THE CHURCH IN DIALOGUE WITH OTHER RELIGIONS IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD: REFLECTING BEYOND NOSTRA AETATE.

A Thesis

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Theology

By

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December 2017
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ABSTRACT

THE CHURCH IN DIALOGUE WITH OTHER RELIGIONS IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD: REFLECTING BEYOND NOSTRA AETATE.

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Marinus Chijioke Iwuchukwu.

The church has accomplished tremendous strides in interfaith dialogue within the past fifty-two years after the promulgation of Nostra Aetate, the declaration which opened a positive and revolutionary avenue for the church in her dialogical encounter with the non-Christian religions. This project praises Nostra Aetate for the bold step in entering the unfamiliar terrain in the church’s dialogue with non-Christian religions, by affirming in these religions “ray of truth,” “seed of the gospel,” element of “truth and holy” and reproving as foreign to the Christian faith any discrimination and harassment against people based on culture, race, condition in life and religion.

However, the postmodern world today, characterized by religious pluralism and diversity, and dethronement of grand narrative, pose a challenge for the church in dialogue with
non-Christians to reflect beyond the tenets inherent in the conciliar document, *Nostra Aetate* in order to foster a genuine dialogical encounter. The project therefore calls on the church to avoid subsuming all particularity, historicity and context into the theological principle of sameness and universalism to prevent all judgments, and all narcissism in interreligious encounter.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Mrs. Benedicta Agyarkoh. Your encouragement and relentless support brought this thesis to fruition.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sincere appreciation is extended to all those who have accompanied me on this academic journey for your love, patience, direction and constructive criticisms. Special thanks go to Dr. Marinus C. Iwuchukwu for his insightful inputs and guidance towards the completion of this project. I also acknowledge the contributions of Professor Elochukwu Uzukwu for accepting to read my thesis and to all faculty members for walking me through academic doors of theological discourses.

Thank you Most Rev. John Bonaventure Kwofie, CSSp for reposing confidence in me and offering me the opportunity to further my studies. To the Adjei and Agyarkoh families in Ghana, the Ladic, Rolandi, Vargo, Kasanovich, Porco, Kostandinu, Curley and Neidig families in USA and all parishioners of St. Maurice-Forest Hills, I would like to register my heartfelt appreciation for your ceaseless support, love, and concern towards my education. Thanks to Frs. Lazarus and Dominic for your fraternal advice and encouragement.

Daniel Aboagye Adjei.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Postmodern Era, Characteristics and Challenges to the Church in Dialogue With Other Religions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic of the Postmodern Era</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of Postmodern Era to the Church in Dialogue</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interreligious Dialogue and Its Necessity</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Church’s Understanding and Attempt at Dialogue with Other Religions from Gregory VII to Thomas Aquinas</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Aquinas and the Fate of ‘Outsiders’ on Salvation</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: The Church in Dialogue From the 19th Century to the 20th Century Prior to the Promulgation of <em>Nostra Aetate</em>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Boniface VIII to the Ninetieth Century</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twentieth Century Before Vatican II Council</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl Rahner’s Theological Views on Other Religions</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ecclesiam Suam</em> on Other Religions Before the Promulgation of <em>Nostra Aetate</em></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Three: During and after Vatican II: The Church’s Vision of Dialogue with Other Religions

*Nostra Aetate*: A Historical Turning Point of the Church in Interreligious Dialogue……………………………………………………………………………………………..33

*Nostra Aetate*: A Positive and the New Outlook……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………34

Pope Francis ‘Church’ in Dialogue with Non-Christians: Implementation and Accomplishment of *Nostra Aetate*…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..42

Chapter Four: Reflecting Beyond *Nostra Aetate* After Fifty-Three Years of Promulgation.

Inherent Hermeneutic Flaws of *Nostra Aetate* and their Implications……………….50

Revitalizing Interreligious Dialogue: Rejecting Some Western Dominant Principles of Theology………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Vatican II, <em>Nostra Aetate</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Vatican II, <em>Gaudium et Spes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Vatican II, <em>Lumen Gentium</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Vatican II, <em>Dei Verbum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>Vatican II, <em>Ad Gentes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCID</td>
<td>Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General Introduction

Background and Purpose

The need for a new hermeneutic grounded and validated by religious diversity in our postmodern world cannot be overemphasized as the Church endeavors to dialogue with other religions in general and particularly with indigenous religions which did not receive substantive attention in Nostra Aetate.

More than fifty years after the Second Vatican Council, Nostra Aetate has undoubtedly fostered interreligious dialogue among nations, peoples, cultures, and faith traditions. It has influenced and changed the tone of dialogue between the Church and other religions through post-Vatican II papal writings and interactions. Nostra Aetate, a pivotal document in the Church’s dialogical encounter has not only reshaped the perspectives of the Church in her relationship to the world and other religions, but has also offered a truly revolutionary attitude of openness.¹ The document sought to procure a new approach to interreligious dialogue as it highlights the positive and shared understanding instead of condemning what is found in other religions that is incompatible with Christian teachings and doctrines.

Notwithstanding the positive assertions and accomplishments, which the Church has made through the implementation of Nostra Aetate, there are some identifiable hermeneutic flaws inherent in the document. For instance, Nostra Aetate writes “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although

differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”\(^2\) The point of consideration as the Church dialogues with non-Christian religions is, by whose judgment are these religions true and holy? Is it from the perspective of the Catholic Church or do truthfulness and holiness emerge as the innate character of the religions? The flaws inherent in the declaration indubitably have effects on the dialogues that should ensue between the Church and indigenous religions.

In the light of these flaws, this thesis would reflect on the Church’s dialogue with other religions, narrowing it to indigenous religions to indicate that, they have their own central focus, be it eschatological, world-based, or consciousness-based that ought to be appreciated. If monotheism and universalism become the foundation for sophistication of cultures as presumed by the *Nostra Aetate*, then the Church will fail to understand and appreciate the reality that, each culture and religion has its own philosophy and unique beauty, which becomes a gift to all humanity when encountered with respect and dignity.

It will be argued that for a fruitful dialogue with indigenous religions, the church must delink herself from Eurocentric or dominant western methodologies of theologizing which disregard the theology that takes cognizance of indigenous religions, different sources of revelation (like literary and non-literary), contextualization, relativity, and religious pluralism. Goizueta points out that truth and knowledge which the postmodernist conceive as radically particular, radically contextual, radically relative, radically ambiguous and always in flux cannot be subsumed into the concept of sameness.

and universal truth assumed by the church in her dialogical encounter.\textsuperscript{3} Thus, this thesis will argue strongly for particularity or contextual method as a viable tool for interreligious dialogue.

In as much as the thesis will underscore the progress the church has made in her dialogue with other faiths especially after \textit{Nostra Aetate}, it would be noted also that there remain equally significant stumbling blocks to dialogue with indigenous religions as compared to the interreligious dialogue with the Abrahamic religions.

\section*{Scope of the Project}

The thesis will be in four chapters: Chapter one will elaborate on the context of postmodernity and the challenges it poses to the church for which interreligious dialogue is necessitated. It will then trace the historicity of interreligious engagement of the Church with other religions considering some papal encyclicals and Church documents. A prime focus would be given to the periods from Gregory VII to Thomas Aquinas.

Chapter Two will continue to construct the church’s understanding and attempts of dialogical relationship with other faith traditions considering the periods of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century prior to the promulgation of \textit{Nostra Aetate}. Official writings of Popes Boniface VIII, Pius IX, Pius XII, pronouncements of some Councils, and some theologians would be considered.

Chapter three will further concentrate on the details of \textit{Nostra Aetate}, and the Church’s accomplishments through the implementation of the principles of the document.

It will further explore the current trend of the church’s encounter with non-Christian religions in Pope Francis’s pontificate propelled by the tenets of the declaration on other religions.

Chapter four would reflect beyond *Nostra Aetate* by first pointing out some hermeneutical flaws. The root of the flaws would be substantiated bringing forth the need to reject or redefine such theological principles. This chapter will also discuss some theological principles inherent in world indigenous religions, particularly the Akan indigenous religion in Ghana. It would be argued that, the Church could adopt some of these concepts and principles to enrich her theology, worship and again open up more for dialogue with indigenous religions in general. A general conclusion would be drawn to underline the point that dialogue by its nature must respect the particularity of one’s religion, allowing the other to articulate from its own context and experiences. This will curtail all judgments, one’s self-positioning and all narcissism in any religious encounter. The courageous vision taken by *Nostra Aetate* into unfamiliar terrain must be encouraged in the Catholicism as it provides the Church in dialogue the opportunities to encounter new realities with other religions because faith is never exhaustive.
Chapter One

Postmodern Era, Characteristics and Challenges to the Church in Dialogue with Other Religions

Introduction

At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. In language intelligible to every generation she should be able to answer the ever occurring questions which men ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other. We must be aware and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live.¹

More than fifty years after the official closure of Vatican II, the world has changed and continues to change. It was therefore prophetic when the church affirmed that she needs to cautiously read the signs of the times to interpret them in the light of the Gospel. For the church to attain a deeper and clearer awareness of itself and its mission especially as she dialogues and collaborates with other religious traditions and cultures in the pluralistic world, she must understand the changing phase of religion and the world history. It is important then for this thesis to delve a little bit into the epoch within which the church engages non-Christian religions in her dialogical encounter, bringing out the characteristics and the challenges this era poses.

Characteristic of the Postmodern Era

There has been divergence and conflicting agreement among scholars regarding drawing lines between the various eras and what is peculiar to each of them. This

¹ Gaudium et Spes 4 as in Austin Flannery, ed., Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents.
explains the reason why today there is no universal agreement among scholars as regards the name befitting this present age. Modernity, late modernity, post-modernity and post-postmodern have been some of the common names proposed by scholars. It is based on this backdrop that David Tracy writes that “we live in an age that cannot name itself.”

Notwithstanding the different views among scholars, the majority generally use the term postmodern or postmodernity which was famously defined by Jean-François Lyotard as “incredulity to metanarrative” to describe this current historical period. Reflecting on the features characterized by this era, one would understand the challenges this historical period poses to the church and more particularly as she dialogues with other faith traditions.

In his book “Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in our Time,” Mannion points out that the postmodern era is characterized by an increasing disillusionment with all-encompassing explanatory hypotheses for the world in general. Master narratives such as religion, political ideologies and even science, are no longer seen to have “all the answers” to humanity’s questions. This dethronement of grand narrative has resulted in a process called “detraditionalization.” The postmodern era is thus marked by a shift from the belief in certainties and truth claims to more localized and contextual factors. As a multivalent phenomenon, critics of this era despair objective

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8 Ibid., 17.
truth and absolute knowledge of reality. Implicit in this position is the eradication of universality, supra-cultural, and timeless truths about “reality” to give priority to an ever-shifting social construction made by a particular community, religion, culture, tribe in view of its own interest.\(^9\)

The epistemology of postmodernity espouses not generalization of principles or overarching systems (metanarrative) that can be reasonably legitimatized but rather a celebration of particularity that respects the context and the ‘otherness’ of all facets of human life, be it race, ethnicity, gender, religion, culture. Plurality and diversity which are imbedded in ‘Otherness’ is never suppressed because to the postmodernists, it is a natural opportunity for human growth and promotion of peace and justice.\(^{10}\) With this background, Peter Phan affirms that, “plurality and diversity are perceived to be the essential safeguards preventing life affirming unity from degenerating into deadening uniformity or, worse, into an instrument for the powerful to homogenize those who are different and to deny them their basic right to be who and what they are.”\(^{11}\)

In as much as postmodernity moves toward a celebration of plurality and otherness, influenced hugely by globalization, there is the collapse of geographical boundaries. In this sense, a person’s identity be it religious or cultural, cannot be confined to his/her origin of birth. Technological advancement into communication and transportation has brought diverse cultural and religious traditions into contact and the flow of these traditions is not unidirectional. For instance, in Ghana, the indigenous

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\(^9\) Ibid., xviii.  
\(^{10}\) Ibid.  
\(^{11}\) Ibid.
religion of the Akans cannot seclude itself from coming into interaction with the Buddhists, Hinduists, Christians, Muslims and other faiths.

