

Faith to faith – Missiology as encounterology

J N J Kritzinger

(University of South Africa)

ABSTRACT

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This article responds to a book edited by Prof PGJ Meiring in 1996 on the religions of South Africa. It appreciates the integration between the fields of Religious Studies and Theology of Religions in the book, but suggests that a missiological approach should explore the inter-religious encounter, rather than merely what others believe or what we believe about the possibility of their being saved. An approach of “encounterology” requires: a) a holistic and reflexive process that considers seven different dimensions of the encounter; b) a dialogical approach in which a Christian enters into a journey of mutual witness with a follower of another faith. The article uses a seven-point praxis cycle to indicate what such an encounterology could look like.

1 INTRODUCTION

The best way to honour an intellectual is to enter into dialogue with him or her. I use this opportunity to show deep appreciation for my colleague Piet Meiring by contributing to this volume. I came to know him over the years as a loyal, friendly and committed colleague, who made a significant contribution to South African missiology, through his publications, his lectures and postgraduate students. His participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission placed the issue of reconciliation as key dimension of Christian mission firmly on the missiological agenda. Sadly, not many South African missiologists have thus far taken up that particular challenge.

In this paper I honour Piet Meiring by taking up some issues flowing from a publication that he produced on interreligious relationships. With six colleagues he edited a textbook that introduces Christian students to the most influential religions of South Africa, entitled *Suid-Afrika, land van baie godsdienste* (Meiring 1996b)¹. I do not review the book in this paper. Instead I respond to its overall approach by suggesting an alternative approach (or theological method)

1 It also appeared in English as *A world of religions: A South African perspective* (Meiring 1996b).

for theologising about the Christian encounter with people of other religions. So this paper is primarily an exercise in missiological method.

2 RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND THEOLOGY

What I appreciate about *Suid-Afrika, land van baie godsdienste* (Meiring 1996b) is that it combines in one book what is often treated in two different academic disciplines, namely Religious Studies and Missiology, particularly the area of Missiology that is called the “theology of religions”. There have been many debates about the relationship between Religious Studies and theology as intellectual disciplines and about the question whether theology should be taught at universities or at church-based seminaries. For me, the distinction between Religious Studies as a “scientific” study of different religions (which does belong at a university) and theology as a biased, “unscientific” study of only one religion (which therefore does not belong at a university) is sterile and unfruitful. Such an approach is stuck in the narrow modernist assumptions that facts can be separated from values and that unbiased “objectivity” is not only possible but desirable.

I believe that a phenomenological and comparative study of different religions contributes something very important to the field of intellectual endeavour. I do not however believe that it is the only way to study religious traditions, particularly if one is interested in the way that people belonging to religious traditions interact with one another. Religious Studies, as a “non-committed” discipline should be in constant dialogue with “committed” (or theological) approaches to specific religions – whether these are Christian Hindu, Muslim, Jewish or any other. Such dialogue will reveal to Religious Studies practitioners how their biases influence their perceptions and descriptions of the religions. It will also reveal to practitioners of theologies how myopic and insensitive they often are in the way they perceive their own religious traditions – and those of their neighbours.

3 LACK OF WHOLENESS AND REFLEXIVITY

One limitation of the book (Meiring 1996b) that struck me is the unreflexive way in which the relationships between Christians and other believers are treated. In terms of the three “models” that have

become commonplace in “theology of religions” discourse², there are exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist contributions in the book³. I do not have a problem that the authors adopt different theological approaches. In fact, it enriches the book. It is a pity, however, that each of them does not (as an integral part of this intellectual engagement) articulate (and reflect on) the various factors that play a role in his description of and interaction with that religious tradition⁴. Such factors include the author’s own theological position, his prior experience of meeting adherents of that religion, his biases and interests in the topic at hand, his analysis of what role his religion (and the religion he is describing) plays in the South African context, and how the two religious traditions interact as each engages in specific projects to try and make a difference to society. Without such reflexivity, which highlights the wholeness and situatedness of the specific encounter, the description that each author gives of a religious tradition can easily become a form of “othering” that does not directly enhance interreligious relationships. In such an approach, but not necessarily in this book, the religious “other” can become an object of either interest, curiosity, sympathy, admiration, or conversion – but without all the significant factors that have shaped that response becoming apparent to the reader.

At the end of each chapter in Meiring (1996b), an author does give some suggestions about how the meeting between Christians and the followers of that tradition could (or should) proceed. Methodologically, however, this is an “afterthought”, since the main focus is on conveying “correct information” about the religious other. This dimension of information is crucially important, since lack of knowledge always makes relationships worse, especially due to

2 The deluge of publications that survey, classify and evaluate different Christian theological responses to the question of salvation in other religions is too vast to list here. The first publication to use the threefold pattern of exclusivist, inclusivist, pluralist seems to have been Alan Race (1983), but other patterns have been proposed. Influential fourfold patterns were proposed by Bosch (1977) and Knitter (1985). I explore the relationship between these patterns in Kritzing (1998:235).

3 One could, for example, describe the contributions of De Beer (1996b:29-68) as exclusivist, that of Naudé (1996b:151-193) as inclusivist, and that of Krüger (1996:69-97) as pluralist.

4 I use the male pronoun “his” in this section since the authors in the book at hand are all men. I don’t thereby exclude women theologians and scholars from the discussion.

harmful stereotypes that are constantly reinforced in the media and in influential discourses circulating in communities. However, in the approach that I propose the focus will shift from conveying information “about the other religion”, in order to make explicit from the outset the dynamics of the encounter between Christians and their interlocutors of another religious community.

