective way. Again, stating that fundamentalism is borne out of ignorance ignores this fact. The sacred text of one's own religion is no longer a source of inspiration, inviting interpretation, but conveys divine truth to the true believer in an unmediated way. Other believers may interpret (which explains their disagreement); the fundamentalist claims to state what the sacred text really says. The complete identification of one's own opinion with divine authority is another hall-mark of fundamentalism. Profound thinkers have distinguished in this process a serious threat to divine revelation: identifying God's word with one's own convictions can be considered as blasphemy.

For the fundamentalist, however, the real enemy is not the pagan or the ignorant, but the fellow believer who disagrees by not adopting the same rigid standards and who searches for nuance and plurality. When it comes to violence, most victims of fundamentalism share the same religion of the fundamentalist perpetrator. Islamic fundamentalism reckons the non-Islamic world, the 'pagans' to be the 'little enemy', and the Muslim believer who differs to be the 'big enemy'. This is applied especially to Islamic governments which do not comply in all respects to the 'ideal' Islamic standards. Such can form the target of extremist actions, including even a 'license to kill' derived from a manipulative use of the sacred text.[2]

As to the sacred text, Qur'an and Bible share the same treatment: a brushing away of existing religious scholarship, even of the traditional orthodox approaches (plural!), in favour of a monolithic truth,

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[2] Cf. on how an early fundamentalist, the Egyptian Faraj, in his *The neglected duty* (New York: MacMillan 1986), legitimized the murder of president Sadat by deducing from Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of the Mongols a wholesale condemnation of every non-strictly Islamic government. In addition, he reads Qur'an 5:44, as a commandment to rule (*yahkum*), although the verb rather means 'to judge' (p. 167). Incidentally, the context of this verse is highly positive toward Jews and Christians, but this does not prevent Faraj (who was an engineer, not a theologian) to argue that here the caliphate is indicated as obligatory.

which is never complicated but instead highly accessible. Many – likely most – of the spokesmen of fundamentalism are themselves not professional theologians. The Holy Scripture serves as the one and only standard of truth, which allows the ignoring of centuries of religious scholarship and scholarly debate. An exception should however be made for Catholic fundamentalists who can be found in the *Brotherhood Pius X*, the schismatic movement which started with Msgr Lefevbre. The movement was continued *inter alia* by Msgr Williamson, who became notorious through his denial of the Holocaust. In this movement, there is hardly any reference to the Bible and the meaning of the sacred text is not a central issue. Instead, it is the liturgy and the declarations of Vatican 2 that form the main target. The *Brotherhood Pius X* rejects the Vatican declarations of *Nostra Aetate* (on the dialogue between religions), *Dignitatis humanae* (on the freedom of religion), and the liturgical reform that emanated from Vatican II. John Paul II was considered a false pope and, in this respect, the *Brotherhood Pius X* is closely related to the *sedevacantism* movement.[3]

Protestant fundamentalism has its own tenets, although there are common elements as well. The denial of interreligious dialogue is obviously a common element. Pope John Paul II was considered an enemy of the Christian faith (the Antichrist) for his involvement in interreligious dialogue, which is remarkably similar to the perspective of Catholic fundamentalism. The modernity of fundamentalism shows itself in the means of communication. A highly professional Public Relations dimension accompanies the active fundamentalist movement. The classical sources of theology, to be found in libraries, are by-passed by the internet. Thus, for the purposes of this article, I will refer to the internet rather than to print publications, simply because it is in the former that fundamentalism can be readily found.

In order to make things more concrete, I introduce a highly successful protestant fundamentalist cartoon, known as 'Chick cartoons', that can be found on the internet: 'Allah had no son'.

