



CULTURAL INTERDEPENDENCE AND THE ETHICAL OTHER: HERMENEUTICAL OPENNESS IN INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND THE COMMON EFFORT TO ADDRESS PRESSING GLOBAL ISSUES

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In the 21st century we are still witnessing the potential threat of a nuclear holocaust, while the rapid advance of environmental disasters and global warming daily anchors in news headlines spreading fear to an already despairing humanity. Social injustice and fragmentation runs rampant, fundamentalism is on the rise and so are the global poor whereas alienation and hopelessness plaques multitudes in modern cities. Moreover, war and instability is the plight of millions drives against all odds hundreds of thousands fear ridden refugees hoping for a better future in migratory patterns toward western or other affluent nations. Concurrently, powerful nation states are engaged in a rally of military political and economic dominance in the international arena, whilst the global political and economic system constituting of an interdependence of financial markets networked via internet colonizes cultures peoples and social values at the beck and call of the few elite. But most importantly, in our highly globalized world where few cultures remain self-bounded or sharply contained, and encounters between diverse peoples and cultures are an everyday occurrence, humanity is gradually awakening to a new historical phenomenon a radically plural world of cultural and religious interdependence. More than any other epoch in history our times necessitate intercultural interreligious dialogue. It is time to work across cultural and religious divides for the strong affirmation of global justice founded on the principle of humanity, a *principio universalis* that calls for the eradication of all forms of suffering, promotes world peace and an ethics of care, accentuates the moral enhancement of human well-being amidst global turmoil. It is the contention of this paper that the global scale of suffering calls for hermeneutical openness in interreligious dialogue as the most appropriate stance for encountering the cultural or ethical other, to respect hear and reckon the truth of the other *qua* otherness as such. Here, the philosophical meaning of a ‘hermeneutics of openness’ is explored through the thinking of Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer. For a deeper appropriation of hermeneutical openness before the ultimately other our inquiry turns to an exploration of Ramundo Panikkar’s vision of interreligious dialogue. A ‘hermeneutics of openness’ in encountering the cultural or religious other avoids the moral pitfalls of imperialism and violence, colonization and projection, endless polemics, argumentation and ethical adversity. Equally, the hermeneutical stance of openness toward religious otherness rises to meet the global challenge—overcomes the categories of sameness and difference—mostly helps promote intercultural interreligious networking communities of learning and solidarity that collectively aim to alleviate world suffering and combat global injustice. Hermeneutical openness clarifies and affirms the richness of cultural and religious diversity and the plurality of traditions and perspectives ultimately advances intercultural communities of human flourishing to help guide

humanity out of the deadlock, to best help redirect the global political and economic system toward advancing social cohesion and the common good.

Keywords: Interfaith dialogue, Interreligious hermeneutics, Intercultural context, Ethical other.

*In a country well governed,
poverty is something to be
ashamed of. In a country
badly governed, wealth is
something to be ashamed of.
-Confucius (Analects VIII, c.)*

Introduction

Hans Küng (1987:194) in his much cited insight says: “no world peace without peace among religions, no peace among religions without dialogue between religions, and no dialogue between religions without accurate knowledge of one another.” Legitimately, one may also point out that neither world peace nor interreligious peace can be achieved insofar as there remains the problem of a global poor. True mobilization towards the solution of this global phenomenon necessitates dialogue with poor communities the world over, for only thus will we attain an accurate interpretation and understanding into the otherness of their world. This paper maintains that today there is a necessity for the recontextualization of interfaith dialogue so as to seriously address the question of mass poverty, as well as other most pressing global issues like the environment.

The present exploration takes its movement between two foci, firstly the historical context of interfaith/interreligious dialogue openings; and secondly, the necessity for recontextualizing which essentially means actualizing a new paradigm of interreligious exchange, a new symbolic hermeneutical opening towards today’s pressing global problems. The first sections of the paper focus on the grammar of the pivotal historic openings of the world to interfaith dialogue. Whereas the last sections open the question of interfaith dialogue and exchange in relation to the problematic of global poverty, offering insight and suggesting solutions.

The overall theme in which the whole paper takes its place and movement is the *hermeneutics of openness*. ‘Openness’ as such is constitutive and symbolic it enables and presupposes every act of interpretation and understanding. Hermeneutics interprets the opening of the human being in relation to time history and the world. Put simply, it addresses the way we interpret conditions our understanding of ourselves the world and others. Since the interpretation of the religious or ethical other is of outmost importance in interfaith dialogue and exchange, this paper turns to the hermeneutical tradition of philosophy for a deeper appropriation of the interplay between openness, understanding, interpretation, and truth.