My difficulty with this approach could be stated differently. The theological method underlying it is that good theory lead to good practice. In traditional Protestant theology this is generally expressed by starting with the exposition of Scripture and distilling universal principles of doctrine and ethics out of it, before applying those to a particular context. This method, which is often recognised most clearly in preaching, can be called an *explicatio-applicatio* scheme. The underlying assumption is that a rational understanding of the facts (or correct exegesis of the texts) leads to right action. The simplicity and clarity of this method has ensured its popularity down the ages, but it is inadequate to produce a contextual theology or foster creative interreligious interaction⁵. We need a more complex and inclusive theological method that brings into focus all the factors that shape religious identity and interreligious encounter.

4 CHRISTIANS SPEAKING ABOUT (OR WITH) OTHERS

A second methodological difficulty that I have with the approach embodied in *Suid-Afrika, land van baie godsdienste* (Meiring 1996b) is that predominantly Christian “outsiders” write about how others believe and practise their respective faiths. This is not wrong in itself, but it misses a huge opportunity to enhance interreligious interaction and collaboration. Insiders speak differently about a religious tradition or community than an outsider, and there is room for both voices in the study of religion. But we need to start listening to the “self-identification” of religious believers if we wish to overcome the reification of “religions” into systems comprising scriptures, doctrines, rituals, etc., with the inevitable essentialism produced by such an approach: A religion is seen as consisting essentially of books, doctrines, leaders, etc., without asking how the adherents of that

5 It was particularly liberation theologians who questioned this theological method, calling for a ‘hermeneutical break’ with such a universalising and ahistorical method (cf. Witvliet 1985:28). He points to the inherent idealism of the method, leading to a “dualism, which makes commitment, actual practice, a secondary matter”.

tradition appropriate or interpret them contextually in terms of a particular language, culture and economy.

The best way to overcome the explicit or implicit “essentialism” in our description of “other religions” is to hear how South African Hindus, Muslims and others explain their own faith. Some of us have had the sobering experience of meeting followers of a religious tradition and discovering that they have not heard of certain textbook concepts of “their religion”, or understand them in rather different way than the textbooks. Developments in the study of ethnicity can help us in this regard. As Braxton (2003:21) points out, an essentialist approach assumes that “there are ... relatively fixed, sometimes observable qualities or characteristics that define one ethnic group over against another”. The same applies to our approaches to *religious* identity. Following the growing realisation in the social sciences that group and individual identities are social constructions, we need to give more attention to the complexity of religious identity, to how religious boundaries are constructed and maintained, and to the role of self-identification by insiders in this dynamic process (cf Braxton 2003:21): “[T]he criteria for distinguishing ethnic [or religious – JNJK] boundaries must shift from the quest for external, ‘essential’ characteristics to the analysis of attitudes”. This further implies that we should get Hindu, Jewish, Muslim (and other) colleagues to write chapters about their own traditions, from the inside; and that an open dialogue, aimed at mutual understanding, then develops out of that as an exercise of mutual witness: Each participant writes about who she is, how he sees the world, what they believe about ultimate questions, what rituals and structures they maintain to embody that worldview, and what projects they collectively engage in to expand or protect their faith community in South Africa. And then responses to and from between the participants are built into the process so that the resulting textbook becomes an unfolding dialogue between living followers of two living faiths.

If our academic courses and textbooks are to enhance and deepen interreligious encounter “in the street”, we will need to change our method of giving a large amount of information about a religion, followed by a few suggestions for dialogue or evangelism. The book written jointly by Badru D Kateregga and David W Shenk, a Muslim and Christian scholar respectively, is helpful here. When it was published in 1980 it was entitled *Islam and Christianity*, with a sub-title *A Muslim and a Christian in dialogue* (Kateregga & Shenk 1980), but

the recent re-issue of the book (by another publisher) bears the title *A Muslim and a Christian in dialogue* (Kateregga and Shenk 1997). What makes this book interesting is that Kateregga explains “The Muslim witness” in Part 1 in 12 short chapters and that Shenk gives a short “Christian response” at the end of each chapter, occasionally with a final “clarification” by Kateregga. In Part 2, Shenk sets out “The Christian witness”, with short “Muslim responses” by Kateregga at the end of each chapter. The irenic style of the book allows its Muslim and Christian readers to grow in understanding of each other, while the similarities and differences between the two faiths stand out clearly. This is a very positive model, except that the framework chosen for the exposition of the two faiths is a narrowly doctrinal one. The chapter headings of Part 1 (“The Muslim witness”) are: There is no God but Allah, The Creation, Adam and Hawwa, Satan and Evil, The Books of God, The prophets of Allah, The seal of the prophets, The umma, etc. In the process of explaining these doctrines, neither the Muslim nor the Christian scholar gives a contextual interpretation. This book makes an important contribution, but what now needs to be added are similar books, written in various contexts where Christians and Muslims live together, in which the contextual features of the encounter become clear.

We will have to develop an interactive theological-practical *method* that focuses not only on the other, but also on who we are, what the context is, and what happens when we meet other people of faith. We need not only Religious Studies (What do others believe?) and Systematic Theology (What do we believe about others?), but also Missiology (What happens in the encounter between us and others?). For this, Missiology needs a praxis approach that integrates all the significant factors shaping the dynamics of interreligious encounter. Such an approach takes us beyond “othering” into an ethos of “one-anothering”. This has two major structural implications for missiological method: a) Christians do not speak alone, but in interaction with people of another faith, thus nurturing mutuality; b) Not only doctrinal or “universal” dimensions of the religious traditions are included but all the factors that shape religious identity and interreligious encounter, thus nurturing reflexivity and contextuality.