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[3] See the somewhat outdated study: W. Beinert, (ed.), *Katholischer Fundamentalismus. Häretische Gruppen in der Kirche?* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet 1991), dealing with Opus Dei, Brotherhood Pius X, the Brotherhood Saint Peter, and Opus Angelorum. More recently: R. Müller, ‚Der religiöse Fundamentalismus in Christentum, Judentum und Islam', in: R. Möller & H. Gossman (eds), *Interreligiöser Dialog. Chancen abrahamischer Initiative* (Berlin 2006), 38 ff. For the *sedevacantism* movement, see: http://archives.sspx.org/miscellaneous/sedevacantism/little_catechism_on_sedevacantism.htm
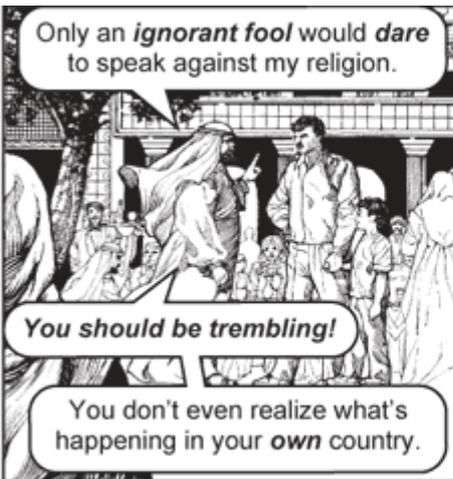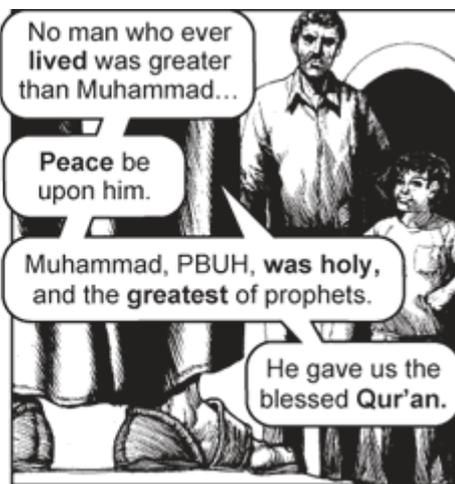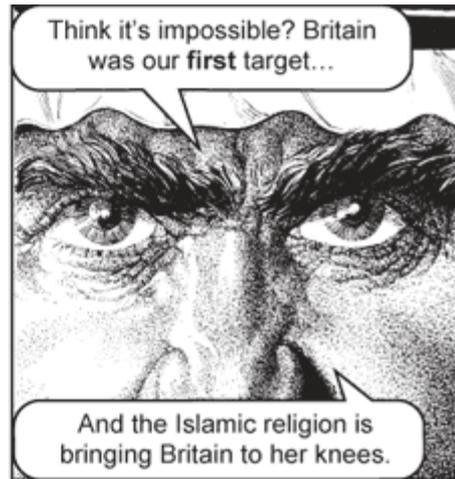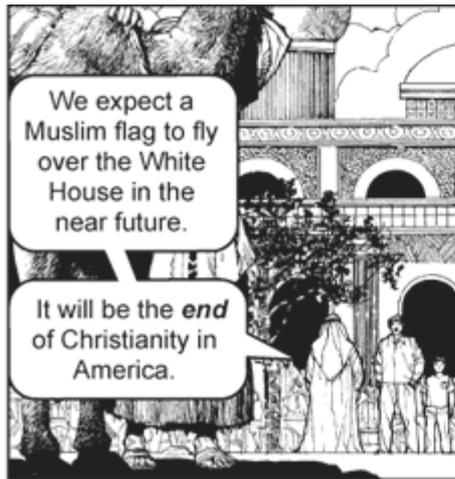
It may come as a surprise that the cartoonist uses elements from religious studies, such as theories about the origin of the Ka'ba, to buttress his rejection of Islam. Scholars like Julius Wellhausen had argued in the 19th century that the Ka'ba was an old shrine containing the images or icons of several gods, among which there was the moon-god Hubal.[4] Allah is supposed to have been a transformation of this moon-god. This theory had been taken up by Robert Moray in his book: *The moon-god Allah in the archeology of the Middle East* (1994). The context of this approach is Biblical scholarship: Julius Wellhausen entertained similar theories about the connection between the Biblical Elohim and the god El, venerated in surrounding cultures, as well as between the Biblical God and the Canaanite god Baal.