In this regard, we attend to the thought of Schleiermacher Heidegger and Gadamer for these thinkers opened new depth into the possibilities of understanding the other; their interpretive philosophical insight transformed western intercultural interreligious dialogue and thinking. After gaining a deeper understanding of the processes of philosophical hermeneutics we turn to an exploration of Panikkar’s thinking in matters of openness, a figure that significantly influenced interreligious dialogue and theory in both east and west. Mostly, the rest of the paper follows its movement against the background theme of “waking from a dream of separateness” to address global poverty and other pressing global issues (Thurston 2015:83). Now, we turn to the great opening of the western world to the phenomenon of interreligious dialogue.

The Historical Context of Interfaith Dialogue in the Western World

Three pivotal moments characterize the opening of the western world to interreligious dialogue. The first moment an outright success was the 1893 *World Parliament of Religions* in Chicago. It took place in a western cosmopolitan city mostly to an elite body of distinguished scholars religious leaders and representatives of various highly esteemed institutions and organizations. Even though the opening of the 1893 Parliament was a western initiative, the culmination of 19th century philosophical and religious hermeneutics, favored by the reflection on the encounter of Christianity with other world religions, it set the atmosphere of interfaith dialogue in both east and west for the next 100 years. The second moment was the *Edinburgh Missionary Conference* in 1910. Indeed, its momentum initiated the ecumenical movement establishing an intensive intra-Christian dialogue now still ongoing for over 100 years (Heim 2005). After much intra-Christian thinking as well as interfaith dialogue and reflection, understanding and reconciliation, and, after facing the aftermath of World War II and the Jewish Holocaust, but also after the apparent failure of colonialism coupled with the rise of the postmodern societal humanist values of the sixties, the western world actualized the third moment of opening, the *Second Vatican Council* in 1962-65, whose significance for the history of Catholicism for interfaith relations and for the modern world are still unraveling (Giuseppe et al 2006, O'Mally 2010, Sheetz-Willard et al 2012).

To comprehend the momentous *œuvre* initiated by all opening moments, the first 1893 Parliament the ecumenical movement as well as Vatican II, one has to only consider that the western world mostly remained closed off to interreligious dialogue; it was for a long time culturally dominated by the Judeo-Christian 'worldview'. For many centuries Christians exercised domination and violence, for instance viewed adherents of ancient religions either as 'pagans' -including the Greek and Hellenistic schools of philosophy-, or else interpreted all other religions as adversaries so called *heathen* or *idolaters* enemies to be vanquished by polemics and war. Moreover, Christian visions differing from the Catholic dogmatic positions were deemed *heretical* or *gnostic* – were banished. But be as it may, Vatican II attempts to heal all these past ills and misdeeds, also attempts to heal the historical differences that arose between the Catholic Orthodox and Protestant faiths; as well as heal the recurring conflicts and wars between Christianity and Islam, due to the expansionist politics evinced in differing times by both religious 'worldviews'. And again, Vatican II attempts to heal the old conflict between Christianity and Judaism; thus, the long-leveled accusation of the Catholic Church against Jews as being responsible for the killing of Jesus is now finally revoked.

With Vatican II the radical renewal of the Catholic church was underway it laid down its Roman attire thus Latin was no longer the *lingua officio* of the liturgy instead the vernacular was introduced, whilst the divide between the priestly hierarchy and the laity was principally loosened turning the church into *one communion*. Moreover, the decisive turn was taken towards Christian church unity a genuine *praxis* of embracing ecumenism and intra-Christian dialogue full heartedly (Giuseppe et al 2006, O'Mally 2010). But the most revolutionary breach with the past an *œuvre par excellence*—indeed a surprise, was *Nostra aetate* a brief declaration that highlighted the relation of the Catholic church to all other world religions; its aim, to advance interfaith dialogue and collaboration in the acknowledgment that all faiths bear "the ray of Truth." *Nostra aetate* declared that in the final analysis all religions search for answers to the unsettled riddles of humanity:

The problems that weigh heavily in people's hearts are the same today as in past ages. What is humanity? What is the meaning and purpose of life? Where does suffering originate and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from we take our origin and towards which we tend? (*Nostra aetate*:1)

Henceforth, with Vatican II the western church declares dialogical openness to all traditions in acknowledgement that they all bear an important place in the advancement of global peace. Further,

Vatican II acknowledges that the achievement and lasting attainment of peace necessitates the opening of the church and all religions not only to a dialogical relation with each other but also with the modern world.