5 A PRAXIS MODEL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER

Kosuke Koyama (1974:89-94) spoke of the need to do “neighbourology”. This is a very creative expression for the way we

need to do mission, not only in Northern Thailand, from where Koyama coined this phrase, but around the globe. Koyama (1974:91f) speaks of a missionary who is “sandwiched between Christ’s saving reality and his neighbour’s ‘other than myself’ reality”, with an immediate relationship to them, not “cushioned” from them by legalism or any other barrier. For Koyama this means that a Christian witness needs to do two kinds of exegesis: “exegesis of the Word of God, and exegesis of the life and culture of the people among whom he lives and works” (Koyama 1974:91). It also means that we should never treat another person as “an object of my religious conquest” but listen for the message that they might have for us (:90).

This paper fully affirms Koyama’s neighbourology, even though I prefer to call it “encounterology”. The unique role of missiology in relation to other theological (and social scientific) disciplines is to reflect on all the factors shaping the intentional encounters between followers of different religious ways. The title of this paper – “faith to faith” – is meant to sound like “face to face”, since this is what a missiological approach wishes to achieve in response to the challenge of other religions: an informed and respectful faith-to-faith encounter that happens “uncushioned”, face-to-face.

Missiologists are therefore not satisfied when a neat set of models has been constructed to distinguish between the different theological positions on the possibility of salvation in other religions. However useful such a “theology of religions” may be, it is only one dimension of the encounter between different people of faith. Lochhead (1988) makes a convincing case that (for dialogue to happen) we need to be concerned as much with the “ideologies” of actual interfaith encounter “in the street” as with the “theories of salvation” that people articulate “in their heads”. The five ideologies that Lochhead constructs are hostility, isolation, competition, partnership and dialogue. What he then suggests is that it is perfectly possible for someone with a “high” Christology and an exclusivist theory of salvation to have very open and dialogical friendship with people of another faith – something that is implicitly rejected (or not even considered) in the traditional “theology of religions” approach. Christians holding a high Christology are simply written off as “xenophobes” (Lochhead 1988:4) and required to undergo a conversion to a different (“lower”) Christology (Lochhead 1988:93). Over against this, Lochhead (1988:93) insists that

the theological agenda for Christians who are concerned with our relation with other religious traditions needs to

focus on a theology of dialogue, not on a new doctrine of God or a new doctrine of Christ, or a new doctrine of salvation. Dialogue – genuine dialogue – ought not to require any prior conversion on either side, other than a conversion to, and a commitment to, the relationship of dialogue itself’.

Lochhead uses the language of formal logic to characterise someone’s theory of salvation as the “major premise” and the “ideology” as the “minor premise” of a syllogism that leads to the “conclusion” – the actual practice of that person in relation to people of another faith tradition (Lochhead 1988:90ff). In this presentation I unpack Lochhead’s two “premises” of doctrine and ideology into seven dimensions. However, instead of his language of logic I prefer the language of praxis, more specifically of a cycle (or field) of praxis⁶. In interreligious praxis, the following seven dimensions are integrated⁷:

1. Agency: Who am I (or we), in relation to the followers of this religion? What is my social, economic, class position in relation to the “other”? How am I “inserted” into the social space that I share with that person or group? What are the power relations prevailing between us? How do these personal factors influence our meeting?
2. Context analysis: What are the social, political, economic, cultural factors that influence the society within which we encounter each other? How do I analyse this context? How does the person (community) of another faith analyse it? How do these factors influence our encounter?
3. “Ecclesial” analysis: What has been the practice of Christians in the past in relation to that particular faith community? What has been their practice towards Christians? How does this history impact on our encounter today? What are the physical and institutional structures of the two religious communities, what are their leadership patterns and their orientation towards broader society?

6 In an earlier publication (Kritzinger 2002) I developed the outline of a ‘praxis cycle’. This paper develops it in a number of directions.

7 In this respect I draw on the approach of Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1994), who also constructed a pastoral circle with seven dimensions, even though my seven dimensions differ slightly from theirs.

4. Theological reflection: How do I (re)interpret the Bible and my theological tradition in the light of the questions in the previous three dimensions? What do I find in it when I bring these questions to it? What is the unique message of the Christian faith that arises in this context? How do my partners of another faith reflect theologically on their situation (and our encounter) in the light of their own religious sources and authority structures?
5. Spirituality: What type of spirituality do I practice? What is the dominant spirituality of my faith community? How can I mobilise the new theological insights I have gained by renewing my own practice of spirituality? How can this renew and deepen the communal practice of worship in my faith community? How does this influence my relationship with people of this other faith? What type of spirituality does my dialogue partner practice? How do these factors of spirituality influence our meeting?
6. Practical projects: What kind of concrete faith projects am I involved in, particularly in relation to people of other faiths and cultures? What kind of plans are the members of this other religious community making to strengthen their position or to relate to other religious communities? How do these projects influence our encounter? Are our projects parallel (working for the common good) or are they opposed (attempting to ‘convert’ one another, or competing for new converts?). How can I better translate my theological insights (mobilised and embodied in spiritual practices) into projects of witness, service, justice, earthkeeping, reconciliation, etc., in relation to my context and the people of this other faith community?
7. Reflexivity: How consistently and honestly do I integrate the foregoing six questions in my life of faith? How well does my faith community do this? Am I learning and growing through this interfaith encounter? Am I learning from my mistakes? Am I really listening to people of another community? Does this reflection lead me to renewed, purified, deepened agency, context analysis, theological reflection, spirituality and planning? Do I live with integrity (wholeness) in this sense of the word, by consciously integrating these seven dimensions in my interreligious praxis?