The approach in the cartoon is to ignore this scholarly debate about the Bible completely, without resulting in a wholesale rejection of all scholarship: the author of the cartoon picks what suits him and turns it into a religious denunciation of Islam. In addition, he introduces the Islamic motif of the

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[4] Julius Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin 1897). Islam itself teaches that the Ka'ba was full of idols, but emphasises its pure origin by connecting it to Ibrahim, or rather Hagar, and Ishmael. See my study: 'Hagar's Wanderings: between Judaism and Islam', *Der Islam* (90) 2, 213-237.

alleged corruption of the Bible (*taḥrif*), without referring to the distinction between corruption of the text and corruption of the interpretation. Then he brings up religious violence, refers to Islamic domination of America and even to 'bringing Britain on its knees', possibly by proposals to introduce Sharia, if even in a limited way.[5] The strong identification of Christianity with the United States, (compare the White House threatened by Islam) shows the geo-political background of this religious fundamentalism.[6]

In another cartoon (The Deceived) the full extent of this Christian fundamentalism becomes clear: Islam and the Vatican have a secret alliance to undermine the world with paganism.[7]

Note again that this cartoon is aware of the Islamic post-Qur'anic tradition of Muhammad clearing the Ka'ba, but transforms it into another accusation of idolatry (by Muhammad's supposed maintenance of Allah). The incident at the holy place of Fatima, where the Virgin Mary is venerated, is used to prove it: the attack on Pope John Paul II was not perpetrated by a Muslim, but was organized jointly by the Vatican and Islam. In the background is the belief that Muhammad's wife Khadija was actually a Christian and even that she was, Chick cartoons state, a nun sent by the Vatican to drag Muhammad into the conspiracy.

Traditional objections against Catholicism as 'salvation by works' are interspersed with allegations of Vatican conspiracies. Another well-known Protestant fundamentalist accusation is that the emblem of the European Union with its twelve stars against a blue background, has been derived from the cult of the Virgin Mary which, according to some forms of Protestant fundamentalism, is a hardly veiled cult

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[5] One may think here of proposals by Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury, to allow for elements of *Sharia* for Muslims in certain areas of law. The cartoon is, however, earlier than that.

[6] See: E. Kaplan, *With God on their Side. How Christian Fundamentalists Trampled Science, Policy and Democracy in Georg W. Bush's White House* (New York, 2004).

[7] Cp. the 'revelations' by someone, supposed to be a former Jesuit, from the secret archives of the Vatican: http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vatican/esp_vatican33.htm

of Isis. On this view, the early Christian monogram IHS means: 'Isis, Horus, Set' – the unholy Trinity, derived from Egyptian idolatry.

A full-length rebuttal from the Catholic side can be found on the internet under the title: *the nightmare world of Jack Chick*.[8] Likewise Muslim sites try to counter these allegations. All such rebuttals run the danger of upgrading this fundamentalism to a theory that can be debated. Accusations of Jack Chick being a Zionist betray another type of fundamentalism, that of a Christian anti-Semitic brand.[9] Incidentally, the Chick cartons are convinced that Judaism is in error and is condemned by not accepting the Christian truth. There is a strain of anti-Semitism in his following depiction of Satan conversing with a future pope.

It is not difficult to find sources for this vehement fundamentalism: Islam and Roman Catholicism are the classical enemies of Protestantism from Luther onwards, the first associated with the devil (this idea derived from Medieval Christianity[10]), the other with the anti-Christ. The context in which these thoughts came up does not play a role, however and neither does the way Islam and Roman Catholicism are viewed nowadays by mainstream Protestantism. On the contrary, ecumenism is viewed as another satanic strategy. Immunity to a rational scholarly debate is a hall-mark of fundamentalism. The apocalyptic imagery serves to divide the political realm in a clear dichotomy between light and darkness, as a clash of civilisations, which is merely the secular form of this religious apocalypticism. Books dealing with political Islam often use titles with quasi-religious connotations such as *The final battle*, or: *From 9/11 to 666*, suggesting an grandiose apocalyptic framework underlying local political conflicts.

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[8] http://www.catholic.com/documents/the-nightmare-world-of-jack-t-chick. See also Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto_Rivera
[9] http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/False%20Doctrines/Zionism/jack_chick.htm
[10] See: N. Daniel, *Islam and the West, the Making of an Image*, Edinburgh 1980.