In their respective ways all three pivotal moments, the 1893 Parliament, ecumenism, and Vatican II, symbolize the official opening of the west to a postcolonial post-imperialist world of intercultural interfaith dialogue. Thus, the western *œuvre* affirms an open dialogue of cultures and civilizations an opening to the religious and ethical other, and, mostly heralds a world of interreligious dialogue inclusive of the plurality of perspectives.

Concluding, countless interfaith events have taken place the last 50 years in both the east and the west, amidst an increasingly diverse and ever-shifting interreligious global landscape. Interfaith events bear a variety of themes and genres. They vary in standpoint of approach ranging from religious, scholarly, educative, activist, youth oriented, and grassroots. Other events bear practical interests with specialized topics such as the environment, education, or peace-building in a region of interreligious conflict (Cisneros 2011, Heim 2005, Hick 1982, Sheetz-Willard et al 2012), yet others have specialized interests for instance Muslim Christian dialogical development, given, as Pratt (2009) maintains, that world peace largely depends on strengthening dialogical relations among these two religions whose adherents comprise 55% of global population. Further, today many interfaith events welcome all traditions and perspectives: religious liberals and conservatives, laypeople, scholars, humanists, scientists, secularists, atheists, agnostics. Also, some events make a point to affirm and welcome above all collaboration and dialogue with the uneducated underprivileged and marginalized poor communities of fellow humans (Fabrycky 2011, Michel 2010, Sheetz-Willard et al 2012).

Interfaith Dialogue in India, China and Japan

One must bear in mind that interreligious dialogue has been going on in parts of Asia for nigh a long time. India, for example, since its inception and for most of its history bears witness to the harmonious coexistence and dialogue among religions, including dialogue with the ancient materialists the then secular proto-scientific perspective. For the most part, India effectually evinces harmonious coexistence collaboration and dialogue not only between Hindus themselves—whether they are Vedantists, Shaivites, Vaishnavites, devotees of Shaktism or of the Divine Mother in all her manifestations—, but between all religions: Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Parsism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. Even amidst modernity, the fabric of Indian everyday life already presupposes interreligious open-mindedness understanding collaboration and dialogue. Similarly, the modern Chinese amidst the dynamics of secular society without conflict or antagonism between traditions, trace their spiritual heritage *in* the dialogue *between* Confucianism Daoism and Buddhism, and, to add to the complexity of Chinese society today, to these faiths one must consider the ongoing dialogue with Christianity and Islam two traditions that millions of Chinese have now embraced. And again, in Japan amid modern complexity there is an amazing historical integration between Shinto, Confucian values, and Buddhism. For example, one may have a Shinto wedding and a Buddhist funeral without cultural conflict or negative social repercussions. Today, the prevailing openness cultivated by many Japanese is astounding they display a surprising readiness to learn from other spiritual traditions.

The Critique Concerning Western Intellectual Dominance of the Interfaith Movement

An important point of critique centers on the western centric intellectual dominance of the interfaith movement and the undeniable foregrounding of western essentialism rooted in the tendency to universalizing truth (Moyaert 2005, Sheetz-Willard et al 2012). Moreover, ever since Cartesian philosophy western thinking seems to favor a prevailing atomistic tendency of conceiving the self as an independent subject outside of space time and world, which is tantamount to a devaluation of truth as interdependence of selves, cultures and traditions. Moreover, the western propensity to universalize and

its correspondence theories of truth highlight the inherent unity of all religions rather than emphasizing as Asian philosophies evince, the interdependent nature of reality and the axiomatic diversity of communally lived religion (Clooney 1993).

Notwithstanding, in the 19th and especially the 20th century the advancement of the western academy in the hermeneutics and phenomenology of truth has been astonishing (Palmer 1969). Today, in spite of differences, the western integration in matters of truth meets coheres and harmonizes with eastern ways of dialogical thinking. Besides, there is nowadays an amazing take off of local regional international and global interfaith dialogue events in Asia: China India Singapore Japan Indonesia and Malaysia are some of the active players. These interfaith events are supported and financed by eastern governments, academic institutions, publishing companies, and other organizations. This, in and of itself, seems to curtail traces of the western intellectual dominance of global interfaith events. Most importantly, it appears that the rapid change of the global landscape of interfaith dialogue is already more culturally inclusive and the problems of western intellectual domination in the near future will be reversed.