**Challenges of Postmodern Era to the Church in Dialogue**

These symbolic features of new cultural diversity, socio-political and economic globalization, religious pluralism presents a challenge to the church in her mission and more particularly in her dialogues with the different non-Christian faith traditions. From the cultural point of view, the church is challenged to separate itself from its two-millennia-long tradition of Eurocentric theological ideologies that subscribe to the idea of sameness and universality.

Religiously, how does the church dialogue with the other faith traditions genuinely, respecting the teachings and practices of other religions? Answers to these questions and especially as the church dialogues with other faiths based on an appeal to metanarrative either based on natural law or divine revelation which lay claim to universal validity and absolute normativity without attention to particularity and context would always encounter opposition in this postmodern era and thus impede genuine dialogue.  

**Interreligious Dialogue and Its Necessity**

The challenges posed by the postmodern era engender all religious traditions to recognize the indispensability of interreligious dialogue. These challenges had been taken up specifically by the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, especially in

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12 Ibid., xx.
Decree No. 5 which invited all members to be open to plurality of religions as “the human response to God’s salvific work in peoples and cultures.” The document considers interreligious dialogue as a “dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify, and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity [John Paul II]. An open and sincere interreligious dialogue is our cooperation with God’s ongoing dialogue with humanity.”

Examining the meaning of dialogue, Teasdale also writes that, dialogue “suggests an attitude of openness to members of other traditions. It presupposes mutual acceptance. Dialogue is an attitude before it is an activity. That is, it requires a state of willingness and generosity of heart to enter into genuine communication with others different from us in the faith commitment.” Dialogue is an active form of communication that is grounded on the foundations of goodwill and mutual respect between and among the interlocutors. It is an invitation to enter into a substantive act of openness, honest conversation devoid of hidden agenda with the primary objective of coming into a better understanding not just a partial knowledge of the other. Jacques Dupuis beautifully writes:

To know the religion of another is more than being cognizant of the facts of the other’s religious tradition. It involves getting inside the skin of the other, it involves walking in the other’s shoes, it involves seeing the world in some sense as the other sees it, it involves asking the other’s questions, it involves getting inside the other’s sense of “being a Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, or whatever.”

When dialogue is truncated between and among organizations, cooperation, government and religions, prejudices, suspicions and violence threaten humanity. This makes interreligious dialogue a great necessity especially in a world of multi-cultural, multi-tribal and multi-religious traditions and practices. It is amid a harmonious coexistence of diversity which expresses the beauty of human life. Diversity according to Aga Khan is richness not a burden.\footnote{November 14, His Highness the Aga Khan addressed an overflow audience at Memorial Church on the challenges of pluralism today in the world. He affirmed that “Diversity is not a burden to be endured, but an opportunity.” \url{http://www.islamicstudies.harvard.edu/agakhan/}. (Accessed on August 16, 2017.)} In a postmodern world, characterized by diversities and religious pluralism, the church and the non-Christian faiths can express such beauty when the element of genuine interreligious dialogue is given a priority as one faith encounters the other. Such interreligious dialogical encounter offers the interlocutors the opportunity to face issues that trigger division, misconception and its associated potentiality for violence. Unfortunate, as Teasdale noted “for centuries, even millennia, the various faith traditions have been cultures of isolation, mutually ignorant of one another’s history, cultures, beliefs, rituals, their positive contributions to the world, society, and the human community. In those ages, communication was minimal, if at all.”\footnote{Teasdale, \textit{Catholicism in dialogue: Conversations Across Traditions}, 5.} Many faith traditions myopically concentrated on themselves considering the other as ‘outcast’.

With the age of globalization, cultural and religious isolation is really breaking down. Different traditions encounter the other in global forums, either in schools, shopping malls, airports, working places, sporting events etc. Succinctly put, “there simply is no escape from diversity any longer. We are finally forced by the conditions of
contemporary life to accept otherness in all its manifestations, especially in the sphere of religious diversity.”18 Amid these religious faith and cultural diversity, there is now the capability of intercultural cooperation and interreligious understanding. It is from this inescapable socio-cultural pluralistic environment that the church and other faith traditions must see the necessity to marshal all the necessary tools and skills to ensure a sensitive and fruitful interreligious dialogue. This must not be seen only from the official sanctioned interventions and pronouncement of the leaders of religions but must also be pragmatically realized among the adherents of the different religions.

The necessity for an in-depth communication among world religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Jainism, Sikhism, and indigenous traditions of America, African Traditional Religions, shamanistic cultures etc. is paramount because all these traditions express extreme concerns for the environment, terrorism, disease, hunger, poverty, education, human right, bioethical questions, justice, freedom, war and peace that threaten humanity. When a dialogical bond of friendship is created among these religions, a collaborative effort to work towards the common goals to safeguard human life and our common environment could be accomplished. Again, since each religion is unique and reflect some elements of religious significance, a genuine dialogue is an opportunity for a mutual edification.

Pope Francis affirms the necessity of interreligious dialogue in his address to the president, prime minister and civil authorities in Ankara, Turkey on November 28, 2014 when he said that “Today what is needed is a dialogue which can deepen the understanding and appreciation of the many things which we hold in common. Such a

18 Ibid.
dialogue will allow us to reflect sensibly and serenely on our differences, and to learn from them.19 A better consideration of the world situation supplies a ‘political and religious’ urgency to implement and even possibly go beyond the tenets of Nostra Aetate presented as official teachings of the church in her interfaith encounters to intensify and bridge the gap between the church and non-Christian traditions.

The Church’s Understanding and Attempt at Dialogue with Other Religions from
Gregory VII to Thomas Aquinas

Gregory VII’s vision of dialogical relation between the church and other faiths remarkably influenced his letter (Epistola, 21) written to Anzir, the Muslim king of Mauretania (in modern Algeria) in 1076. The pope in the letter expressed his gratitude to Anzir for his willful liberation of Christian prisoners and promising to free more. Interestingly, the Muslim king proposed a candidate among the Christians to be ordained as bishop charged with the responsibility of shepherding the Christian community under his jurisdiction.20 Vatican II acknowledged this letter in Nostra Aetate to establish the Church’s recognition of other non-Christian religions as far back Gregory VII’s time.21 Referencing Holy scripture, the pope categorized the gesture of the king from the perspective of universal revelation and salvation of all humanity. He writes, “‘He who enlightens all people coming into the world (John 1:9) had enlightened the mind of the

21 See NA. 1-3.
king,’… ‘who wishes all people to be saved [I Timothy 2:4].’”

Gregory VII vividly expressed to the Muslim king the one God they profess irrespective of their religious differences by saying that, “we and you must show in a special way to the other nations [Christian and non-Christian alike] an example of charity, for we believe and confess one God, although in different ways, and praise and worship him daily as the creator of all ages and the ruler of this world.”

It is implicit in the pope’s writing that though there are different channels for both religions, there is one inspired Truth, God and that Muslims could find salvation as a result of their sincere faith and devotion to God.

Medieval Catholicism through the instrumentality of mendicant Orders of Franciscan and Dominicans saw a revitalizing phase in the church’s history. St Francis of Assisi inspired Franciscan mystics and missionaries to peacefully dialogue with Muslims who for centuries have been labeled as enemies of the Catholic faith. Francis, positively changes the perception of dialogue with other faith when for the first time in the history of the church, through Francis’ leadership and vision for interreligious dialogue, inserted a unique rule for his Order which underlines Muslim and Christian relations and by extension, all other non-Christian faith. In his popularly known ‘Early Rule’ (the *Regula non Bullata* of 1221), Francis insisted on a cordial understanding and peaceful relations between any Christian friar and a Muslim and even ‘non-believer,’ not just as a courtesy but a rule to govern them in their missionary work.

His conviction about such a dialogical aspiration was not only in words, but he practically lived that by establishing a genuine encounter with Muslims which motivated him to visit a Sultan in Egypt in July

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23 Ibid., 24.
24 Ibid., 25, see also Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 104.
1219. It is from Francis’ practical step to dialogue peacefully with a non-Christian king which motivated Dupuis to write that, “Francis’s voice was truly prophetic in calling for mutual understanding and reconciliation between Christians and their ‘Muslims brothers,’ which will bear fruit later, not least in Vatican II (NA 3)” Francis was indeed motivated at restoring and promoting the integrity of human relationship.

**Thomas Aquinas and the Fate of ‘Outsiders’ on Salvation**

Thomas Aquinas in the Thirteen-Century contemplating the destiny and spiritual situation of ‘outsiders,’ was much influenced by St. Cyprian of Carthage axiom of “outside the church no salvation (extra ecclesiam nulla salus).” Aquinas’ ministry began after the endorsement of ‘outside the church no salvation’ by Innocent III who had opted for a return to the unity of the Catholic church when he stated that: “we believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that there is one church, not that of the heretics, but the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, outside of which we believe that no one is saved.” At the Fourth Lateran Council headed by Innocent III in 1215, this same principle was affirmed that, “there is one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved.” The Council erroneously failed to recognize St.

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26 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 104.
27 For Cyprian, the principle of “extra ecclesiam nulla salus” was in reference specifically to Christians who have separated themselves from the church through heresy and schism. It was not in reference to non-Christians. Unfortunately, later writers like St Ambrose of Milan, St Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom applied this principle to include all those outside the Christian faith. see Collins O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions 26.
Cyprian’s restriction of the axiom to only heretics and schematics but broadened the scope to include all those outside the Catholic faith.

Thomas Aquinas having knowledge of the church’s stance at his time, revisited the principle of salvation outside the church.\(^{30}\) Without rubbishing the tremendous contributions of Islamic, Jewish philosophical theologians (Avicenna, Averroes, and Maimonides) about the question of God, he never explicitly engaged the theological question of divine revelation and salvation extended to the other religions. For him, salvation cannot be beyond the parameters of Christ and the sacraments (especially the sacrament of Baptism and Eucharist). Commenting of the decree *Firmiter* of Pope Innocent, Aquinas had the following to say:

Next, he [Pope Innocent] comes to the article about the effect of grace. First, he speaks of the effect of grace with regard to the unity of the church, saying: “there is one universal church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved.” Now the unity of the church primarily depends on its unity of faith, for the church is nothing other than the congregation of the faithful. Since it is impossible to please God without faith, there can be no place of salvation other than in the church. Furthermore, the salvation of the faithful is consummated through the sacraments of the church, in which the power of Christ’s passion is operative.\(^{31}\)

Faced with the question of someone who has never heard about Christ, Aquinas posits that a person in such situation who consciously follow his natural reasoning in seeking the good and avoiding evil, would be divinely offered an inner aspiration to know what must be believed or God would send a preacher to him, as he sent Peter to Cornelius.\(^{32}\) Commenting on the solution provided by Aquinas, O’Collins puts forth two

\(^{30}\) For details see Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, 81.
\(^{31}\) In I Decret. Ed. Parma, 16:305 as quoted Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* 47.
\(^{32}\) De veritate, 14. 11 ad I as quoted in O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 28.
ideas: First, Aquinas envisages that the divine revelation (his word) through a divinely inspired way will reach those who have not had the chance to encounter the Christian message. Secondly, he referenced the scriptural passage of Cornelius’ encounter with Peter (Acts 10) to imply that God will always send his messenger to any person who ‘seeks good and avoids evil.’