Special note should be made of the role of the Temple Mount in some forms of Christian apocalypticism. As the rebuilding of the Temple is considered in Judaism a sign of the Messianic times, dispensationalist fundamentalist Christianity has it that Jesus himself will return after the ingathering of the exiles and bring the Jews to Christianity... or to damnation. Islam serves again as the anti-Christ. The danger of this idea is that the catastrophic political ingredients will be considered as the fulfilment of prophecies: of the battle of Gog and Magog, of the Antichrist and Armageddon. Although in Israeli Judaism the movement for rebuilding the Temple is growing as well, creating a Jewish fundamentalism with strong geo-political claims coupled with an utter demonisation of the Palestinians, the support for that idea of rebuilding the Temple would remain utterly weak without the considerable backing up from American protestant fundamentalist side.[11] In such a fundamentalist schema, Europe is viewed as another enemy of Israel, next to Russia and the Arab countries. Surprise is sometimes shown in respect to the fact that Islam is familiar as well with a battle against Gog and Magog, as for many fundamentalists it is clear that Islam will be one of the enemies of the returning Messiah.[12]

It is interesting to note that Islamic fundamentalism shows remarkable parallels: Bin Laden, for instance, associated the god Hubal with America; the Antichrist is reckoned as the Zionist enemy, the clash of civilisations thesis is advocated; the Muslim Arab world is reigned against the American-Zionist crusaders, and so on.[13] Obviously, these two apocalyptic fundamentalisms reinforce each other.

Although the presence of such fundamentalisms on the internet is overwhelming, it remains difficult to measure the real extent of their influence. It is nevertheless certain that interreligious dialogue is considered by all of them as a sign of the Antichrist. It may well be that interreligious dialogue presupposes an openness to the truth of other religions, which clashes with the experienced need to consolidate one's own identity confronted with secularism and political turmoil. So, to sum up some basic characteristics of fundamentalism:

1. It is highly selective in its use of religious sources.
2. It displays an equally selective use of modern science.
3. An absolute dichotomy is held between the small group of 'real' believers and an overwhelming majority of 'traitors'.
4. A self-perception of immunity from criticism.

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[11] http://www.endtime.com/armageddon/; http://www.mt.net/~watcher/bible.html; http://www.heisnear.com/NewJerusalemTemple.html.
[12] The remarkable similarities between the classical Islamic classical apocalypticism and the classical Jewish and Christian ones, such as the Antichrist, the Messiah / the Mahdi / Gog and Magog, deserve closer research than can be undertaken here.
[13] J. Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam* (Los Angeles, 2011).

5. Belief in conspiracy.

6. World politics is invariably viewed in apocalyptic terms of light versus darkness.

7. There is manifestly a deep disappointment toward modern society, quite often after having been exposed to it.

8. A complete passing over of the relevant religious establishment of religious leaders, theologians and traditional scholarship.

Because of the immunity from criticism dimension, it may be that interreligious dialogue in its present form will not work as a counterforce to fundamentalism. Fundamentalists consider dialogue as just another symptom of decadent society. The impact of fundamentalism in its Christian form might be underestimated.[14] In a way, 'official' theology can run its course without ever being confronted with fundamentalism. University libraries are not the proper medium to study it. Still, its presence on the internet warrants the assumption that fundamentalism is a widespread and fast growing phenomenon. Obviously interreligious dialogue is seriously threatened by this phenomenon.

Let me now turn to a completely different phenomenon, post-modern religiosity. It may come as a surprise that this phenomenon, although widely different from fundamentalism, likewise constitutes a threat to interreligious dialogue.