Sheetz-Willard et al (2012:270) put it well:

Judging by global demographic trends, it is most likely that it will be the non-Western, non-elite groups in the world that will be significantly shaping interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the coming years and decades. These populations represent the increasingly diverse faces of dialogue globally that are transcending the East-West divide, and their ideas will undoubtedly look different from the ideas of the past and of today.

Though the issues of western domination are beyond the present scope a few words are deemed fruitful. Foremost, critique must be attended by a prior reservation, namely that the great *œuvre* of the western world and academy to cultural and religious otherness issued forth the global phenomenon of interreligious dialogue as we know it today. Given that this global multifarious phenomenon of interfaith engagement has effectually been organized and led by the western academy and other organizations, it is inevitable that we inherit part of the dialogical and intellectual acumen of western thinking, including perhaps the blind spots of western rational discourse and universalization, along with other vested interests or contingencies placed by western governments publishing companies or other financing organizations (Sheetz-Willard et al 2012).

Needless to say, the richness of the dialogical thinking of the western philosophical tradition being not wrong in-itself, is best complemented by the Indian Chinese Japanese and other eastern ways of thinking that highlight the interdependent, intergenerational multiplicity of religious communities, that for the most part exist harmoniously amidst each other; each, bearing the torch of its own *truth*, an incomparable absolute -that neither includes excludes or subsumes other religious absolutes or ways of life- that ultimately can never be known. In the final analysis, regardless of level of commitment capacity or religion, all human beings and communities are bound to otherness an ultimate horizon they strive to embody. The Asian experience in interfaith dialogue with a more open culturally interdependent and grassroots approach can best guide or assist in the integration of differences, and at times perhaps correct global interreligious, dialogical impasses.

Returning to the great beginning of the now global phenomenon of interfaith dialogue, it matured in the western hemisphere during the 19th century precisely the maturing time for the west to question its own exclusivist universalizing agendas, and, retrospectively speaking, to work through the de-absolutization of truth from the ancient Greeks to the middle ages and though the 18th century enlightenment-, that exemplary epoch of reason absolutized; and consequently, the unlimited prominence given to the powers of human rationality to purportedly grasp unchanging, so-called infallible or universally absolute truth. However, in the 19th century perspectives on truth radically changed, it stands as one of the most intellectually creative and fertile periods in the history of Western Europe. Culture thrives giving birth to new schools and currents of thought evinces the sprouting of the social sciences: history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, whilst developments in the conception of historical

truth saw the birth of Darwinian evolutionary theory; and in philosophy we have the developments of existentialism, romanticism, voluntarism, pragmatism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, linguistics, and later deconstruction.

Now, we turn to a study of the hermeneutical tradition. The insight of hermeneutics and its corollary tradition of phenomenology have significantly shaped modern intercultural and interreligious dialogue, forwarding a better understanding of the religious and ethical other. The following exploration offers a glimpse into western philosophical thinking as it relates to the question of the interpretation of truth. This is accomplished through the study of three important figures that significantly contributed to the opening and development of modern hermeneutical theory.

Openings in Philosophical Hermeneutics: Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer

The 19th and 20th century developments of philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology focus on the possible conditions of understanding text and context, challenging essentialist or absolutist interpretations of universal truth. Here texts refer to the understanding of anything from conversations, dialogue, processes, others, situations, words, speech, language, art, and history (Palmer 1969). Hermeneutics firstly began as a method of interpreting biblical and ancient Greek philosophical texts, however soon emerged as a phenomenological study of the structures of human experience and consciousness. The beginning of modern hermeneutics is mostly traced to Friedrich Schleiermacher. He contends that hermeneutics constitutes the *art* of interpretive understanding bears the ultimate aim to achieve “understanding in the highest sense (Schleiermacher 1998:228).” If the interpreter overcomes the risk of misunderstanding, he may potentially put himself “in possession of all the conditions of understanding (227).” As such, hermeneutics does not constitute lax interpretation where misunderstanding must by all costs be avoided. Hermeneutical understanding is problematized so that misunderstanding is expected and anticipated.