For Aquinas, explicit faith in Christ especially for those configured to him is necessary for salvation. He further argued for the salvation of ‘outsiders’ through his notion of implicit faith in Christ and implicit baptism of desire. In his exposition on the fate of those who preceded Christ, Aquinas gives a recognition to implicit faith expressed in Jesus through the expression of faith of the existence and providence of God as implied in Hebrew 11:6. With respect to those brought to Christ through the sacrament of Baptism, Thomas adheres to the position that no one could be saved without baptism. He adds that baptism could be in the form of desire when he writes that, “a person can obtain salvation without actually being baptized, on account of the person’s desire for baptism. In such case, God, whose power is not tied to sacraments, sanctifies a person inwardly.” Baptism of desire does not necessarily have to be explicit but implicit. In the *Summa Theologae*, Thomas cited Cornelius as a perfect example whose desire for baptism prior to Peter’s encounter was implicit.

In relation to the above is his notion of the Eucharist as necessary for salvation even in an implicit manner. He affirms that, a person can be saved through the desire to

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34 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (NIV).
35 *Summa Theologicae*, 3a. 68.2 see also O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 29.
receive the sacrament of the Eucharist, in the same manner as one’s ardent desire for baptism preceding the moment when the sacramental action really takes place.\textsuperscript{36} It must be noted here that Vatican II hardly accepted fully Aquinas’s notion of the religious implicit and explicit attitude of people. The Council only affirms that “those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience-those too may achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life.”\textsuperscript{37}

Writing on the grace of Christ as the head of the church, Aquinas broadened the salvation extended to all humanity which goes beyond the scope of the church. He maintained that Christ is the head of the whole of human race not only the church albeit in different degrees.\textsuperscript{38} He affirms that “unbelievers, although they are actually not part of the church, nevertheless, belong to it potentially. This potentiality is based on two things: first, and principally, on the power (\textit{virtute}) of Christ, which is sufficient for the salvation of the whole human race; and, second, on freedom of choice.”\textsuperscript{39} This suggests an all-inclusive salvation which proceeds from the universal headship of Christ not only for the church but the whole of humanity, including those outside the church nevertheless in different degrees. O’Collins concluded drawing from above that, salvation and the means

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Summa Theologiae} 3a. 73. 3.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Lumen Gentium} 16 as in Flannery, ed., \textit{Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents}.
\textsuperscript{38} O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 30.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
to salvation is principally from the power of Christ not the church.\textsuperscript{40} It is from this position that Aquinas proposed a different axiom “\textit{extra christum nulla sallus}” (outside Christ no salvation) emphatically affirming that there is no way of being ‘outside Christ’ based on the underlying factor of the universal headship of Christ. This all-inclusive salvific work of Christ would have traces in the Vatican II documents.

The above position of Aquinas on salvation from interreligious perspective drives home the possibility of salvation for non-Christians but only from a Christological background. This theological standpoint will resurface in Nostra Aetate and almost all subsequent conciliar documents.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 31.
Chapter Two

The Church in Dialogue From the 19th Century to the 20th Century Prior to the Promulgation of Nostra Aetate.

From Boniface VIII to the Ninetieth Century

Pope Boniface VIII promulgated in 1302 the bull, “Unam Sanctam” (“One Holy”), to announce against the king of France, Phillip the Fair, his spiritual power exercised under Christ, as the head of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Pope Boniface concludes, linking his spiritual and temporal authority, that, all including kings and emperors, must submit to his temporal authority. Here, He develops a medieval theory which provides power of spiritual supremacy to the pope over any temporal powers. It gives the Pope the total authority to institute and to judge temporal rulers. Pope Boniface VIII at the conclusion of the bull draws a relationship between the absolute authority of the pope and salvation by saying “indeed we declare, announce and define, that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”41 This statement by extension implies that, salvation cannot be attained outside any religion which is not under the spiritual and temporal authority of the Pope. Even though the contemporary view of the relationship between the spiritual and temporary authority has been abandoned, the bull nevertheless reiterates the traditional misconstrued position of ‘outside the church no salvation.’

A century after Boniface, the Council of Florence quoting St. Fulgentius\textsuperscript{42} exact words in its Decree for the Copts of 1442, avowed that:

It firmly believes, professes, and proclaims that those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart “into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels” [Matt. 25:41], unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock; … That no one, whatever almsgiving he has practiced, even if he has shed blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he has remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{43}

Even though most bishops during the first millennium of Christianity condemned all the separated Christians and those outside the faith to damnation, it was the Council of Florence’s Decree for the Copts which for the first time as a general council in the history of the church, emphatically judged ‘pagans’, ‘Jews’, ‘heretics’, and ‘schismatics’ of being outside salvation.

Sullivan pointed out that members of the Council of Florence shared the view of many Christians of the middle age that all those who rejected Christ’s message were extricated from the saving power of Christ. He added quickly that historical circumstances contributed immensely for such understanding but that does not make it acceptable.\textsuperscript{44} It would be noticed in our subsequent chapters that Vatican II Council consciously never used the terms ‘pagans’, ‘heretics’, ‘schismatics’ but used Jews,

\textsuperscript{42} St. Fulgentius of Ruspe (462 or 467 – 1 January 527 or 533) was bishop of the city of Ruspe, North Africa during the 5th and 6th century, a vigorous critic of Arians and Pelagians, whose \textit{De Fide ad Petrum} followed a pessimistic view of Augustine about the damnation not only of many ‘within’ the church but also of everyone ‘outside’ the church. See also O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council}, 32.


Muslim and passed positive judgment on the other religions. This was a clear rejection of the former position of the Council of Florence drawn from Fulgentius of Ruspe.

The Council of Florence pronunciation won the support of many Christians at the time, however, it was equally opposed by others. Nicholas of Cusa in his work “De pace fidei (On the Peace of Faith) for instance, vehemently reacted against the Decree for the Copts and argued for peace between the different religions. In this work, he pushed for a dialogue among all different religions by elegantly developing a form of vision where he saw himself as a dreamer in heaven where angels were imploring God to instill peace among the different religions and peoples that call him by different names. The representatives of the different religions in his dream, with seemingly irreconcilable diversities of teachings and faiths, recounts their differences after which God sent them back to the earth to lead their worshipping communities in their own faith, with the assurance of promoting peace.\(^45\) Nicholas of Cusa’s primary objective was to indicate that diverse faith of different religions and people can implicitly converge. Different faith practices, rites and teachings can be maintained on the condition that they promote and maintain peace and co-existence.

The Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563 in Trento (Trent) also offered some reflections with respect to interreligious dialogue. The Council turned to Hebrews 11:6, to emphasize the necessity of faith in God’s existence for justification. The Council did not categorically provide a blue-print statement on explicit faith in Christ, knowing well that maintaining a belief in God as Hebrews stipulates is enough for one’s

salvation.\textsuperscript{46} This suggests that those who have no knowledge about Christ, including believer of Traditional Akan Religion, can still attain justification with their faith in God’s existence. Secondly, while insisting on the necessity of baptism for salvation, Trent also permitted the bath of regeneration or for the desire of baptism of one’s salvation.\textsuperscript{47} The question left open is whether the desire for baptism should be implicit or not. Thirdly, the Council offered a positive dimension of the cultic and sacrificial rites in other religions. Citing Malachi 1:11 (“From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations”), the Council of Trent interpreted this ‘oracle’ in the light of the Holy Eucharist offering being “prefigured by various types of sacrifices under the regime of nature and the law. For it includes all the good that was signified by those former sacrifices; it is their fulfilment and perfection.”\textsuperscript{48} O’Collins restates that the Council with this assertion provides a positive evaluation of the sacrifices of the other religions, not only the Jewish sacrifices under the law but also the sacrifices of other faith under the regime of nature.\textsuperscript{49}

The aftermath of Trent convinced Juan de Lugo, Francisco Suarez and other Jesuit theologians to share in the theological view that, salvation is available to those who by no fault of theirs have not encountered the gospel message, but through divine assistance and grace have lived genuinely and uprightly by natural law and faith in God. De Lugo further proposed salvation for outsiders who did not convincingly found

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{46} O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 38.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 39.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
sufficiency in their encounter with the gospel message and with their sincere faith continued their religious faith and practices not losing sight of conscience and the divine law.\footnote{Ibid.} It is from such conviction that De Lugo argued that ‘outsiders’ must not be called ‘non-Christians’ because even though they do not explicitly fellowship with Christians in church, from the interior perspective, they live and share the faith of the church and will be rewarded by God just like their fellow Christians.\footnote{J. de Lugo, Tractatus de virtute fidei divinae, disp. 12, 18, and 20; In Disputationes Sholasticae et Morales, ed. J. B. Fournials, i (Paris: Vives, 1868), 385-437, 657-75, 751-76; ii, 1-50.}

The view of the Council of Trent influenced Pope St. Pius V to officially censure Michael de Bay in 1567 who subscribed to the position that “all the works of infidels are sins, and the virtues of [non-Christians] philosophers are vices.”\footnote{O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 40.} Again, in the seventeenth century, the Jansenist’s view that Christ’s death was not beneficial to “all human beings without exception,”\footnote{See Jansenism, ODCC, 867-8.} were also condemned by Pope Innocent X. Such theological viewpoint is not in congruence with 1 Timothy 2:3-6, which expresses the divine will for the salvation of all but rather the Calvinist position of predestination (that by divine will some are predestined for salvation and others eternal death).

From the seventeenth to the eighteenth century where missionary activities became pronounced especially with the Holy Ghost Fathers, the Society of African Mission, White Fathers and Verona Fathers, different religions apart from Judaism, Islam were encountered. Missionaries who travelled to China, India, Asia, Americas and Africa encountered Hinduism, Buddhism, and African Traditional Religions. In as much as many missionaries frown on some of these religions, others also learn to appreciate the
different religious teachings, values and customs. It even became for some a stepping-stone of communicating the Christian message. Some of the missionaries devoted themselves to studying the cultures and languages of the indigenous people so that they could interpret intelligibly without prejudice the text of the different religions. Gradually, universities in Europe initiated academic disciplines, which opened opportunities for the study of languages and literature of other religions giving room for comparative religious studies.

The enlightenment again brought forth some intellectuals whose writings and teachings also challenged the church and Christianity in general to reconsider their position on explicit Christian faith necessary for salvation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau particularly considered such view to be incongruous to the justice of God. In his writing entitled The Creed of a Priest, he asked some questions worth considering: “You proclaim to me a God, born and dead two thousand years ago at the other end of the world in some little town, and you tell me that whoever has not believed in this mystery will be damned.”54 He added as a challenge for missionaries that, “you say that you come to teach this to me. But why did you not come to teach it to my father, or why do you damn this good old man for never having known anything about it? Ought he to be eternally punished for your laziness, he who was so good and beneficent, and who sought only the truth?”55 For him it is unjustifiable if Christians affirm and proclaim the message that eternal damnation awaits non-Christians who had no opportunity of embracing the Christian faith.

55Ibid.
Giovanni Perrone (1794-1876) and Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816-86) contributed with their theological expositions to shape the opinion of papal writing on “outside the church no salvation.” Perrone formulated the ‘gospel law’ (*lex evangelica*) which was later developed by Karl Rahner. The ‘gospel law’ teaches that people who lived prior to the proclamation of the gospel message could be saved without baptism and adherence to the Christian faith. There is the need for the gospel to be preached but those who without their fault did not encounter the gospel message would be brought to faith through “an internal supernatural illumination or revelation.”