In the rest of this paper I discuss these seven dimensions of praxis, reflecting on the specific resources and “tools” (intellectual, emotional, spiritual, cultural) that we need in each of these spheres to develop an interreligious praxis that is faithful to Christ and fruitful in our context.

6 DIMENSIONS OF INTERRELIGIOUS PRACTIS

Before looking at each dimension separately, just a brief comment on the order in which the dimensions are treated. The pastoral circle (or praxis cycle) originated in activist circles and its original purpose is as a mobilising tool for action groups working for transformation within a particular context. The original three step See-Judge-Act approach pioneered by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn started expressly with the See dimension of social analysis, and the same applied to the four step “pastoral circle” of Holland & Henriot (1982) and the seven step “pastoral-hermeneutical circle” of Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991). When the seven-dimensional praxis approach set out below is used as a mobilising tool with a transformative purpose, it will also be helpful to see the seven dimensions as unfolding sequentially as part of an ongoing cycle (or spiral). However, if it is used as an analytical tool with an interpretive purpose, the sequence in which the dimensions are used are less important, as long as all the dimensions come into play at some stage⁸. In this exposition I use the traditional sequence.

6.1 Personal agency

The question of the personal relationship (“insertion”) of a Christian (or group of Christians) in relation to people of another faith is a critically important dimension of missiology, particularly because it is often neglected. The question concerns not only the who? (agency) of mission, but also the how? of that relating (identification) and the power relations prevailing between the partners in the encounter. Attitudes of inferiority or superiority, fear or anger, play a central role in how people relate. These attitudes always have a history; they originated somewhere in a person’s childhood or youth; and often first impressions (even false ones) are lasting.

Personal bias and prejudice play such a large role in interfaith relations that they need to be declared and examined if a mature encounter is to take shape. As with anti-racism training, it may be

8 These two uses of the praxis cycle/field are similar to Rambo’s (1993) distinction between the two uses of his seven-point interpretive framework for religious conversion as a “sequential stage model” and a “systemic stage model”.

was evident when they were enemies⁹. Overdiep (1985:54) describes the ‘horizontal’ relationship between opponents, as opposed to the ‘vertical’ relationship between enemies, as follows:

They are on a journey, in a struggle with each other and themselves, to become partners and at least they take each other seriously enough to enter into conflict. Hostility is aimed at destruction, but conflict aims at resolution and reconciliation.... Conflict presupposes contact, which is precisely what is denied and avoided in hostility [own translation].

It is clearly preferable that they then develop further from opponents into colleagues or (even) friends, but it is probably unrealistic to expect this, given the dynamics of group identity formation and boundary-making inherent in the functioning of religious communities. However, the change from enemy into opponent is already a huge conversion, for which we should work in interreligious (and other) relationships.

Overdiep (1985:36) further points out that the stranger (who doesn’t affect us emotionally), can suddenly be transformed into an enemy, as has happened to foreign workers in the Netherlands when the economic situation deteriorated. Something similar happened recently in South Africa, when ignored or tolerated ‘strangers’ from other African countries were suddenly transformed into ‘enemies’ who had to be driven from the homes.

This concept of emotional distance can give partners of different religious persuasions the words to name (and own up to) the emotional dimensions of their relationship, and hopefully help them to overcome ‘stranger’ and ‘enemy’ positions.

6.1.2 Johari Window

Another resource that religious partners can use to uncover their prejudices and develop deeper self-knowledge in relation to others, is the ‘Johari Window’. Developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham at UCLA in California in 1955, this cognitive psychological tool for deepening self-awareness allows partners in social interaction to become more aware of how they see themselves, how others see them,

9 Overdiep was not writing specifically about interreligious relationships, but about general human relations of enmity, friendship, etc. but I am convinced that his insights may be fruitfully applied to interreligious relationships.

and how they think others see them. The window has four panes or quadrants, usually labelled as open, blind, hidden and unknown respectively (Reece & Brandt 2005:191). The *open* quadrant represents the area of public awareness: information about yourself that you and others know. As a relationship with someone else matures, this pane of the window gets bigger, reflecting your desire to be known. The *blind* area consists of information about yourself that others know, but that you are not aware of (Reece & Brand 2005:192). As a relationship with others becomes more self-disclosing, they become more willing to tell you what they think of you, and so this pane becomes smaller, as the open panes gets bigger. The *hidden* area contains information about you that you know but others do not, in other words, private feelings and needs that you prefer to keep to yourself (Breece & Brand 2005:193). The larger this areas is, the more you build a wall of separation between yourself an others, creating uncertainty about you in other people. The *unknown* area is made up of factors unknown to you and to others, like unrecognized talents or unconscious motives, that affect your interaction with others. As you grow in self-awareness and self-acceptance through greater self-disclosure, the open pane of the window grows, at the expense of the other panes. Applying these insights to project management, Barkley (2008:14) remarks that one of the greatest risks in any project is that decision-makers “overestimate what they know and underestimate what they do not know.” This is eminently true also of interreligious relationships, and the Johari Window can help participants of different religious backgrounds to grow in self-disclosure and to deepen their encounter.