Schleiermacher (1998) like many scholars of his time worked toward freeing the subject from the limitations imposed by Immanuel Kant’s philosophy of finitude. He questioned the Kantian duality between *unknowable things in themselves* and *knowable appearances*. He essentially rejected the dichotomy of the pre-existing outside world of objects that the subject passively receives in the *inner mind* through the active generation of consciousness. In so doing, he was the first to debunk the need for a correspondence theory of truth as method that explains what the objective world is, *qua* the way it corresponds to the subjective representation of it. Here, Schleiermacher fundamentally challenges the subject object distinction in matters of understanding. His posture problematizes the question of correctness of re-presentation which requires analysis into what the subject passively received from the world and how it spontaneously interpreted it, but, above all, requires further analysis into how the subject represents shapes or interprets herself. For him, we can neither wholly isolate our consciousness from the world to see what it passively receives, nor can we understand how our mind spontaneously contributes to the generation of consciousness or world.

Most importantly, Schleiermacher introduces the question of the universality of language as medium of understanding and interpretation. Language constitutes “the only presupposition in hermeneutics and everything that is to be found, including other objective and subjective presuppositions,” all “must be discovered in language (Schleiermacher 1977:38).” Understanding has a twofold hermeneutical perspective: firstly understanding is formed by reference to a given language as a whole for instance French, and secondly it is formed on the basis of understanding the speaker, her unique individual language molding and manner of appropriation of language. The discourse of the speaker is only understood by reference to language as a whole (Schleiermacher 1998).

He was the first to explore the meaning of a text by inquiring into the intentions of an author, the style or grammar of the language he chose to convey his ideas as well as the historical context of his thought. He contends that to inquire into the author’s interior history of aims and thought, those that motivated him to bring the text into being, is a psychological and intuitive exercise of individual genius

that at its best enables the interpreter to potentially experience the thoughts of an author the same way the author experienced them. Hence, the interpreter bears an advantage can possibly better understand the author's intention and historical context of the texts generation and thinking than the author himself (Schleiermacher 1998).

But since hermeneutics constitutes only an aspect of Schleiermacher's thought we have to understand it in reference to the totality of his philosophical and moral system. Briefly, his real break with the limitations posed by Kant on subjectivity is by an immediate appeal to experience through *psyche* intuition and religious aesthetic genius. He argues that the feelings induced by religious experiences participate in the highest order of thought and life compelling us to understand that we are absolutely dependent on infinity. Openness and freedom originate through the conscious reception of great ideas, like nature, beauty, humanity, God, the infinite, and so on, whose largesse releases unifying aesthetic religious feelings that enable us to participate in their vastness. Religion transcends morality and metaphysics is a feeling and an intuition a deep need to directly emerge oneself in the infinite; whereas dogmas, including that of immortality do not belong to religion proper rather are its consequence (Schleiermacher 1988).

In the 20th century Martin Heidegger who was influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Edmund Husserl, amongst others, makes a decisive break with the subject object duality, in effect with all representational or essentialist thinking and correspondence theories of truth. His ontological turn to hermeneutics works through a careful interpretation of the representational character of the truth claims of major figures in the philosophical tradition; and this enables him to pursue the destruction of metaphysical thinking from Plato to Nietzsche. He determines that re-presentational truth or thinking ("*percipere, co-agitare, cogitare, repraesentare in uno*"), is a mode of universalizing that endeavors to be consistent to the rules imposed upon it by thought, hence makes the claim to be free from all doubt and uncertainty in matters of truth (Heidegger 1973:29). In reality however, the claim to indubitable and certain knowledge is a subjective act of thought a type of cognitive representational thinking in a movement away from existence, presencing and presence.

For Heidegger (1968), thinking that attempts to represent the world as well as itself, remains divorced from its ontological existential ground and origin, the unthought: being as such. Accordingly, an immediate understanding of being cannot be conceptual the result of representation or reason (*ratio*), essentially objectification of the existent. Rather, being as such unconceals itself in meditative opening to the vastness, the mystery and marvel of contemplative thinking and of existence itself. Heidegger (1962) determines that the existential possibilities of understanding truth emerge in direct relation to the question of the being of beings. However, the history of metaphysics in its concern with representing beings failed to ask the most fundamental question: what is being itself? Like his teacher Husserl before him, Heidegger turns to the presocratics for an unmediated understanding of the disclosure of being, that is in search for the shining forth of well-rounded truth (*aletheia* or unconcealment).

Rejecting Husserl's method of phenomenological reduction that aimed to understand pure intentionality and consciousness by bracketing the external world (*epoché*), he makes the radical ontological turn to completely annul any separation between the subject and the world. Accordingly, he determines that the human being *Dasein* is a being-in-the-world, a being-there already involved in the midst of historical reality. *Dasein* is the kind of being anterior to the subject object duality that bears a primordial connection to the being of all beings. Further, *Dasein* is already comported customarily and predominantly in everydayness, and it is not indicative of the disclosure of reason or rationality. Rather it is the *openness* or *world* through which an intricate nexus of meanings is disclosed in its truth (*aletheia*), only to hide into concealment (*lethe*). The world is constitutive emergent understanding and stands between the interplay of presence and absence, discloses itself in measures of openness to the light and mystery of being itself (Heidegger 1962).