Blessed Pius IX influenced by their teaching and coupled with the missionaries’ experiences with other religions in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia and Oceania, gave a more inclusive interpretation to ‘outside the church no salvation.’ It was the first in the history of Catholicism where a pope mitigated the harshness introduced by Innocent III, Boniface VIII, and the Council of Florence about the axiom. In 1863, Pius IX in his encyclical *Quanto conficiamur moerore*, while affirming the necessity of the church for salvation also positively writes that, “those who labor in invincible ignorance concerning our most holy religion and who, assiduously observing the natural law and its precepts which God has inscribed in the hearts of all, and being ready to obey God, live an honest and upright life can, through the working of divine light and grace, attain eternal life.” Thus, outside the Catholic faith, those who according to the pope “carefully keep the precepts of the natural law which have been written by God in the

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hearts of all persons, if they are prepared to obey God, and if they lead a virtuous and dutiful life, can by the power of divine light and grace, attain eternal life.” The Pope further implored Catholics and for that matter Christians to foster a cordial relationship with the believers of other religions. The universalistic and inclusive interpretation of the axiom by Pope Pius IX could be rendered as ‘no salvation for those culpably outside the church.’ The power of divine light and grace according to him is universally present and available not only for Christians but all humanity irrespective of religion. In other words, people of other faiths could attain salvation irrespective of their religion and not through their religion. This does not necessarily mean that Christians must shirk their missionary mandate of making Christ known. In as much as Christians respect this mandate, the proper channel must be employed to facilitate dialogue and collaboration with the other religions instead of generating rift.

**Twentieth Century Before Vatican II Council**

An official document that illustrate the developments in the church’s thinking about dialogue and collaboration of non-Christians is Pope Pius XII encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*, promulgated in 1943. Though the document centered on identifying the strict identity between the mystical body and the church, it also made an important contribution, a positivity which builds upon Pope Pius IX position on the salvation of believers of other religions. *Mystici Corporis* states:

> We must earnestly desire that this united prayer may embrace in the same ardent charity both those who, not yet enlightened by the truth of the Gospel,

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are still outside the fold of the Church, and those who, on account of regrettable schism, are separated from Us, who though unworthy, represent the person of Jesus Christ on earth (Mystici corporis 102).  

This was the first official document of the church which enjoin Catholics to pray for those outside the Catholic faith. The encyclical further reiterates the idea proposed in the sixteenth century by the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine and Suarez, that non-Christians can also be saved based on their desire of belonging to implicitly or explicitly when he writes,

…from a heart overflowing with love We ask each and every one of them to correspond to the interior movements of grace, and to seek to withdraw from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation. For even though by an unconscious desire and longing they have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church.

The above quote essentially brings home salvation for those of other traditions. Even though the Pope did not categorically say non-Christians can be saved, he equally did not refute the possibility of salvation outside the church. The quote clearly recognizes that salvation is possible, even though more problematic for those of other religions.

60 Ibid. See also James L. Heft and John O’Malley, After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics, 71.
Karl Rahner’s Theological Views on Other Religions

“Human beings can never even begin to have anything to do with God or to approach God without already being borne by God’s grace.”
(Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith.)

One of the prominent theological views of a notable theologian at the eve of Vatican II which tremendously shaped Nostra Aetate is that of Karl Rahner (1904-84). Rahner in 1961 at a lecture remarked about religious others by saying that, “today everybody is the next-door neighbor and spiritual neighbor of everyone else in the world…every religion which exists in the world is just like all cultural possibilities and actualities of other people—a question posed, and a possibility offered, to every person.”

His conviction of this prompted his statement that the world can talk of “one history of the world, and in this one history both Christians and the non-Christians live in one and the same situation and face each other in dialogue.” Another pressing theme in his lecture which Vatican II sanctioned is his Christocentric vision of God’s universal salvation for humanity. Rahner holds that, “God desires the salvation of everyone, and this salvation willed by God is the salvation won by Christ, the salvation of supernatural grace which divinizes the human person, the salvation of the beatific vision.”

Karl Rahner developed his scheme of natural and supernatural order to expatiate his point. According to this scheme, all humanity in this world is open to the supernatural grace which is divine, and through this grace, God gratuitously communicates himself to

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61 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 51.
63 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 53.
all irrespective of one’s disposition of refusal or acceptance of the grace of God’s self-revelation, experienced by man implicitly in the depth of their being.⁶⁴ Even though Vatican II minimally employed the term, traces of Rahner’s ‘supernatural existential’ (originally a philosophical view of Martin Heidegger) is found in Vatican II Gaudium et Spes (22) and Redemptor Hominis 8, 22. This primordial revelation of grace as used by Rahner suggests implicitly that those ‘pagan,’ or ‘outsiders’ who hear the gospel message for the first time cannot be conceived as not been touched by divine grace and truth because this grace permeates the whole of human history even before they encountered the gospel. For Rahner, the ‘pagan’ or ‘outsider’ has already been given revelation in a true sense even before he has been affected by missionary preaching from without.⁶⁵ It could be concluded through Rahner’s theological position that, God’s self-revelation is not restricted to a specific group of people or religion but through genuine faith, every soul can encounter God’s permeating grace.

Rahner convincingly further opines that, the first encounter of Christian missionaries with non-Christian religions must see them as meeting anonymous Christians – these are people who have been touched by “God’s grace and truth” prior to the advent of the missionaries and their situation is “Christianity of anonymous Christians.”⁶⁶ For him, Christianity confronts not non-Christians but anonymous Christians who have already been touched by God’s revelation, truth, grace and faith, thus on their way to salvation.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 131-2.
⁶⁶ Ibid., 131, 133.
Rahner attaches importance to the social nature from which human beings develop their religion when he said that, a positive, saving relationship to God can only be built by humanity only within that religion at their disposal. He insisted that all humanity has the absolute right and duty to live and build their relationship with the divine from their own religious and social particularly historical context. It was lack of this theological knowledge by missionaries which unfortunately made them condemn the indigenous religion of the Akans in Ghana as fetish or devilish. Some regarded the Akan religious practices and culture as not having any trait of divine revelation and inadequate medium for salvation.

**Ecclesiam Suam on Other Religions Before the Promulgation of Nostra Aetate**

On August 6, 1964, the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, Paul VI promulgated his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*. It was one of those ever-timely encyclicals in the history of Catholicism. Some theologians hastily affirmed this encyclical to be the manifesto of a Church in transition from a monologue to dialogue. *Ecclesiam Suam* expresses adequately some significant prospects for a Church eager to evangelize and to live in the midst of a pluralistic "otherness" in our postmodern world which influence *Nostra Aetate*. As a preceding encyclical to *Nostra Aetate*, *Ecclesiam Suam* admitted that the history of salvation is a continuous dialogue of God with humanity in which the church has the responsibility of ensuring the prolongation of such dialogue. According to Pope Paul VI, the dialogue covers fourfold levels: with the entire

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67 Ibid., 128, 131. Italic is from Rahner.
world, other religions, other Christian churches and dialogue within the church.\textsuperscript{68} Having in mind some doctrinal considerations, the pope cautiously noted the foundation and condition for such interreligious dialogue when he observed the following:

It is obvious that we cannot agree with various aspects of these religions, and that we cannot overlook differences or be unconcern with them, as if all religions had, each in its own way, the same value, which would dispense those who follow them from the need of inquiring whether God has revealed a way free from all error and certainty, by which he desires to make himself known, loved and served. Indeed, honesty compels us to declare openly that we believe, namely that there is one true religion, the Christian religion, and that we hope that all who seek God and adore him, will come to acknowledge this.\textsuperscript{69}

Irrespective of the above position, the encyclical still positively opens opportunity for dialogue with other faiths when it remarked:

We do acknowledge with respect the spiritual and moral values of various non-Christian religions, for we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideas…. On these great ideals that we share with them we can have dialogue, and we shall not fail to offer opportunities for it whenever, in genuine mutual respect, our offer would be received with good will.\textsuperscript{70}

Without giving up his own conviction that the Christian religion is the one and only true religion, and the hope that it will be acknowledged as such by all who look for God and worship him, Paul VI was concerned about dialogue and collaboration with the world’s non-Christian religions.

All these theological views especially from the 19\textsuperscript{th} to 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries that were in circulation prior to the promulgation of \textit{Nostra Aetate} influenced tremendously the

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
Council Fathers to make a revolutionary statement that, “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although different in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”

The church therefore asked her members to “preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.”

The above discussed writings and pronouncements of Popes and theologians over the centuries show the struggles and the development the church has gone through in building and strengthening dialogue and collaborations which gave birth to Nostra Aetate and its positivity on non-Christian religions.

Theological ideas on other religions of Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Raimon Panikkar and Gustave Thiels, could also be of tremendous importance to our discussion but enough has been said to trace the major themes that were in circulation from the period of Gregory VIII to the Twentieth Century prior to Vatican II Council and more specifically to the promulgation of Nostra Aetate. The next chapter will therefore focus on the declaration and its positive vision on other religions which broadened the scope of dialogue between the church and other religious traditions.

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72 NA. 3.
Chapter Three

During and after Vatican II: The Church’s Vision of Dialogue with Other Religions

Nostra Aetate: A Historical Turning Point of the Church in Interreligious Dialogue

Introduction

The ‘Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religion- Nostra Aetate,’ was promulgated during the fourth and final sessions of the Vatican II Council on October 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1965. The Catholic church for the first time in an ecumenical council made a significant step in offering a positive outlook in approaching other faiths and their faithful as being integral part of the divine plan for humanity. Through this declaration, the church laid out a new path of openness, reconciliation, dialogue and collaboration among the Christian religion and the other religions. It offers opportunity for Catholicism to open herself up to the truth and realities of other non-Christian faiths. It highlights again, the unity that exists among the various religious traditions in the world: their common origin in God, common struggle with the riddles of human life and their common end in God.\textsuperscript{73}

Even though Nostra Aetate recognised the truth and universalistic scope of God’s salvation in other faith traditions, it did not fail to declare the church’s duty to affirm the fulfilment of religious striving in Christ. The declaration builds on the writings of popes and theologians that were in circulation from the previous centuries but more importantly on Sacrosanctum Concilium and Lumen Gentium which had proved a genuine milestone in interreligious dialogue. Influenced by the above-mentioned documents, Nostra Aetate reflected further not only on Judaism and Islam, but also on other religions like Hinduism.

\textsuperscript{73} NA. 1. as in Austin Flannery, ed., Vatican Council II.
and Buddhism, human condition and the ‘unsolved riddles of human existence’ to which different religions endeavors to procure satisfactory answer.

**Nostra Aetate: A Positive and the New Outlook**

**Attitudinal Change and Openness Towards Judaism, Muslims and Other Religions**

*Nostra Aetate* opens a positive dialogue towards other religions but particularly with Jews and Judaism that had never existed in the history of these two religions. In its section devoted to Jews, *Nostra Aetate* unequivocally confirmed the ‘spiritual heritage,’ unique spiritual ties which link Christians, (the people of the New Covenant) to Jews, (the stock of Abraham). This is because the church continues to draw nourishment “from that good Olive tree onto which the wild branches of the Gentiles have been grafted” It could be said that the last Fifty-Two years of dialogue based on *Nostra Aetate* has witnessed what Jan Cardinal Willebrands had labelled “a real, almost miraculous conversion” in the attitude between the Jews and Catholics towards one another. A formidable and cordial dialogue between the two religions engendered by the declaration is also attested to by Edward Cardinal Cassidy when he opined that the Catholic-Jewish relations are now “better than they had ever been during the two thousand years of Christianity.” A prominent contributor worth mentioning towards Jewish-Christian dialogical relations is Pope John Paul II who in diverse ways pushed the agenda of

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 4.
Vatican II towards dialogue with Jews and others traditions. He encouraged Catholics to work towards a deeper appreciation of how the Jews define themselves based on their religious experience, and further challenged the church to reinterpret its relationship to Jews as the people of God.\textsuperscript{78}

Meeting with the Jewish leaders for the first time, Pope John Paul II reiterates the spiritual bond that links the Jews and Christian. This link to him implies that “‘our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities’ and so the path along which we should proceed ‘is one of fraternal dialogue and fruitful collaboration.’”\textsuperscript{79} John Paul II further shows the church’s openness to Judaism in saying that, “the Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our religion. With Judaism, therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers [and sisters] and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers [and sister].”\textsuperscript{80} These initiatives undeniably exerted a dynamic fraternal bond and effaced the stereotypical mentality of Judaism espoused by countless Christians.