Post-Modern Religion

At first sight, it may seem that post-modern religion with its emphasis upon multiple truths and piecemeal convictions is the perfect antithesis of fundamentalism. Post-modern religiosity has been compared to *bricolage*: by assembling heterogeneous elements from diverse religious provenance into a single, but preliminary whole, religious convictions are established. Quite often mystical sources serve to buttress the claim of a religiosity transcending existing confessional boundaries. Karen Armstrong suggests that mystics transcend the idea of a personal God and by doing so contribute to a transconfessional belief.[15] Mystics such as Meister Eckhardt are presented in such a way that his Christian identity as a Medieval Dominican is completely obscured by Universalist perspectives, supposed to be highly critical to Christianity itself. On closer scrutiny, it turns out that mystics should first and foremost be understood in the context of their specific religion. An ecumenical orientation is lacking in most mystics, and a farewell to a personal God is not common, especially not in Christian

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[14] E. Kaplan, *With God on their* Side, points to the fact that during the presidency of Bush junior, there were daily obligatory Bible lessons in the White House.

[15] K. Armstrong, *A History of God, from Abraham until the present: 4000 years for God* (London: Heinemann 1991. At the end of the book she deals with mysticism.

mystics. The conclusion must be that Armstrong voices here a post-modern understanding of religiosity and uses the mystics to buttress that idea.[16]

It is importance to keep in mind that the classical secularisation thesis is challenged by the rise of post-modern religiosity. The increase of science and technology are not themselves the cause of the waning of religion, as the classical secularisation thesis has it, but its de-institutionalisation. In secularisation, religion becomes more pluralistic and variegated, spreading itself over many areas of life such as eating, drinking, vacations, life style and the media. Spirituality takes the place of institutional religion, fostered by the popular idea that the latter is the cause of much violence. Ingredients familiar to interreligious dialogue also feature in post-modernism: plurality, enrichment by the other, no singular possession of the truth. Still, the final result is different. Whereas in interreligious dialogue the emphasis is upon mutuality of religious traditions that may contain similarities and differences, in post-modernism tradition has become flexible to the point of vanishing completely. Whereas in the past of interreligious dialogue the similarities were often highlighted in order to reach mutual understanding (whereas differences were circumvented as stumbling blocks to dialogue), recent developments in interreligious dialogue lead to appreciate differences in a positive light as well. The other religion is viewed in its *alterity*: as other and different, and as such deserving respect. In post-modernism, the existence of traditions as such is rendered relative. The historical and institutional dimensions of religion are ignored or considered as stumbling blocks to a genuine encounter. In addition, identities are no longer demarcated but merge: whatever is appreciated can serve as a building block in one's own post-modern religiosity. Instead of distance in respect for differences, the existence of real differences are doubted. *The disappearance of alterity is a hallmark of post-modernism.*

It may well be that interreligious dialogue has paved the way to post-modern religiosity, but this is not necessarily so. The three levels of interreligious dialogue, namely grass-root, academic and institutional, were ideally closely interconnected and the legitimacy of dialogue was fostered by its communal dimensions.[17] Participants in interreligious conferences were reminded of their representational function to speak on behalf of their community and tradition. This did not prevent a free exchange, but lent a solid base to the dialogue. Ironically, the longer people participate in interreligious dialogue, the more difficult it becomes to maintain this representational function, as the bond with the community tends to loosen: the source community itself does not have the same dialogical experience. In addition, such conferences tend more and more to resort to political

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[16] See: M. Poorthuis, '"Stilte is lofprijzing to U". De mystiek en de institutionele religies', in: J. Frishman & S. Hellemans (red.), *Het christendom en de wereldreligies* (Utrecht: Van Gruting 2008) ['"Silence is praise to Thee". Mysticism and institutional religion'].

[17] See: L. Reedijk, *Roots and Routes. Identity Construction and the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Amsterdam 2010), 57-62.

correctness, with the result that the 'real questions' may be tacitly avoided. Nevertheless, the communal dimensions of interreligious dialogue, the underlying assumption of a well-defined and demarcated religious identity, and the appreciation of differences without assimilating them is patent.