He says: "World is the lighting of Being into which man stands out (Heidegger 1977:229)." The presencing of things as they open up their meaning to us, (anything from the whole gamut of objects, circumstances, contexts, moods, feelings, constitutive existential structures), is the shining forth of

aletheia at the origin of things, in and as the disclosure of world. Truth, *aletheia*, ultimately is Being-in-the-world that is *Dasein*; it is the unconcealment (and concealment) of the existent itself as well as the emerging of world through the meanings gathered and preserved by humans in language (Heidegger 1962, 1968). And the human is that kind of being that finds itself in-between what is unconcealed and what is concealed. Heidegger (1977:229) says: "Man in his essence is ek-sistent into the openness of Being, into the opening region that lights up the 'between' within which a 'relation' of subject to object can be."

Heidegger's early philosophical turn to language is interesting. He finds that authentic speaking is only possible in silence for hearing entails a kind of speaking silence. Hence, he claims that the essence of language does not lie in words and is not the uttering sounding or speaking of them. Nor is it the silence that pertains to hearing a gap in our chatter. Rather, the silence that speaks to us belongs to authentic discourse, a kind of primordial attunement of one self to another and to otherness, out of which the speaking (*legein*) of language emerges as authentic speech (*logos*). Heidegger maintains that discourse is ontologically prior to language. Hearing is constitutive of discourse and in authentic discourse through listening, one hears. Thenceforth, to hearken to language (spoken or written) to understand its discourse (*noein*), is to hear its speaking silence (Heidegger 1962).

In the sphere of *alētheia*, speech and silence emerge as part of the same ineffable totality of being. In order to emphasize the ineffability inherent in all speech and writing, Heidegger often annuls the limits between words by hyphenating the spaces between them; erases words already written, or uses an ancient word in the place of its modern equivalent (like *Eon* instead of Being). Through linguistic twisting and a poetic spinning he endeavors to say something intuitive about the ontological status of language. Further, through edifying etymological interpretations and a language that evokes stillness he uncovers ways and builds bridges that enable the crossing from speech to silence and vice versa. His usage of slippery language and innovative terminology therefore unveils the double elusiveness of both words and silence over the abyss of unconcealment (*aletheia*).

Through meditative pathways of thought, Heidegger therefore sets out to break free from what he sees to be the pervasive dichotomies of metaphysics and theology. The various linguistic strategies he employs are geared to overcome the constitutive dualism of subject and object inherent in all philosophical and theological thinking and also embedded in language. He maintains that at all junctures of thought the Being of beings is not a mere being, rather it is the pure giving of the being of all existence. Being gives of itself in openness and its presence concurrently draws the manifestation of language and thinking across the space of an absence.

Precisely, it is this refusal of being itself to be put in words that calls and re-calls for the meditation on language. Being purely gives. And the human comes to its own in language across the space of the unconcealment of self concealment (Heidegger 1968). This absent space of disclosure draws near both the meaning of silence and the silence of meaning. For Heidegger, the unthought –absence, silence, ineffability, concealment–, is what calls for genuine thinking and also remains the challenge for thought. In openness to being thinking becomes authentic and original, a kind of thanking a poetics of the earth and all the cultural social realities we think build and dwell-in (Heidegger 1977).

Heidegger's student Hans Georg Gadamer agreed with his teacher's ontology of *Dasein* being-in-the-world, however took a more radical ontological turn to language. He eschewed Heidegger's philological approach and recasting light on the Platonic dialogues determined that hermeneutical understanding emerges dialogically. In his *magnum opus Truth and Method*, upon which the present inquiry is based, Gadamer (1985) determined that we are already immersed in the historical context, participating through language family society and tradition, therefore our understanding is ontologically shaped by history with which we are in constant dialogue. Since we can never totally transcend nor have a totally objective view of the historical context, we move within its stream of meaning beliefs and tradition. Understanding therefore emerges in history and is rooted in language. However, it cannot be attained by an objective insight into history and being, nor can it be objectified or controlled; rather it constitutes the spontaneous opening of meaning that unfolds before us in everyday life.