*Nostra Aetate* devoted an entire article 3 to Muslims, acknowledging major features in their doctrine of God which the church also believes: “they worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men.”\textsuperscript{81} Pointing out that God has spoken to humanity, the Council Fathers

\textsuperscript{78} Edward Bristow, ed., *No Religion is an Island*, 14.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{81} NA. 3.
positively affirms the fact that Muslims could truly worship God now revealed to them.\(^8^2\) The declaration further commends the moral life and the way Muslims worship God in prayer, almsgiving and fasting, three of the ‘Five Pillars’ of Islam. It concludes by calling Christians and Muslims to forget the many quarrels and dissension of the past and urges both religions to forge ahead for a sincere effort to achieve mutual understanding, promotion of peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.\(^8^3\)

**The Unity of all Humanity**

The Council’s Fathers coming from different parts of the world, coupled with the awareness that isolation and barriers between religions, nations and people are gradually disappearing because of diverse forms of social communication, globalization, explosion of international trade, world sports and global tourism, declared that, “men are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened.”\(^8^4\) Commenting on the above, O’Collins observes that no Council among the Twenty-One general councils recognised by the church has ever made such a profound statement about the state of a global humanity.\(^8^5\) Later, the ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’ extensively developed the vision of the global human race affirmed by *Nostra Aetate.*\(^8^6\) *Nostra Aetate* therefore saw the urgent necessity for the church to “examine with greater care the relation which she has to non-

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\(^8^2\) O’Collins explains that “to say that God has ‘spoken ( allocutum) to human beings’ obviously evokes traditional way of expressing divine revelation as ‘Locutio Dei’, or God breaking silence and speaking to and addressing human beings. The verb ‘alloquor’ corresponds to the noun ‘locutio’. O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 101.

\(^8^3\) NA. 3.


\(^8^5\) O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 86.

\(^8^6\) Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 4-11 as in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II:*
Christian Religion in order to foster unity and charity among individual, nations and religions, as inherently bound to the church’s mission. The church aims at accomplishing the above not denying the differences among other religions but more importantly emphasizing the positive shared understanding, what humanity have in common and what necessitate the promotion of fellowship among them.

Nostra Aetate identifies three fundamental reasons for acknowledging what all nations and religions commonly share which make them one community and thus a better ground for dialogue and collaboration: From one stock or origin in God, the divine providence and salvation that extends to all people, and their common heavenly destiny.

The Council referenced Acts 17:26 to assert that, all nations stem from the one stock since God created the entire race of human beings to inhabit the earth. The declaration expresses the divine providential benevolence and God’s universal salvation for all humanity but not for a specific religion when it quotes in the footnote wisdom 8:1, Act 14:17, Romans 2:6-7, and 1 Timothy 2:4. The Roman text in particular introduces a

87 NA. 1.
88 Cf. NA. 1, See also O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 87.
90 NA. 1.
91 (New American Standard Bible) “And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.” The Council only cited Acts 17:26 without quoting the text. According to Collin, in order to “simply avoid the problem of deciding between the two possible Greek reading: ‘ex henos (from one human being, from one ancestor)’ or ‘ex henos haimatos (from one blood, from one stock, from one blood-stock).’ O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 87.
92 NA. 1.
93 Wisdom personifies divine willingness to save all when it said “She [lady wisdom] reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well. (RSV)
94 Paul and Barnabas in Lystra refused and corrected those who wanted to worship them when they saw Zeus and Hermes in the activities of Paul and Barnabas. Paul said, “yet he(God) did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. (RSV).
different theme, which conveys the idea of God’s judgement for all humanity based on the same standards; the good and the evil works of a person whether Jews or Gentiles.95 The positive assertion of the declaration of the unity of all humanity provides a better opportunity for all religions to come together instead of our allowing our differences to create dissension and conflict among religions.

The Primordial Human Question

*Nostra Aetate* positively pointed out that “human beings expect from the various religions a response to the obscure enigmas of the human condition, which, today as in the past, intimately disturb the hearts of human beings.”96 The indication here is that, it is not only Christianity but all other religions – for that matter Traditional Akan Religion also reflects on these ancient human questions and endeavors to procure answers for humanity. The document encapsulates the human riddles which enjoy a long heritage, both in the scripture, literature and human thought in seven questions namely:

What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?97

Non-Christian religions for which some are older than Christianity equally endeavor to respond to the various questions in order to provide meaning to life for humanity.

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96 NA. 1.
97 NA. 1.
Nostra Aetate on the Positive Elements in Non-Christian Religions

The “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” refers to John 14:6 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 to highlight Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth and the life”, the one in whom God has reconciled all things to himself as the summit of divine revelation and salvation. From the church’s perspective, it is in Christ that humanity encounters the “fullness of religious life.” Even though Nostra Aetate insists on the fullness of divine revelation and salvation as found in the Christian religion, she is not oblivious to the non-Christian religions as possessing elements of truth and holiness. Hence the Council observes,

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although different in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.

Vatican II Council purposefully refrained from condemning the various ways of acting and living, the precepts and doctrinal diversity which differ in many respect to the church’s teaching but positively articulated the truthfulness enshrined in the rituals and practices of non-Christian religions which serve as channels of illumination for all humanity (John 1.9). It is from such a positive outlook that the declaration affirms the spiritual or religious values of Hinduism and Buddhism: “in Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by

98 NA. 2.
99 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 99. See also NA.2
100 NA. 2.
ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love.”

Buddhism likewise provides in diverse forms “a way of life by which man can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help.” From the basis of this positive and new outlook of the church about non-Christian faiths illustrated in *Nostra Aetate*, the Council calls on Christians to dialogue and collaborate with believers of other faith traditions when it observed:

> The church therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.

This positive assertion builds on what *Lumen Gentium* had already affirmed about the existence of some elements of sanctification outside the church. Even though *Lumen Gentium* just like most conciliar documents uphold that the church constituted and organized in our present age subsists in the Catholic church, it also acknowledged the existence of equally many elements of sanctification and of truth found outside its visible confines.

Again, when describing the missionary activity of the church the document recognized the good that is found sown not only in the hearts and minds of people, but

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101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 NA. 3.
105 *LG*. 8. as in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II*.
also in their rites and customs.\textsuperscript{106} The declaration further adds that the good acknowledged in the rites and customs of other faiths nevertheless are not only saved from destruction, but is purified, heightened, and perfected for the glory of God.\textsuperscript{107}

The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (\textit{Ad Gentes}, Dec. 7, 1965), a later document, captures the positivity of other religions stated by \textit{Nostra Aetate} to suggest that, there are elements of truth in the non-Christian religions which are not the fruit of merely human initiative, but they have been sown in these religions by the Holy Spirit. Speaking of the church’s sacred duty of preaching the gospel, \textit{Ad Gentes} also confesses some elements of goodness outside the church in writing that, “whatever goodness is found in the minds and hearts of men, or in the particular customs and cultures of peoples, far from being lost is purified, raised to a higher level and reaches its perfection, for the glory of God, the confusion of the demon and the happiness of men.”\textsuperscript{108} These elements of truth and grace are described as a sort of “secret presence of God.”\textsuperscript{109} It is in the light of this new outlook of Vatican II’s dialogue with other faith traditions which propels the church to exhort missionaries to be “‘familiar with the national and religious traditions’ of those whom they are sent, and ‘gladly and respectively to uncover the seed of the Word which lie hidden in those traditions.’”\textsuperscript{110} The above revolutionary teachings of Vatican II, particularly \textit{Nostra Aetate} about non-Christian religions contravene the catechesis of most of the early missionaries on the soil of Ghana who completely abandoned the Traditional Akan Religion and most of the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{LG.} 17.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{AG.} 9, as in Austin Flannery, ed., \textit{Vatican Council II.}
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 11.
\end{footnotes}
cultural heritages of the people as ‘fetish’ or ‘devilish.’ They failed to discover the secret
presence of God and thus brain washed the converts to even hate and treat their own
indigenous religion and culture with contempt till this day.

To summaries the positivity and the new outlook offered by Nostra Aetate, it
could be said that, the Catholic church now recognizes the presence of the “seed of the
Word,” and “the ray of that truth which enlightens all humanity” in other faith traditions
as a preliminary working of the Holy Spirit prior to the advent of the missionaries in
different cultures. The church acknowledges the divine origin of some elements of truth,
which could also serve as “pedagogy toward the true God.” The Council Fathers intend to
recognize the presence, in non-Christian religions, not only of human value but of divine
gifts, which are not only a manifestation of goodness or holiness in non-Christians as
persons, but as objective elements inherent in their religious traditions and rites.111
These elements according to the church must still undergo purification and further
enlightenment by the Christian message. How has this new outlook of Nostra Aetate been
implemented and what accomplishments has it made in the pontificate of Pope Francis?

Pope Francis’ ‘Church’ in Dialogue with Non-Christians: Implementation and
Accomplishment of Nostra Aetate.

“You cannot provoke, you cannot insult the faith of others…You cannot make fun of the
faith of others (Pope Francis)”112

Reading the fine prints of Nostra Aetate as the paradigm, every Supreme Pontiff
since Vatican II has provided his vision of the church towards interreligious dialogue. For

111 Sullivan, Salvation Outside the Church, 166.
112 “Pope on Paris: ‘You Cannot Insult the Faith of Others,’” USA Today, accessed on August 10, 2017,
instance, John Paul II was deeply convinced in the universal working of the Holy Spirit and that motivated him to repeatedly reference *Gaudium et Spes* which observed that “The Holy Spirit in a manner known to only God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery.” 113 For him the outpouring and the power of the Holy Spirit provides a foundation for the affirmation of a universal human spirituality. 114 In his address to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) in 1995, John Paul II called for a “dialogue of spirituality” based on his conviction of universal human spirituality. For him the church in dialogue with other faiths must reflect a “universal vocation to holiness.” 115

Pope Benedict XVI, unlike his immediate predecessor had a significant reservation about interreligious dialogue. He cautioned against a “shallow eclecticism in regard to disparate religious teachings and what he called in another context, the “dictatorship of relativism.”” 116 He addressed the PCID by first praising the attempt at dialogue promoted by John Paul II but warned that “the great proliferation of interreligious meetings around the world today calls for discernment.” 117

The pontificate of Pope Francis on the other hand aims at building dialogue of respect and friendship with non-Christian religions because he is convinced just as Berling puts it, that, “learning other religions is a requirement for living as Christians in a religiously diverse world.” 118 His interfaith dialogue are in consonants with the guidance

113 *GS.* 22.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
stipulated by Vatican II in *Nostra Aetate* and the theological directions traversed by his predecessors particularly Paul VI and John Paul II. There can be no doubt and ambiguity in Francis’ position on the place of dialogue in the church and his own focus and enthusiasm for it in his pontificate. He has developed friendship individually and communally with non-Christian believers. In his answer to a reporter’s question about his individual closeness and friendship with Francis, Abraham Skorta, a renowned conservative rabbi in Buenos Aires has this to say:

We come together without burying our identities. I spoke to him about evangelization, and he stated emphatically that the Catholic Church cannot engage in proselytism, … We are not looking for a photo opportunity, but we want what we are doing to trigger a re-thinking about things. Ours is not a relation of ‘tea and sympathy’; that is not my way, and it is not Bergoglio’s way. We want to move ahead by actions, we must advance by building bridges, through a living dialogue; not a dialogue of words, but a dialogue of actions that reflect our commitment.¹¹⁹

Addressing the participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, exploring the theme, “Members of different religious traditions in civil society,” Pope Francis reaffirmed his pastoral orientation of friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions. He noted that due to increasing movement of peoples because of phenomena such as migration, communication, globalization, in our postmodern world, Christians are being challenged to be more open to different cultures, religions and traditions. He substantiated his position with a quote from his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, in saying that “an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the

followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides.”