There are many other resources that can be used to enhance the quality of interpersonal encounter between people of different religious persuasions. This personal, emotional dimension should never be seen in isolation from the other six dimensions of the praxis cycle/field, but neither should it be left out of the equation.

6.2 Context analysis

To analyse a context as part of a praxis cycle/field is “reading the signs of the times” or “interpreting this kairos” (Cochrane et al. 1991:18). It focuses on the historical and structural factors that have given shape to a society and keep on influencing how people within that society relate to each other. We need to examine how power relations (or perceived power relations) in a society affect attitudes between people of different faiths. Factors such as gender and cultural identity, racist societal

structures, poverty and privilege, nationalism, etc. have a huge effect on interfaith relations.

In apartheid South Africa, residential separation on the basis of race led to the isolation and estrangement of Hindus, Muslims and followers of the African Religion from many (especially white) Christians. These residential patterns are changing slowly, but in some respects the estrangement remains. It is particularly when religious identities have become closely linked to (or identified with) racial, cultural, gender or class identities that interreligious relationships are complicated enormously by such broader societal structures. Since religion should not be reified into a separate “thing” in society, existing apart from or in opposition to other social structures and institutions, interreligious encounters will always be deeply affected by the broader structures of society. Partners in interfaith encounter need to acknowledge this and spell out to themselves (and to one another) “where they come from” in terms of the macro-structures of society – and how this affects their relationship.

6.2.1 Analysis of culture

One key dimension of a context analysis that can deepen an interreligious encounter is cultural analysis. Partners in an encounter need to take cognisance of the role of their respective cultures in the way they perceive and experience their own faith as well as in the way these cultures influence the way they relate to people of another faith. No religion exists outside of culture, but there are different kinds of relationship between religious convictions and cultural patterns of behaviour. Since all people have been socialised by their families and other social institutions (like schools and religious organisations) into becoming who they are culturally, culture is the air we breathe – often not noticed since it is the “normal” way to do or see things. In order to “name” the dimensions of one’s own culture one needs to “take distance” from it by adopting a culture theory which forces one to become reflexively aware of what one usually takes for granted. This is not a painless process, but essential to any mature interaction between people of different religious communities¹⁰.

10 It is also of key importance for mature interaction to take place between people of different cultural backgrounds who have adopted the same religion, but that is a topic for another publication.

Various culture theories are on offer, but some have already been applied to missiological concerns, for example the semiotic approach used by Schreier (1985), which views culture as a “vast communication network” with a number of semiotic domains (such as the economic, social, political and religious), each with a root metaphor giving unity and structure to all the metaphors that connect the signs and symbols of the domain with each other. The formation of cultural identity and the process of cultural change are central to Schreier’s approach, and he defines identity as constituted by the nature of group boundaries and the underlying worldview (Schreier 1985:63ff). These are very helpful insights for analysing the cultural dimension of interreligious encounter, since the formation of identity (personal and communal) is at once the greatest strength of a religious tradition and the greatest obstacle to interreligious understanding and collaboration. If religious partners can articulate for themselves (and for one another) what the boundary markers of their group identity are and what elements are central to their worldview, there is the possibility of a deeper understanding of each other to take place.

The culture theory developed by Geert Hofstede (1997) can also contribute to deepening interreligious encounter. He has constructed an approach that maps a particular culture in terms of five polarities (each expressed as a continuum): power distance (degree of inequality), individualism vs collectivism, masculinity (assertiveness) versus femininity (modesty), uncertainty avoidance (tolerance of uncertainty), and long term orientation (level of long-term commitments and respect for tradition). Hofstede’s concept of national cultures has been criticised, but that does not invalidate the usefulness of his five polarities. If partners in interreligious encounter can place themselves (and their cultures or subcultures) on these five continua it could greatly deepen their self-understanding and interaction.

Another approach to culture that I wish to mention is that of David Hesselgrave (1991). He points out that there are seven levels in any culture, all of which need to be taken into consideration when one wishes to communicate “cross-culturally”¹¹. These seven levels (Hesselgrave 1991:192) are worldview (ways of perceiving the world), cognitive processes (ways of thinking), linguistic forms (ways of

11 I prefer the term ‘inter-culturally’ to express the mutuality of all good communication, but this terminological difference does not invalidate the helpful insights generated by Hesselgrave in his book.

expressing ideas), behavioural patterns (ways of acting), social structures (ways on interacting), media influence (ways of channelling the message), and motivational resources (ways of deciding). Once again, if partners in an interreligious encounter can reflect on these dimensions of the cultural air they breathe, it can greatly enhance the quality of their interaction.

6.2.2 Other influential dimensions of context

Without being exhaustive, it is important to realise that every human being is socially situated, “both at the micro-level (family, upbringing, circle of friends, immediate authorities) and at the macro-level (community, society, nation, international, global) (Cochrane et al. 1991:26). The more we take cognisance of these dimensions, the more meaningful our interreligious and intercultural interactions will become. It is especially important not to ignore the global dimension of the equation, since more than ever what happens in Iraq, Palestine, Somalia and Zimbabwe, affects the way people of different religious persuasions interact with each other in South Africa.