In post-modern religiosity, with its emphasis upon individualism and anti-institutional religiosity, the merging and assimilating of identities becomes more or less mandatory.[18] The motif of individualism goes along with a tendency to globalisation of religiosity, but stripped of its institutional and cultural idiosyncrasies. Globalisation, understood in this way, constitutes the flip-side of individualism. People who leave their religious fold in order to embrace another religion have been frowned upon with disapproval, to put it mildly, in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[19] In contrast, post-modern religiosity rather fosters such crossing-over, in which to a certain extent a formal act of conversion is not even necessary any more, as elements of other religions can be freely adopted and adapted. The traditional rejection of this specific post-modern attitude towards religions explains why post-modern religiosity constitutes no less a threat to interreligious dialogue than fundamentalism. Both are answers to modernity, the one by militating against it (and implicitly taking over many of its achievements), the other by taking over many of its achievements, but militating against institutional religion. Both phenomena are products of modernity and may have more in common than it seems at first sight: the anti-institutional and anti-historical approach of both seem to contain some similarities and even individualism and ensuing 'massification' are not so different as it may seem.

Whatever the connection between the two, in both perspectives the role of interreligious dialogue is considered to be obsolete. Due to mutual short sightedness, post-modern religiosity considers institutional religion as tending towards fundamentalism, whereas fundamentalists accuse institutional religion of post-modern liberalism. Mainstream religious belief, such as in the inspired nature of Scripture, is increasingly considered as itself fundamentalist due to the lack of knowledge in society of what religion is. This may create a quite dangerous situation as mainstream orthodox Muslims may feel themselves criminalized and marginalized in the name of democracy and of freedom of speech. To give just an innocent example of such misunderstanding of orthodox Islam: the famous Islamic expression: 'God knows better', has been criticized in the Netherlands by the anti-Islamic writer Afshin Ellian, himself a refugee from Iran. He denounced the expression as fundamentalist and retorted: 'God does not know better'. He had not understood that the locution: 'God knows better', is

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[18] The historical mutual influences of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are thorough, but can be valued in different ways, both to uphold dialogue and to promote a postmodern profile of religions. Neither possibility is compelling on the basis of history alone.

[19] In Judaism, someone who leaves Judaism for Christianity is still declared dead, in Islam a convert to Christianity is threatened with the death penalty. In this respect it is relevant to point to the not well-known fact that Catholicism still considers someone who leaves the Church an 'apostate'. See mgrs. M. Fitzgerald, 'Dialogue and Proclamation. A Reading in the Perspective of Jewish-Christian Relations', in: D. Kendall *et al*. (eds.), *In Many and Diverse Ways. In Honour of Jacques Dupuis* (New York 2003), 187.

anti-fundamentalist in the sense that the utter of it accepts that his own understanding will always be profoundly less than God's wisdom! It is in fact a locution denoting humility, not fundamentalist hubris. The fundamentalist, however, identifies the two.

Academic developments, at least in the Netherlands, show a remarkable pattern. Academic theology is rapidly declining at the expense of so-called 'religious studies'. The ideal of an unbiased approach to other religions, as developed in the 19th century and connected to the famous phenomenological *epoche*, should be appreciated as a method in its own right. Theology and interreligious dialogue can greatly benefit by this method in order to get rid of prejudice and caricatures. The ideal of putting one's own conviction between brackets should not, however, be the last word in theology and in interreligious dialogue, as it would prevent self-reflection and a dynamic renewal of one's own faith after encountering other religions. The symbiosis between this ideal of detachment in religious studies and a post-modern dissolution of traditions, creates an attitude of 'believing without belonging', in which 'liquid values' take the place of a clearly demarcated religious identity. Self-reflection as the hallmark of theological thinking in a so-called 'first-person' perspective gives way to 'third-person' descriptions, without ever arriving at a real appropriation of new insights.

What should be done?
We could decide to accept the decline of interreligious dialogue. Like all religious institutions in Western Europe, members and participants grow older without young people joining the ranks. In addition, the real actual religious phenomena such as fundamentalism are quite often ignored out of an attitude of 'political correctness', which strongly devalues the significance of dialogue. We may even ponder about the phenomenon of post-modernist religiosity: is this a matter of choice? Or is this rather an anonymous discourse imposing itself and from which there is no escape? It would even be possible to present the post-modern view of truth and of religion in a far more positive light: as a rejoinder of dogmatism, absolutism, intolerance and whatever further. It requires a suspicious mind to detect what lies behind post-modern tolerance: a hidden intolerance against all tradition-based religion.[20] Likewise, its supposed universalism and respect becomes somewhat sloppier when we realize that all claims of truth by other religions will be countered by pointing to still other religions and their claims (without taking these seriously of course), ending up in a non-engagement that avoids all accountability, coming down to invulnerability to any criticism whatsoever.