In fact, contexts are not lacking in the world in which coexistence is difficult: often political and economic motives superimpose themselves on cultural and religious differences, also fueling misunderstandings and mistakes of the past: all these risks generating diffidence and fear. There is only one way to overcome this fear the pope affirms, and it is that of dialogue, of encounter marked by friendship and respect.

In as much as he warns against the attitude of being the master of all truth, Pope Francis also encourages genuineness to one’s identity, not compromising one’s moral truths and faith in the dialogical process. He writes, “A facile syncretism would ultimately be a totalitarian gesture on the part of those who would ignore greater values of which they are not the masters. True openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one’s own identity, while at the same time being ‘open to understanding those of the other party’ and ‘knowing that dialogue can enrich each side.’”

He concludes his address by emphasizing that, the prospect of interreligious dialogue lies in all its dimensions in the coexistence of respectful diversity, and the fundamental right to religious freedom.

120 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 250.
Another significant vision of Pope Francis, which permeates through his pontificate and pastoral work toward enhancing interreligious dialogue is his commitment to the vocation of fraternity. Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the PCID in June 2015, at a gathering of Christians and Buddhists at Castel Gandolfo, as part of the observance of fifty years’ anniversary of Nostra Aetate, observed that, in a world where diversity is perceived as a threat, the gathering between the two religions must be seen as a “commitment to human fraternity.” According to the cardinal, the impetus for such an initiative is a fundamental vision of Pope Francis, a vision to construct a new form of dialogue that will help foster interreligious relations intended to addressing social problems.124 Francis hopes that the time is ripe for the church to invite their non-Christian faithful to a “dialogue of fraternity.” His vision of fraternity and its relation to interreligious dialogue could be discerned from his understanding and applications of the church’s social ethics.

For Pope Francis, “fraternity” is the pastoral appropriation of the principle of ‘solidarity’ as could be seen from his writings: 2007 Latin American Bishop’s Conference Aparacida document supervised by him before he became a pope, Evangelii Gaudium and Ládato si. John Paul II had developed in Sollicitudo Rei Socialis the principle of solidarity by addressing the ethical challenges of globalization. Based on his consciousness of the social, economic and political interdependence of our world, John Paul II warned against what he calls “moral evil” in which the failures of an individual indirectly contribute in the creation of “structures of sin.” Our response to structural evil cannot be limited to “a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes

124 Fredericks, Commonweal 144, 10.
of so many people, both near and far.”

Rather what is required is commitment to the common good and this commitment is what he refer to as the “virtue of solidarity.”

Francis like John Paul, understands fraternity to be an essential human quality which enables us to treat one another, poor or rich, Christian or Muslim, Jews or African Traditionalist as brothers and sisters in our dialogical encounter, always promoting the common good. Without fraternity, it is impossible to build a lasting dialogue which ultimately generates peace among all religions and eradicate the tendency of seeing the other person or religion as enemies or rivals.

Acknowledging the ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today’s postmodern world, Pope Francis further calls our attention to the unity and common destiny of the nations which compels all people amidst the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies, cultures, and religions to work towards a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another. It is only from this that all religions and people can promote the fundamental human rights, especially the right to life and religious freedom.

Connected with the above is his relentless effort and speeches to bridge the many situations of inequality, poverty and injustice, which according to him are not only signs of a profound lack of fraternity, but also of the absence of a culture of solidarity. In this way, the pope inseparably connects fraternity and solidarity, and invites all religions and

125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
nations to pay attention to the weakest in societies which cuts across religious
differentiations when he observed that;

New ideologies, characterized by rampant individualism, egocentrism and
materialistic consumerism, weaken social bonds, fueling that “throw away”
mentality which leads to contempt for, and the abandonment of, the weakest
and those considered “useless”. In this way, human coexistence increasingly
tends to resemble a mere do ut des which is both pragmatic and selfish.¹²⁹

The pope really confesses that the spirit of fraternity places on the privileged in
every religion and society the moral duty of solidarity which will focus on the common
good despite religious differentiations to propagate peace and friendship among nations,
cultures and religions.

Pope Francis dialogical encounter with non-Christian religions could also be
realized from his pastoral zeal and orientation towards social problems. He adds his voice
in the condemnation of religion-inspired violence among religions, nations and called for
a commitment to fraternity specifically calling on Muslims leaders to unite against
terrorist acts and any violence that contravenes the dignity of the human person. On April
28th, 2017, at an International Peace Conference held at Al-Azhar, the pontiff’s speech
opened a two-day trip that came less than three weeks after Palm Sunday attacks on two
Coptic Christian churches in Egypt killing 45 and others injured. The pope affirmatively
condemns any act of religious violence calling for “a firm and clear ‘No!’ to every form
of violence, vengeance and hatred carried out in the name of God.”¹³⁰ He further
condemned strongly “demagogic forms of populism” coupled with arms trade which

¹²⁹ Ibid.
¹³⁰ Christopher Lamb, “Pope Francis Tells Muslim Leaders in Egypt to Fight Violence in God’s Name,”
fuels terrorism and conflict thus creating rift among nations, culture and religions. In fact, “religious beliefs must never be allowed to be abused in the cause of violence and war”, the Pope noted and we must be “unequivocal” in denouncing acts of violence.

It was not uncommon of Pope Francis after refuting and condemning the act of violence and killing to still exhort the “Egyptian Christians to be positive force within society; to be people of dialogue who are “sowers of hope” and able to forgive those who wrong them.” The pope encouraged all religious traditions to be dedicated to the education of young ones to “turn the polluted air of hatred into the oxygen of fraternity.” From his own personal pastoral touch, Francis has taken interreligious dialogue in his pontificate beyond a mere talk into practicing and living fraternity, upholding the dignity of the human person, friendship and respect for others.

132 Christopher Lamb, "Pope Francis Tells Muslim Leaders in Egypt to Fight Violence in God’s Name,” Ibid.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
Chapter Four

Reflecting Beyond *Nostra Aetate* After Fifty-Three Years of Promulgation

Inherent Hermeneutic Flaws of *Nostra Aetate* and Their Implications

Though the shortest of all the sixteen documents of Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* has significantly contributed in the church’s interfaith dialogue and collaboration both from the theological and pastoral point of view. Notwithstanding these significant contributions, the changing features of the postmodern world challenge the church to go beyond the document by overcoming the hermeneutical flaws inherit in the declaration to enhance a genuine and collaborative dialogue with other faith traditions.

Claim of Universal Truth, Salvation and Ideologies

Classical theologies have postulated universalistic ideologies and its complexities, suppressing all other religious sacred histories, and imposing a uniformity of religious ideas and revelation for which traces could be identified in *Nostra Aetate*. Deloria has this to say with respect to the claim of universality and revelation:

> In the western tradition, revelation has generally been interpreted as the communication to human beings of a divine plan, the release of new information and insight when the deity has perceived that mankind has reached the fullness of time and can now understand additional knowledge about the ultimate nature of our world. Thus, what has been manifested of the deity in a particular local situation is mistaken for a truth applicable to all times and places, a truth so powerful that it must be impressed upon people who have no connection to the event or to cultural complex in which it originally made sense.\(^\text{135}\)

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Such assumption propagates the idea of universal religion and revelation without taking into consideration the particularity of context, thus becoming a recipe for retarding interreligious dialogue in our postmodern world. When Nostra Aetate positively asserts that non-Christian religions “often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men,” it quickly adds that Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6), is the one through whom “men find the fullness of their religious life.” Also, stressing the role of the church in proclaiming Christ, the Council Fathers write that “it is the duty of the church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s universal love and the source of Grace.” Conciliar and post conciliar writings of the Church have advocated such definitions of religious universalism and revelation, faith and theology as paradigms of truth which cannot but ought to be assimilated or “inculturated” by all other religious faith.

The Church has always affirmed that the fullness of revelation and salvation resides in Jesus and by extension, in the Church. Pope Paul VI in Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum), explicitly states: “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity…By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.” The sacred Synod further avows

136 NA. 2
137 Ibid.
138 NA. 4.
139 Maria Pilar Aquino, Theological Methods in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Towards an Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium in From the Heart of Our People: 8.
unequivocally that it is in “Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion.”

The synod, even though expressed in *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium (LG)* the fact that non-Christians, “may achieve salvation,” the Council Fathers consciously refrained from affirming that, the other religions could function as “ways of salvation in a manner analogous, let alone parallel, to Christianity.” A paradoxical statement from later document *Dominus Iesus* reiterates what *Nostra Aetate* had already opined when it writes: “if it is true that the followers of the other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.” *Dominus Iesus* captures the statement in a conditional form to appropriate a Christological reading of divine grace of salvation. The document therefore hinges the divine grace and salvation found in the other religions to be necessarily grounded in Christ Jesus. From such a universalist theology, the church according to Aihiokhai “continues to position itself in a way that hinders its ability to see the riches of the flourishing of religions among peoples even among the oppressed and the marginalized.”

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141 DV. 7.
142 LG. 16.
‘Revelation’ in Other Religions

Another inherent flaw connected to the above is the use of the term ‘revelation’ in the declaration. *Nostra Aetate* talking of other religions consciously failed to employ the noun ‘revelation’ or the verb ‘reveal’ except when it spoke about Jewish people in saying “…on this account the church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant.”¹⁴⁶ Miikka Ruokanen may be right based on his observation of the conscious silence of *Nostra Aetate* to apply ‘revelation’ in talking about non-Christian religions when he said that, “any idea of applying the concept of revelation to any instance outside Christianity is totally missing in the council documents”¹⁴⁷ *Nostra Aetate* recognizes the positive elements in the non-Christin religions but these valued elements are with respect to “their natural aspects, i.e., natural knowledge of the one personal creator and natural law given by Him.”¹⁴⁸ The moral good imbedded in their doctrinal concept and moral practices are also acknowledged but the declaration still considered the non-Christian religions as still ‘seekers of the truth’ as regards *Mysterium Divinum.*¹⁴⁹ This implies that “non-Christian religions do not add any supernatural dimension of revelation or grace to the natural condition of man.”¹⁵⁰ Roukanen affirms. These flaws inherent in the declaration indubitably have effects on the dialogue that should ensue between the Church and other religious tradition.

¹⁴⁶ NA. 4.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 68.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 93.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 100.
Intrinsic truth and holiness based on the church’s judgement?

What is the locus from which the church reflects and judges the truth and holiness of non-Christian religions? Nostra Aetate positivity acknowledges from the interreligious point of view, the element of truth and holiness of non-Christian religions. However, the question to be answered is, by whose judgment are these religions true and holy? Is it viewed from the hermeneutical judgement of the church, or do truthfulness and holiness emerge as the innate character of the religions? Reflecting on this, Roukanen points out that a possibility of the presence of God’s saving grace in other religions is not totally rejected by the church. However, Nostra Aetate depicts the idea that non-Christian religions “have no independent status as to revelation of the divine mystery; their religious truth must be related to the truth of Christianity.” Ahiokhai could also be right in in his conclusion that “if the church’s teaching authority has judged that other religions are holy and true not of themselves but only of what they convey, ‘ray of truth,’ then it is a logical conclusion to deny their intrinsic salvific significance.”