6.3 “Ecclesial” analysis

This section represents a broadening of the “ecclesial analysis” highlighted by Cochrane et al (1991:36ff). It reflects “the need to analyse the reality of the church, both in itself and as part of the wider social structure” (Cochrane 1991:36). It is not vastly different from the broader context analysis (6.2); in fact, many people who use the pastoral circle, do this ecclesial analysis as an integral part of context analysis. What makes it attractive, from the vantage point of interreligious encounter, to highlight this dimension is the importance of religious organisations and of what happened in the past between religious communities. Religious communities are inherently conservative institutions, since many of them preserve scriptures, rituals and traditions that are hundreds (if not thousands) of years old. As a result religious communities have long memories, and it is amazing how events that happened a thousand years ago, like the crusades, are part of the living memory of Muslims and Christians, shaping their present-day interaction in negative ways. Similarly, every encounter between Christians and Jews today take place under the shadow of the holocaust perpetrated by a German “nation” that was steeped in Christianity. The same applies to other (perhaps less momentous) events that have taken place between religious

communities, or between political communities dominated by the ethos of a specific religious tradition¹².

What I am proposing here is not only ecclesial analysis (i.e., of the Christian church) but an analysis of the history of both the religious communities represented in the encounter, particularly if there were instances of injustice and alienation in the past that still affect their relationship. The purpose of this historical analysis is not accusation or rejection, but precisely (in terms of Overdiep's language) an attempt to move from enemies to opponents (or colleagues), by looking honestly at "where we come from" as religious communities

"Ecclesial" analysis involves more than history, however. It is also helpful to look at the leadership structures and organisational patterns of the two religious communities, as well as its ethos and basic orientation towards the society in which it finds itself. The ethnic, gender, class and 'racial' composition of the two religious communities are also significant factors to consider at this point, to the extent that these have an influence on the nature of the interaction.

6.4 Theological reflection

6.4.1 Theology of religions

One focus of this dimension is to explore how each religious community views other religious traditions, specifically the "other" tradition represented by the partner in the encounter. It is the "theology of religions" of both communities that is on the agenda here. In Christian theology there is a spectrum of views on this question, as mentioned before. In the "theology of religions" it has become customary to use the three-fold distinction of exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism proposed by Race, but other patterns have been proposed (cf. Kritzinger 1998:235 and footnote 2). Authors like Bosch and Newbigin have proposed, however, that we move beyond the narrow emphasis on

12 In the South of the world, among people of different 'non-Christian' faiths, colonialism is generally seen (and judged) as having been a Christian endeavour, or least an endeavour blessed by Christianity. Similarly, the apartheid policy, with all the damage it did to cultural and religious communities (and their mutual interaction) in South Africa, was (and still is) seen as a Christian project since the Dutch Reformed Church for many years gave theological justification to it. This continues to influence the interaction between Christians and people of other religious persuasions in the post-colonial South and in post-apartheid South Africa.

salvation as a destiny beyond this life, which underlies this typology (eg. Newbigin 1989:176f):

In the debate about Christianity and the world's religions it is fair to say that there has been an almost unquestioned assumption that the only question is, 'What happens to the non-Christian after death?' I want to affirm that this is the wrong question and that as long as it remains the central question we shall never come to the truth.

6.4.2 Mutual witness

However, this dimension of the encounter also has a more constructive purpose. It urges the interlocutors to explain to each other the basic message, beliefs and practices of their religious traditions, in relation to the other dimensions of the praxis cycle/field. If a creative interaction takes place and a deep listening has taken place, the partners will not merely repeat the orthodox doctrines of their traditions but attempt to reformulate their beliefs in terms of the questions asked by the other religious tradition. This is called "mutual witness" (eg. Williamson 1992), a concept that is elegantly explained by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991:par 40) in their document *Dialogue and Proclamation*:

In this dialogue of salvation, Christians and others are called to collaborate with the Spirit of the Risen Lord who is universally present and active. Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations. It reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one's beliefs and a common exploration of one's respective religious convictions. In dialogue, Christians and others are invited to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God's personal call and gracious self-gift which, as our faith tells us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of his Spirit.

The book by Kateregga and Shenk (1997) to which I have already referred, should also be mentioned in this regard since it has a similar intention: In an honest and irenic spirit, two religious partners witness to each other, commending to each other the heart of their own faith.

This is an encounter of commitments that does not necessarily threaten the identity of either religious partner or community, but it does lead to new discoveries of the riches of one's own faith, as each partner attempts to articulate their faith in the worldview of the "other", in response to the challenge presented by that other religious tradition.

6.5 Spirituality

One of the most significant factors influencing interreligious encounter is spirituality, that is, the way the partners experience the reality of their faith, which provides the depth dimensions of the interreligious encounter.

6.5.1 Typologies

To help religious partners to name their experiences and their type of spirituality, a typology like that of Cannon (1994) or Foster (1998) could be useful. Their two sets of types are quite similar (in no specific order of importance):

<i>Dale H. Cannon</i>	<i>Richard J. Foster</i>
Sacramental liturgy	Incarnational tradition (The sacramental life)
Faith seeking understanding	Evangelical tradition (The Word-centred life)
Meditative contemplation	Contemplative tradition (The prayer-filled life)
Spiritual empowerment	Charismatic tradition (The Spirit-empowered life)
Devotional surrender	Holiness tradition (The virtuous life)
Deeds of justice	Social justice tradition (The compassionate life)

Both authors emphasise that these "streams" are not mutually exclusive, and that many believers experience their faith in terms of more than one of these "types". Cannon (1994:320) goes so far as to say that it is ideal for a Christian to be at home in all six these types of spirituality in order to experience the wholeness of Christian life. Even though it may be rare to find an individual who is deeply experienced in all six types, Cannon says that a local congregation in the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions will certainly have all six types represented in its ranks – and that it should be seen as the way to attain the catholicity of the Christian faith.