Interreligious dialogue should not search for theoretical consensus but for practical cooperation. Already, at the end of *Nostra Aetate*, an important criterion for interreligious dialogue has been

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[20] See the interesting philosophical reflections in: M. Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Amsterdam, 2011).

voiced, later on taken up by theologians like Hans Küng, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Ramon Panikkar.

> We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8). No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned. (*Nostra Aetate* §5)

The pressing situation of our planet, living as we do in one world, necessitates an ethics based upon interreligious encounter. This is what Hans Küng calls 'a global ethics'. The Indian theologian Ramon Panikkar, influenced both by his Hindu father and his Catholic mother, warned that there will be either a planet for and with all of humankind in a united effort by all religions, or total destruction will await us. Far from constituting a syncretistic project, this planetary concern of all involved seems the only guarantee for an effective dialogue between religions. 'No religion is an island', the Jewish philosopher Heschel exclaimed in the 1960s. Not only the ecology and social situation on planet would benefit from interreligious dialogue, but religions themselves would gain credibility: how can you preach peace and happiness for the world if you are not even capable of maintaining peace with other religions?

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, instead of proposing a whole change in mentality which runs counter to probably unavoidable postmodern trends in society, I simply propose some measures to safeguard the level of interreligious dialogue, leaving its implementation to whoever wishes to do so.

1. If we want to protect interreligious dialogue against political correctness, we should watch out for professional dialogue participants. Instead we should guarantee a change of dialogue partners every few years.

2. Avoiding delicate topics such as the Israeli-Palestinian problem, fundamentalism, religious violence and blasphemy, education of a new generation, ethical questions *vis-a-vis* technical advancement and secularism, anti-Islamism and antisemitism, is detrimental to the impact of interreligious dialogue upon society. It fosters the impression of a naive mutual understanding without taking serious actual tensions (this attitude is known in the Netherlands as: 'drinking cups of tea together').

3. The three levels of interreligious dialogue: grass root, academic and institutional (i.e., religious leaders), should be in constant interaction with each other. Academic encounters between religions end up to become sterile if they are not fed with issues and problems from the respective religious institutes. Religious institutions in their turn might refrain from dialogue altogether and so will remain stuck in ignorance and prejudice if not challenged by academic learning. Both levels, the religious institutions and academic learning, would remain unfruitful without influencing their respective religious communities.

4. We should regard religious truth claims not as a stumbling block to interreligious dialogue in which a consensus would be the goal, but rather as incentives to dialogue in which differences of opinion are respected.

5. Truth claims should be combined with a dialogical attitude. Truth claims as inner convictions should be welcomed, but buttressing these by disparaging the religious convictions of other should be avoided in order to maintain a dialogical attitude.

6. The aim of interreligious dialogue is practical: to contribute to world peace and to foster a global ethic.

7. The most fruitful antidote against fundamentalism is not post-modernism, but strong religious convictions, organically connected with tradition and community.

Zusammenfassung

Der Dialog zwischen den Religionen scheint in der Krise geraten zu sein. Oberflächlich betrachtet ist die Entwicklung eines postmodernen Begriff der Wahrheit eine Unterstützung der Dialog. Wenn wir aber genauer zusehen ist gerade dieses Begriff einer Wahrheit die genau so mannigfältig ist als es Leute gibt, eine Gefährdung für die Suche nach Wahrheit die im Dialog vorausgesetzt wird. Ich beraube nicht nur mich selbst von einer aufrichtigen Engagement mit der Wahrheit, aber auch den Anderen - womit Ich auf subtiler Weise immer unangetan bleibe für die Wahrheit der Anderen und nie überrascht wird und damit eine Herrschaft ausübe - eine spirituelle Pendant des Neo-kolonialismus Eine diametral entgegengesetze Bedrohung der Dialog zwischen den Religionen konstituiert der Fundamentalismus. In diesem Aufsatz werden die beide Bedrohungen analysiert und am Ende werden Empfehlungen für eine Dialog inder Zukunft gegeben.

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