Gadamer's insight into truth is similar to Heidegger's understanding constitutes the ontological historical processes through which both the world and the human come into being through language. However, Heidegger's silence and ineffability though constitutive of language seems to at the same time overcome it in and through the opening to being as such. On the other hand, for Gadamer nothing can occur outside the sphere of history and language. It is in language that being unconceals-itself and all truth. Therefore whether in history, art, the sciences, and all disciplines of life, truth unfolds in the opening of the movement of language and method, understanding and interpretation. Hence, all knowledge consciousness or understanding taking its place within the ontological sphere of language is interpreted understanding.

Gadamer contends that by virtue of already finding ourselves immersed within the context of language history and tradition, our understanding is given to prejudices (*preunderstandings*) that influence and hinder our interpretation of texts, situations, cultures, and historical contexts. However, prejudices are not bad in themselves rather are necessary and constitutive they form the indispensable fabric that makes the movement of meaning history and interpretation possible. It is axiomatic to hermeneutics that one voluntarily engages a text a conversation or dialogue with the intention of learning from the other; but one always learns in the measure that they bring to light their inmost prejudicial understandings.

Gadamer outrightly disagrees with Schleiermacher's hermeneutical claim that understanding by way of intuition and psychology can divine the author's inner intentions or thoughts. He therefore challenges Schleiermacher's assertion that one can "understand an author better than the author understood himself (Gadamer 1985:169)." He finds that the author already in the movement of the historical context which transcends him, is not in control of the processes of emergent understanding; even authors themselves cannot unveil the full meaning of their writing. Besides, authors are constitutive of otherness therefore not in control of their creative processes that in practice transcend them by far.

Gadamer, in contradiction to Schleiermacher, shifts the attention from inquiring into the intentions of an author to focusing on the text and the interpreter. He finds that the hermeneutics of the author constitutes an objectification of understanding an interpolation introduced in the text from the outside. However, the dialogue of emergent understanding takes place directly between the text and the interpreter. Hence, meaning or understanding emerges dialogically is revealed in inter-subjective communication that takes place in what Gadamer calls a *fusion of horizons* between interpreter and text. A horizon constitutes a *historically effected consciousness* through the sharing of a common language. And language, ontologically constitutive of understanding, forms the basis upon which any fusion of meaning is made possible.

In Gadamer, understanding (which is already prejudicial) becomes the ontological opening of the world, a dialogical fusion of horizons of interpreter and text. It is not that the interpreter can attain objective or absolute knowledge of a text; rather, interpretation takes place in the dimension and movement of the projection of the interpreter's inmost prejudicial *pre-understanding*. The fusion of horizons is an event of being that occurs in a precognitive pre-representational moment, and, understanding—the opening of world—emerges through a constant projection and immediate superseding of the historical horizon.

Gadamer's hermeneutics opens the intersubjective conversation between interpreter text and context that ultimately reveals novel possibilities for learning another culture history and language. On the other hand, Schleiermacher opens the romantic horizon of aesthetic genius and of total immersion in the hermeneutics of the infinite; ultimately reveals the deep thinker that brings *psyche* intuition and feeling to bear upon his interpretation of the religious other. Whereas, Heidegger sheds light on our primordial connection to being itself, reveals across spaces of silence the ineffable marvel of the existent. Ultimately, he illumines the opening that enables the human to comprehend beyond rational thinking the inmost mystery of being *qua* mystery and otherness.

Heidegger finds that to represent means to stand over against the world a step away from presence, mystery and presencing. Representational thinking, the subject object duality at the basis of things, keeps us clinging to the dream of separation from being-in-the-world. However, through a deep and prolonged

meditation on language the light of being grants to the human herself *qua* mystery -absence- and the expanse: the existent silence. Straightaway, we turn to an exploration of Panikkar's hermeneutics of openness in intercultural interreligious dialogue.

Panikkar's Interreligious Hermeneutics of Openness *qua* Ultimate Mystery

During the 20th century in the wake of the revolutionary *œuvre* of Vatican II arose great catholic scholars like Raimon Panikkar, Hans Küng, Leonard Swidler, Edward Schillebeeck, Paul Knitter, among others, who inherited and furthered 19th and 20th century philosophical insight, applying it to the hermeneutics of intercultural interreligious dialogue. The lives work of these pioneers and many others not mentioned revitalized Christology, imbuing it with a new enhanced interreligious momentum that challenged and reshaped ecumenical intra-Christian thinking, deepening the interfaith movement (Sheetz-Willard et al 2012).