On the other hand, is there the possibility for Nostra Aetate to accept that there is equally the presence of ‘rays of truth’ which are not found in the Catholic church but possessed by some of the non-Christian religions? These questions raise some consistent epistemological conclusions and resistance to the validity of the religious claims by non-Christians outside the watchful eyes of the magisterial teachings of the church. Maurier

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152 M. Ruokanen, The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council, 61, Quoted in Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 166
153 NA. 2.
therefore concludes that the church’s way of thinking is only from the egocentric dimension, impeding a genuine dialogical encounter which must be a mutual affair, a two-way street in which there is give-and-take.

Silence on African Traditional Religion or Indigenous Religion

It is of great importance to note that, the declaration did not even mention indigenous religions at all, like Indian Tribal Religions, African Tradition Religion some of which have existed before Christianity. Where then can a real genuine encounter take place so that both African Tradition Religion and Christianity could no longer experience the sentiment of being ignored by the other but can build room for “a catholic embrace, an exclusive substitution or a mutual interpenetration.” On the other hand, the declaration recognised Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, showing the closeness of dialogical encounter the church has with these religions. It is also obvious from Nostra Aetate that the church holds and affirms the unique and privileged position of Judaism or Israel in the divine plan of salvation and the close relationship it has with Christianity as compared to African Traditional Religion and others. Peter Phan could be right when he writes that, Catholicism does not count Judaism as one of the non-Christian religions which it engages in dialogical contact. In unambiguous terms, the church affirms the reality of divine revelation and grace and not merely “element of truth and grace” or “secret presence of God” or “seed of the Word” as she speaks of the other religions.

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157 Phan, Being Religious Inter religiously: Asian Perspectives of Interfaith Dialogue, 139.
Colonial Narrative, Perception, Imagery and Language

*Nostra Aetate* reveals a bias of colonial narrative, perception, imagery and language embraced by the Church in her dialogues with peoples, religion and cultures that have been at the margins of human civilizations.\(^{158}\) The document states: “religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and more developed language.”\(^{159}\) Douglas E. Thomas in his reference to an article by Samuel G. Kibicho noted that “in western scholarship, Judaism and Islam have been viewed as superior to other religions because of their monotheistic view of deity. This ignores the fact that African Traditional Religions is a religion whose strength is in the unity of diversity.”\(^{160}\) If sophistication of cultures and religion is hinged on monotheism, the church would fail to have a broader understanding and appreciation of other religions because every culture and religion has own unique beauty (also true of the Akan Tradition Religion), a gift to all humanity which can only be seen when approached with respect and dignity.\(^{161}\)

Aihiokhai poses a question for further reflection when he asked: “are these ultimate questions presented in *Nostra Aetate* questions that preoccupy all humans, or do they simply arise from a particular cultural locus?”\(^{162}\) He answers from his practical experiences in teaching comparative theology to millennials that these questions do not necessarily preoccupy many in this particular age. For him, ultimate questions of

\(^{158}\) This is particularly true about peoples and cultures of indigenous religions which barely received any attention in the *Declaration on the relation of the church to non-Christian religions*.

\(^{159}\) NA. 2.


\(^{161}\) Simon Mary Asese Aihiokhai, “Going Beyond Nostra Aetate. 388.

\(^{162}\) Ibid.
humanity generate from their lives in their particularities and encounter with the world, God and with one another within their context. He therefore suggests that the articulation of ultimate questions and concerns must always generate from the manifestations within the contextual experiences of people and culture but not from abstraction. It could be noticed from the Traditional Akan Religion and most African Religions that even though they concern themselves about the questions asked by Nostra Aetate, the ultimate concerns that preoccupy them focus on their engagement with the forces that pose threat to their existence in the here and now.

Revitalizing Interreligious Dialogue: Rejecting Some Western Dominant Principles of Theology.

Interreligious engagement among religions will be a wasted dream if religions are glued to their narcissistic self-awareness and their entrenched imperialistic tendencies of theologizing. In our bid to revitalize interreligious dialogue and theology in general, it would be expedient to consider some contemporary principles of theologizing which can serve as a good foundation for religions in their encounter with others in our pluralistic world.

Contextualization, Particularity and Historicity

Firstly, it must be noted that postmodern theology which aims to foster interreligious dialogue among religions stresses theological methods that provides room for particularity, contextuality, historicity, and contingency. Any theological position that

\footnote{Ibid. 389.}
neglects these closes itself up to genuinely encountering the other. Aquino, theologizing from the background of the U.S. Latino/a for instance, emphasizes explanation and articulation of the faith, beliefs, symbols and formulation of the Christian communities based on the idea of contextualization. This is because contextual theology brings out the specificity of the reality of a community, culture and religion, by delving into the epistemological foundation, fundamental principles and sources and loci which are characteristics of that faith community. Contextualization advantageously refutes as the foundation, theologizing from the Western theological traditions. It is in this light that Aquino affirms that, Latino/a theology must not aim at mere repetition of dogma or old formulas but rather make a conscious effort to theologize comprehensibly the central tenets of the faith which commensurate with tradition and present the daily experiences of the community.  

Contextual theology inspires the claim of voices instead of merging all particularity into universal concepts. Fernando Segovia expresses the claim of voices when he said that, every theological reflection “is a voice in search of freedom, independence, and autonomy… a voice that wishes to lay claim to its own reality and experience, give expression to its own view of God and the world, and charts its own future.” To emancipate the particularity, historicity and symbols of each religion in the dialogical process from the western monopoly of the definition of revelations, faith and theology as the truth which should be assimilated and “inculturated” by other faith traditions, could be achieved when priority is put on contextualization. Every religion must be allowed to

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164 Maria Pilar Aquino, Theological Methods in U.S. Latino/a Theology, 8.
165 Ibid., 9.
166 Ibid., 8.
reflect from its own historical voice and experiences instead of one religion serving as a paradigm for theological expositions.

**Literary and Non-Literary Resources of Enquiry**

Another contemporary trend of theological reflection which will revitalize interreligious dialogue is to bring forth the primacy of cultural and contextual value of theologizing from the perspective of indigenous religions, using the literary and non-literary resources of theological enquiry. Important example to mention here is the emerging trend in Asian and African theology which uses “extratextual hermeneutics (an approach that tries to use indigenous literary and non-literary resources for theological enquiry.)”\(^{167}\) For instance, the idea of rediscovering the values of folktales in the Traditional Akan Religion which were “demonized” by the influence of Christian teaching as unsuitable for Christian theology, is a positivity in contemporary theology. It is important to theologize from the various stories, poems, proverbs, dramas, drum language, traditional symbols and chants which are particular to the communities of the Akan and every community, because they authentically express the historicity and contextual experiences specific to the indigenes. Kofi Bempah in his book affirms the above in defining the Traditional Akan religion when he said the spirituality or religion is describable because it is a way of life. It flows from the cultural heritage of the people and is elaborated and exemplified through songs, drama, sculpture, poetry, rituals, philosophy and folklore, by the people.\(^{168}\) These sources move beyond the mere narrative


to the dramatic mode to express the cultural identity, morality and traditions unique to a particular religion, place and time.

Again, theologizing from the indigenous literary and non-literary perspectives is advantageous exceptionally to revitalizing interreligious dialogue because, these sources offer a cosmology which is spiritually based and they can serve as elements of edification and enrichment for the theology of Christian religion in their care for creation, our common home. The theologies surrounding the creation stories of the Traditional Akan Religion for instance, communicate something that goes beyond the physical and sensory. They affirm a close connectivity with mind and body, the sensual and the highest aspiration of the soul unlike the Christian creation theology which is linear and chronological.

The literary and non-literary sources of the indigenous religions stress the living spirit present in all human beings and the whole of creation. For instance, in his article “Who is God to Us Today?” Sahi sustains that there is the need for via positiva, a spirituality that sees the beauty in the physical world as not just illusion but the presence of the divine. This approach of spirituality goes against the religions that only believe in the transcendental and tramples down on the cosmic faith. It is obvious that the lack of such spirituality attached to creation found in the Western Christianity, has led to many instances of exploitation of human beings and the land.

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169 Cf. Nana Akua Kyerewaa Opokuwaa, *The Quest for Spiritual Transformation: Introduction to Traditional Akan Religion, Rituals and Practices* (New York, Lincoln: iUniverse, Inc. 2005), 20. It is based on this that all creature-land, plants rivers, forest, animals etc. are all protected and treated with care in the Traditional Akan religious milieu.

**Space and Time**

Linked to the above is the important shift to the theological concept of spatiality as against temporality. Contemporary theologies must take into consideration “space.” Like the Traditional Akan Religion, American Indians Tribal religion, contemporary theology puts emphasis on lands-places as having the highest possible meaning and relating all theological reflections and statements with spatial undertone instead of time. The dominant religions have for centuries theologized and upheld the theological and philosophical principle of time which undoubtedly have failed to answer adequately difficult issues of the world. Deloria, identifies the difficulty of the Western European thinking in line with time when he writes:

A singular difficulty faces people of western European heritage in making a transition from thinking in terms of time to thinking in terms of space. The very essence of the western European identity involves the assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion; … the same ideology that sparked the crusades, the Age of Exploration, the Age of imperialism, and the recent crusade against communism all involve the affirmation that time is peculiarly related to the destiny of the people of western Europe. And later, of course, the United States.\(^\text{171}\)

Time or history has been conceived as the absolute value, thus universal for all. Deloria argues that religion and religious activity and by extension theology, must be approached from a different novel, the novel of space. The context of space relegates to the background the perception of religious universalism which has been the undertone of most conciliar documents. Space religion highlights the beliefs as modified by human

\[^{171}\text{Ibid., 62.}\]
and natural environment. Context becomes paramount for the practices and understanding of the reality as compared to monotheistic religions.\textsuperscript{172}

Religion and religious concepts that uphold space do not lose sight of sacred places like river, mountain, plateau, valley or other natural features.\textsuperscript{173} They are protected from human abuse since particular community relates their revelation and historical events within but not outside the confines of their land. It will be noted that “regardless of what subsequently happens to the people, the sacred lands remain as permanent fixtures in their cultural or religious understanding.”\textsuperscript{174}

Sacred places inform us about the particularity of revelation since space has a geographical limitation.\textsuperscript{175} If space underlines the particularity of revelation, then Deloria may be right in saying that, “the question that the so-called world religions have not satisfactorily resolved is whether or not religious experience can be distilled from its original cultural context and become an abstract principle that is applicable to all peoples in different places and at different times.”\textsuperscript{176} How does this concept tally with Nostra Aetate’s insistence on the fullness of revelation in the person of Jesus? Could other forms of revelation be accepted in other religions just like the Akan Traditional Religion, Islam, Hinduism Confucianism and other tribal religions etc.?

Again, from the world of religious imagery, how do we explain from the temporal perspective the conception of symbols\textsuperscript{177}, doctrines, insights in which religious ideas are

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\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{173} Nana Akua Kyerewaa Opokuwaa, \textit{The Quest for Spiritual Transformation}, 20.
\textsuperscript{174} Vine Deloria Jr., \textit{God is Red.}, 66.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{177} For instance, how can the symbol of the cross from the roman community have a universal efficacy and become meaningful to the African traditionalist as a symbol of salvation?
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brought forth. The answer becomes clear when approached from the spatial dimension because the deity, symbols, and doctrines proceed from the experience of a particular community. The symbols may be refined but there is no editing to affect the core of it since it is the sole property of the whole community.\(^{178}\) Theologizing from the spatial perspective is valuable in the sense that, it does not favor universal imposition of one religion upon another cultural context. The limitation associated with space forces Western dominant religion and theology to reconsider its position on revelation and religious imposition because, revelation or religion interpreted, impressed and transmitted upon another foreign culture or place is likely to severely damage the message of revelation and become immaterial to the community that receives it.\(^{179}\) This explains why some Ghanaian (Akan) Christians still consult priests and priestesses of Traditional Akan Religion for remedy to situations because the Christian faith, symbols and the philosophical undertone of its doctrines are sometimes foreign to them and the land.