Cannon (1994) develops his typology in Religious Studies mode, and contends that it is applicable not only to the Christian tradition. In his article he illustrates how it also applies to the Hindu tradition (Cannon 1994:312). One could ask a partner in an interreligious encounter whether this typology would apply to her/his religious

community – and whether it would be helpful to give expression to his/her own spirituality. The purpose of this is not a modernist exercise in classification or pigeonholing, but to give partners terms with which to describe their religious experiences. In this way the dimension of spirituality can become an indispensable part of the interreligious encounter and the praxis cycle/field, even if the partners speedily move beyond these typologies into “thicker” (more narrative) descriptions of their own lives and communities.

6.5.2 Worship

Attention to the spirituality dimension of interreligious encounter raises the issue of sharing in each other’s worship. The unique nature of a religious tradition is expressed in the way it sings, prays or meditates. It is therefore a natural development for partners in an interreligious encounter to be interested in understanding and experiencing the heart of their partner’s worship. Various scruples and fears could come to the fore on the side of guests when this happens, but also various forms of *arcanum* (rules restricting entry or participation in certain rituals) on the side of hosts. It is a sensitive area which needs to be planned wisely beforehand, and yet it is an indispensable part of an in-depth interreligious encounter. Someone who has never entered a mosque to sense the atmosphere of exalted majesty and simplicity expressed in its architecture can read all the books in the world about Islam but will always have an inadequate sense of what Islamic worship is and what it “does” to Muslims.

6.6 Practical projects

Another important factor that determines the shape of interreligious encounters is the concrete projects the partners are involved in within their respective faith communities, particularly as they relate to other faith communities. This raises the question of the community’s sense of mission in society. In this regard too participants need terms with which to name their community’s ‘posture’ in society, as well as the scope of its involvement in community engagement. There is a danger that Christian concepts could be imposed on other religious communities at this point, but descriptive categories need to be developed for the missions of different religious communities so that they could do justice to all the different groups¹³.

13 In an earlier article (Kritzinger 1995) I attempted to develop such an inclusive framework for studying religious communities as ‘agents of change.’

One example of a helpful map for religious communities generally was developed by Roozen, McKinney and Carroll (1984:87) for Christian congregations. They construct four different “mission orientations” that a religious community could have in society. They arrive at these four mission orientations (civic, sanctuary, activist, evangelistic) as the four quadrants when you plot worldview (this-worldly vs otherworldly) against boundary-making (membership-centred vs publicly proactive):

	Membership-centred	Publicly proactive
This-worldly	<p><i>Civic orientation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Affirm existing social structures ➤ Stress civil harmony and avoidance of conflict ➤ Individual members make own decisions on moral issues 	<p><i>Activist orientation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Stress justice and a critical posture to existing social structures ➤ Openness to member and congregational involvement in social action ➤ Openness to confrontation and conflict
Other-worldly	<p><i>Sanctuary orientation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refuge from this world ➤ Tradition and doctrine ➤ Opposition to congregational involvement in social change ➤ Patriotism and adherence to civil law 	<p><i>Evangelistic orientation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Personal witnessing ➤ Seek conversion of everyone to the ‘one true faith’ ➤ Strong openness to the Holy Spirit

When a faith community has an “evangelistic” orientation in public life, it is important to explore the methods it uses to achieve that. It is also interesting to ask whether a community with an evangelistic orientation also adopts some of the other three orientations to some extent; and to what extent it succeeds in integrating context analysis, theological reflection, spirituality and project planning into a meaningful whole. Do the different dimensions of its mission praxis “fit together” in an ethical and relevantly contextual way? This is often a sensitive area for people of different religious communities to talk about, since most conversions take place against the express wishes of the faith community losing the convert. Most faith communities have sanctions against “apostasy”, to try and limit the number of members that it loses, but since the South African Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and association, along with freedom of religious belief, people are legally free to adopt or reject any religious message without fear of being intimidated or punished. In practice, though, the social and family pressures on (potential) converts are often huge, particularly in collectivist cultures (to use Hofstede’s culture theory).

In recent times there have been attempts to draft a code of conduct for the missionary behaviour of different religious communities in order to prevent, or at least curb, the unacceptable use of material inducements and other forms of force to induce conversions. On March 11 2008, the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief released a document entitled “Missionary activities and human rights: Proposing a code of conduct regarding missionary activities”, asking for comments¹⁴. Some Christian churches may not support such a move, since they have deeply entrenched enemy images of other religions, which may not allow them to negotiate with those religious communities about acceptable missionary conduct. However, it is an issue that should be discussed by mature partners in interreligious encounter.

An increasingly important question on this point is whether different religious communities also have the willingness to engage in joint mission for the common good in society. In terms of Overdiep’s typology, that would mean seeing other religious communities not as strangers, enemies or opponents, but as colleagues or friends, working together for justice and peace in society. Newbigin (1989:181) says pointedly that “the Christian will be eager to cooperate with people of all faiths and ideologies in all projects which are in line with the Christian’s understanding of God’s purpose in history”, even though that does not take away Newbigin’s commitment to witness and evangelism. This could be a fruitful topic for conversation among interreligious partners.

In another paper (Kritzinger 1997) I argued that three ‘postures’ are involved in interreligious encounter: shoulder-to-shoulder, face-to-face, and back-to-back: Christians should be willing to collaborate (shoulder-to-shoulder) with people of other faiths in community projects for the common good, without giving up the face-to-face posture of witnessing to others (and being witnessed to), while the acid test for all partners in dialogue is probably what we say about other religions when they are not present (back-to-back). It seems to me more urgent than before to develop these three postures of interfaith encounter.