**Uniqueness and Universality of Religion**

The concept of God, theologically is an absolute mystery and no religion can claim to be adequately represented by that. This absolute mystery forbids any claim of uniqueness for any religion. Wilfred Cantwell Smith puts forward that “each religion is an ‘idol’ (that is, image) of God and that if an ‘idol’ is elevated to the status of uniqueness and exclusiveness, it is turned into an ‘idolatry.’”\(^{180}\) Phan also summarizes the positions of Gordon Kaufman, John Hick, and Langdon Gilkey to say that, “the modern

\(^{178}\) Ibid., 70-71.
\(^{179}\) Ibid., 65.
awareness of the historico-cultural limitations of our knowledge and religious beliefs and of the impossibility of judging the truth claim of another culture has rendered the claim of uniqueness and universality of a particular religious tradition no longer credible."\(^{181}\)
The effect of the claim of uniqueness and universality for any religious founder and of religion leads to oppression and injustice and undeniably retards genuineness to interreligious dialogue. It creates imperialistic attempt to impose one dimension as the normative reality for all others thus impeding mutual dialogue.

Another theological principle connected to the above which impedes interreligious dialogue between Christianity and other religions is the claim of uniqueness and universality of Jesus. Phan later considers what can be claimed in interreligious dialogue in the light of uniqueness and universality by differentiating between claiming uniqueness and universality of one’s religious founder and uniqueness and universality of one’s religion. The differences according to him, could be viewed from the epistemological, sociological, historical and theological grounds. For him, faith in the person (founder) must not be equated to the institution. Theologically, Jesus and the Church though intimately connected, Phan affirms, there is a fundamental difference and that cannot be misconstrued.\(^{182}\) Failure to maintain this differentiation leads to idolatry he pointed out.\(^{183}\) Phan therefore argued strongly against the claim of uniqueness and universality of one’s religion because it makes a particular religion and institution the normative which engenders colonialism, religious imperialism and oppression. He particularly accused Christianity as having historical traces when he said “the

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\(^{181}\) Ibid., 87.
\(^{182}\) Ibid., 93.
\(^{183}\) Ibid., 93.
triumphalistic claim for Christianity as a social organization, and not the claim of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus as the crucified Christ, produced in Christians self-righteousness, contempt for other religions and lust for domination.  

The difficulty I must point out is the differentiation between claim of uniqueness and universality of both a religious founder and the church/institution from the philosophical ground sounds convincing but practically faith and one religious institution are intrinsically inseparable. It is therefore difficult to claim for universality and uniqueness in Jesus and not the Church/institution as well.

It could be concluded that the church in dialogue with other religions in our postmodern world could achieve a revitalization of Interreligious dialogue when it reflects beyond and overcome the inherent flaws imbedded in *Nostra Aetate* by adopting some of the contemporary methods of theologizing enumerated above.

**Theological Reflection on African Traditional Religion in Dialogue from the Akan Context**

**Brief Overview of the Traditional Akan Religion**

The Akans inhabit the tropical rainforest area in modern Ghana. The subgroups of the Akans include the Nzima, Anyin, Sefwi, Asante, Fante, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Agona, Wassa, Bono, and Ahanta. These subgroups have spiritual and cultural attributes in common, tracing of descent, inheritance of property, and succession to high political office. The Akans share a spiritual tradition, founded on the belief in a supreme Being. They believe that God (Nyame, Onyankopon) is the supreme, self-existent being, creator

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184 Ibid., 100.
185 Ibid., 13-14.
of heaven and earth, from whom all things have their beginning and end, and upon whom
everything depends.\textsuperscript{186} He is everywhere and known by everyone as captured in the Akan
proverb “Obi nkyere Akora Nyame (no one shows the supreme Being to a child)”

The Akans, do not disassociate their daily life from their spirituality. Bempah
therefore defines the Akan religion or spirituality as:

The totality of rituals, beliefs, practices and behavior patterns perfected by a
community of people throughout the passage of time, to get in touch with, not
only the ultimate source of all energy, but also, the various multiplicity of
energy configurations which include moon, air, etc. For the Akan, the goal,
the prize at the end of these endeavors, is to reconnect himself with his power
source, his own reality—the Universal Spirit, \textit{Nyame}.\textsuperscript{187}

Any definition of religion which negates or eliminates the essential elements
mentioned in the definition above automatically falls short of the values, reality and
substance of the Akan Traditional Religion.\textsuperscript{188} As an African Traditional Religion, the
Akan Religion is part of the religious heritage of humankind which emerged from the
contextual experiences and in-depth reflections of the forebears of the Akans. From the
beginning, Traditional Akan Religion has undoubtedly provided and continue to procure
answers to the stirring of the human spirit and elaborate on the profundity of the
experience of the divine-human encounter which flows directly from the Akan’s own
cultural heritage and insight.\textsuperscript{189}

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\item\textsuperscript{186} Opokuwa, \textit{The Quest for Spiritual Transformation}, 19.
\item\textsuperscript{187} Bempah, \textit{Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth}, 14.
\item\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 14.
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Traditional Akan Religion and Interreligious Dialogue

The Traditional Akan Religion from its immediate contact with different religions has been interreligiously religious and friendly. It is open to other religions. It accepted the missionaries who entered Ghana with evangelization and other motives but unfortunately, they branded their indigenous practices as devilish. Even till date, the traditional religion continues to coexist with Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and other world religions in Ghana. This is so because the Akans believe that “wisdom is like a baobab tree, and a single man’s hand cannot embrace it” as the African proverb goes. The religion acknowledges that the immensity of divine truth totally surpasses the wisdom and discovery of one religion or tradition. Wisdom therefore demands a fraternal embrace and openness to other truths and revelation which are inherent in other world religious traditions. The Akans depict such notion in the proverb: “nipa baako nsa nntumi nkata onyankopon ani,” which literary means “the hands of one person cannot cover the eyes of God.” The interreligiosity of the Akan religion also has its basis on what Asare Opoku points out in seeing human beings as recipients of divine truth not the source. From such position, he believes that the religions which lay exclusive claim to truth and engage in fierce evangelistic campaigns and relentless proselytization, tend to give the impression that the source of the truth resides in them.190 Even though the Traditional Akan religion demonstrates openness to Catholicism, Nostra Aetate failed to mention it or any African Traditional Religion and their friendly receptivity of the catholic faith in Ghana.

Contrary to the above, the dialogue between Traditional Akan Religion and the missionaries of Christians and Islam turned to be unhealthy after the indigenous religion accepted them amicably. Christian missionaries and colonialists in Ghana deliberately and systematically distorted and discredited the reality of the indigenous religion to their converts. With the missionary education (school and church) as a powerful tool, the Africans were educated to even hate their own religion. Thus, those who could even record and write about the Akan religion did so by selectively shaping their writings by the ideologies and principles of Christianity. For political gains, the Christian missionaries treated the Africans as ‘savages’ who are been favored by Christians by teaching them their religions, a way to make them civilized. Akans were educated to forget their religion and culture because anything that links them to their roots or pasts were considered as an impediment to ‘advancement.’ This strategy of inferiority was perfectly captured in Americas and the West Indies as the colonial master literary forced their African slaves to relinquish their names, languages, and religions. Knowing the power of religion, the missionaries consciously subjected to mortal attacks any African concepts, ideas, practices and rituals that were seen and regarded as religious.

E.C. Dewick maintained that on the part of the Catholic Church, there was totally no question of offering any substantial value to non-Christian religions and their ritual, practices and worship. It was obvious from the attitudes of the early missionaries sent to the indigenous people of the land. The missionaries according to Dewick “went out with love for non-Christians in their hearts, but not with any thought of appreciating the non-Christians religions. Their purpose was simply to rescue souls from the clutches of heathenism in this world and from the fires of hell in the next. They went to give and not
to receive; to save, not to cooperate.” This is an indication of unwillingness to dialogue on the part of missionaries.

The Muslims totally ignored the possibility that the African, for that matter Akans, could possess a religion at all. They concentrated on educating the Africans to only read the Quran and pray in Arabic because that is the language to communicate with Allah. The African languages and rituals, values and practices were demonized.

General Conclusion

Promulgated on 28th October 1965, Nostra Aetate, the shortest of all the Vatican II sixteen documents has undoubtedly expressed and opened up the avenue of dialoguing and collaboration with non-Christian religions. This initiative of Vatican II was extremely revolutionary because the church ventured unknown avenues knowing well that this exploration will offer her opportunities to unveil the truth which the church may have partially grasped or not yet grasped about herself and other religions. Nostra Aetate ushered in a positive understanding of non-Christian religions which had never been professed in any of the twenty-two-recognized general ecumenical councils. The council exhibited a positive attitudinal change in affirming the presence of activity of God within the other faith traditions when Nostra Aetate writes: “The Catholic Church rejects

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193 Dewick, The Christian Attitude to Other Religions, 20.
194 The medieval and modern perception of other faith traditions from the church’s perspective prior to Vatican II Council was largely negative
nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although different in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”195 It is from this positivity towards other religions which motivated the Council Fathers to further exhort her members to enter into dialogue and collaboration with the other faith traditions when it said, “The church therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.”196

This new outlook and openers to dialogue with the non-Christians religions emerging from Vatican II, Nostra Aetate, has changed the maintained negativity that had existed between the church and other faith traditions from the medieval and modern times. The era of “outside the church no salvation” which condemned non-Christians to the hell of eternal damnation is changed. The beliefs, professions and proclamation that “those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart ‘into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels’ [Matt. 25:41], unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock… unless he has remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church”197 is no more the position of the church. In

195 NA. 2.
196 NA. 3.
the face of dialogue and collaboration opened by Nostra Aetate, the church upholds and acknowledge the presence of the “seed of the Word,” and “the ray of that truth which enlightens all humanity” in non-Christian religions as a preliminary working of the Holy Spirit before these religions and cultures encountered Christianity. The Council Fathers affirm also in non-Christian religions, not only of human value but of divine gifts, which are not only a manifestation of goodness or holiness in non-Christians as persons, but as objective elements inherent in their religious traditions and rites.¹⁹⁸

Above these positivity enshrined in Nostra Aetate, the postmodern world characterized by religious pluralism and diversity, dethronement of grand narratives, and which endorses epistemology that embraces not universalization of principles but rather particularity that respects the context and the ‘otherness’ of all facets of human life, be it race, ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, pose a great challenge for the church to further go beyond the tenets espoused in the declaration due to some inherent hermeneutical flaws. For instance, in the church’s journey of dialogue and collaboration, the document exhibits some traits of universalistic and ecclesiocentric theological attitudes and tone which retards genuine openness to other faith. In as much as this work celebrates Nostra Aetate for its “courageous vision to venture into unfamiliar terrains,”¹⁹⁹ it also throws a challenge considering the features of postmodern world, to go beyond the hermeneutical flaws inherent in the declaration, because these are factors that will facilitate the spirit of genuineness to discover and dialogue with other faith traditions. The question for further consideration is, could the church of Pope Francis and his successors, reading the fine prints of Nostra Aetate reflect beyond the inherent flaws numerated above in their

¹⁹⁸ Sullivan, Salvation Outside the Church, 166.
¹⁹⁹ Asese Ahiokhai, “Going Beyond Nostra Aetate,” 400.
dialogue with other faiths and what is the vision of the church for the next fifty years as a church in the postmodern world dedicated to the vocation of interreligious dialogue?
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