14 http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr_cc_draft.php

6.7 Reflexivity

The seventh, and final, dimension of the praxis cycle/field brings us full circle back to Personal agency again, raising questions like: What is the quality of our agency? Is our engagement with the other dimensions of the cycle helping us to relate more sensitively and purposefully, with greater integrity and depth, with people of other religious persuasions?

The resources and tools that are appropriate at this point of the process is journalling, retreats and strategic planning sessions. Ideally the praxis cycle is not meant for an individual but a group of committed believers. That is particularly important with this dimension of reflecting on the wholeness and integrity of our praxis. We need to submit ourselves to the scrutiny and critique of committed colleagues, who seek with us to embody the gospel of God's reign more faithfully and effectively in our context.

It will be clear by now that this approach is not designed for theologians working in isolation at their desks, but rather for a group or community of Christians who are committed to expressing and embodying the vision of the Reign of God in a particular context¹⁵. By this I am not downplaying the importance of academically-trained theologians, specialised researchers or professional academic theologians, who have the calling to think and write. I am merely situating theologians in the broader framework where they belong, namely alongside of other Christians, as 'organic intellectuals,' actively involved in attempts to make a difference to society.

7 CONCLUSION

Two implications of my proposed approach need to be briefly pointed out in conclusion.

7.1 A theology for a particular interfaith encounter

This approach will help us avoid the tendency in the dominant 'theology of religions' discourse to assume that a particular theologian or church (for example one that is classified as 'exclusivist') will respond in the same way to *all* other religious communities. There are some Christians who regard Islam as 'barbaric' or 'medieval', because some Muslims practise amputation of limbs in their penal code, but at the same time regard Hinduism or Buddhism as wonderful religions,

15 Cf what Schreier (1985:16f) said on 'the community as theologian'.

since they have produced compassionate human beings like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and the Dalai Lama. It is therefore necessary to develop a theology of interreligious encounters between living religious *people and communities*, rather than a theology of *religions*. Credible and in-depth theological reflection in this field will therefore manifest itself as a theology of Christian-African encounter, Christian-Buddhist encounter, Christian-Muslim encounter, etc. By starting with face-to-face personal agency (identification or insertion) this approach does not allow one to produce a “theology of (all) religions”, but only a focused theologising-and-acting process for one specific interreligious encounter at a time.

This proposal will therefore not give rise to a book to replace Meiring (1996). If the logic of this approach is followed it would lead to a series of books (or modules), each dedicated to a specific interreligious encounter.

7.2 Christians differing among themselves

One basic intention of this praxis approach has not yet become visible, namely to help Christians interact more respectfully and constructively with fellow-Christians who adopt different approaches to people of other faiths. Christians not only face the challenge of religious pluralism in society but also of theological pluralism generated among Christians by the impact of other religious claims. If the ‘theology of religions’ becomes a battlefield for Christian churches and theologians, where they fight each other and cause further fragmentation among Christians, then there will be less positive energy for constructive witness and service in society. What this praxis approach hopes to contribute to the intra-Christian debate is to make everyone aware of the role played by each of the seven dimensions mentioned above in the shaping of each one’s specific interreligious praxis. This may help to deepen the debates among Christians about the meaning of particular Bible verses (such as Jn 14:6 and Ac 4:12) by getting participants to realise that their differing interpretations of such texts are a result of at least six other factors, namely all the dimensions of the praxis cycle.

This praxis approach could help participants in a discussion to see that each form of interreligious praxis – whether they agree with it or not – is a complex and finely woven interplay of these seven dimensions. This forces each participant to think concretely about the way in which her own interreligious praxis has been and is being shaped by these dimensions, *and* at the same time to develop

understanding and tolerance for how the praxis of the “irritating” person across the table come into being. The expression “I can see where you come from”, which is sometimes used in discussions, expresses something of how this approach functions. It helps us get a sense of the seven “places” where other people (and we ourselves) “came from” to where we are now. This approach is not meant to produce a lame relativism, suggesting that any view about other religions is understandable – and therefore acceptable – even if it is racist, ethnocentric, sexist, or blatantly unscriptural. There are limits to what any person or group is prepared to tolerate, but those limits are also a product of the interplay between these seven dimensions.

Underlying this ecumenical intention of the praxis approach is the paradoxical attitude of “roots and wings”, which suggests that mature human beings (and theologians) are able to affirm their roots while spreading their wings¹⁶. Applied to our relationships with people of other faiths, and to Christians who differ from us, the roots and wings metaphor reminds us that we do not have all the answers, that we are rooted not in what we have earned but in what we have received by grace; that we worship, witness and serve epiclestically¹⁷ – depending on the Spirit of Truth to keep on leading us deeper into the truth – as we spread our wings to explore, discover, listen and rejoice in the rich diversity of languages, cultures and religions in God’s world.

Along this journey of faith a missiology may emerge that will be encounterology: A critical and creative reflection on the encounters between the people of the Way and the people of other ways – arising out of encounters and nurturing ever more authentic and transformative encounters – on our way into the fullness of the Reign of God.

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16 I developed this notion elsewhere (Kritzinger 2002:145f), but mention it here in order to clarify the underlying ethos out of which my praxis approach emerges.

17 Epiklesis is the Greek term used for the prayer in the Eucharistic liturgy calling on the Holy Spirit to come and make the sacrament a real encounter with the living Christ. Christian worship and mission both proceed in an epiclestic way.

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