Spanish philosopher scholar and theologian Raimon Panikkar, is especially commendable for achieving a monumental integration of eastern and western intellectual perspectives on interreligious dialogue. His work on truth and intercultural interfaith exchange effectually, envisions the dialogue between faiths through a hermeneutics of openness to ultimate mystery. He claims that it is the ineffable divine, beyond dogmatic positions fixed identities or any contingent form of objectification, classification, or conceptualization, which potentiates the possibility of harmony between the wisdom of east and west. For Panikkar, genuine interreligious encounter and dialogue is captured in total hermeneutical openness, engages the plurality of religious standpoints allowing them to be unifying threats of ultimate mystery. As such, every faith is an occurrence of the divine ineffability, "and openness to ultimate mystery—that indeterminate and ungraspable reality constituting the greater whole of which each religion is but a manifest fragment—is the only way to existentially bridge the gulf or mediate the distance between faiths" (Michaelides 2009:451).

For Panikkar (1987, 1999), the matter of interreligious truth constitutes an undecidedly open form of interpretation and understanding: absolute truth exists it overflows contingency however ultimately it can never be known—it is unspeakable and unknowable. Moreover, it is this vastness of ineffable truth that reveals time history and context. Truth as such is relational interdependent dialogic and interpretive; it is contingent to historical, sociocultural, perspectival, intentional, linguistic, and other relational parameters. It cannot be infallible or universal nor is it incommensurably pluralistic; neither does it annul dissolve or subvert differences nor does it collapse into relativism that destroys itself as absolute claim, if all is relative so is relativism. Rather, truth remains relational through and through, ultimately is unknowable as it supersedes contingency in all respects.

However, even though truth supersedes relativism it nevertheless remains relative to the dialogical historical context. Panikkar (1987:127) says: "[...] any human affirmation, and thus any truth, is relative to its very own parameters and that there can be no absolute truth, for truth is essentially relational." Yet, paradoxically, there is an absolute invisible truth that is ineffable unknowable, concurrently relational and transcendent. Truth is relational because overflowing contingency it discloses the fluid dynamic interrelated array of bewildering inter-reacting contexts: ever shifting, porous and interdependent cultures, historicities, languages, intentions, situations, perspectives. But concurrently, in the stepping back from experience to hear the deep plurality - truth opens in and as transcendent wholeness heard through the inexhaustible reservoir of diversity, with which the mystery of the self coheres.

In Panikkar, truth ultimately means genuine and deep engagement with the religious other is relative to dialogue and context, directly relates to the superseding interdependent whole the self, resonating in and as the axiomatic *totum* of deep plurality (Trapnell 2004). This *totum* existentially cohering with the mystery of the ultimate horizon of self discloses all other egos as distinct fragments opening within it-self, reveals at every present step the reservoir of dialogue context and plurality.

Panikkar (1999) deeply influenced by the Indian tradition, considers the other person as distinct from my ego but as part of my self; the unspeakable whole, the self – the ultimate horizon – must therefore be

the point of focus and attention in dialogue with the cultural or religious other. Hence, Panikkar's hermeneutics of cultural and interreligious dialogue positions the other person as distinct from my ego but not from my-self (Cisneros 2011). In this light, hermeneutical openness to the whole means never losing sight of the ultimate horizon, the unknowable religious other, within me: otherness subverts universal truth—the other,—betokens dialogical openness reveals diversity and context, ultimately bestows *cosmic human trust* and *cosmic confidence in reality* (Panikkar 1979, 1987).

Cisneros (2011:254) finds Panikkar's influence in our times “a significant contribution to the hermeneutics of interreligious dialogue;” it is a vision that highlights the prominence and prior significance of the other in cultural religious hermeneutics. According to Panikkar, “to cross the boundaries of one's culture without realizing that the other may have a radically different approach to reality is today no longer admissible (1987:9).” He contends that cosmic trust and communication deep listening and engagement are born in relating to the *other qua other*. Then, *dialogos* bears a cosmic confidence in the unfolding of ineffable reality, a deep listening to difference and learning *qua* otherness and diversity. Panikkar (2006:19) affirms that since “the divine mystery is ineffable and no discourse describes it,” in genuine dialogue words become *icons born from silence* and mystery, only to return “back to a new silence,” a dialogical posture that echoes and pronounces the deepest recesses from which the contemplative word is born and listening unfolds.

Concerning hermeneutical truth, Panikkar says:

[...] hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation, of bringing forth significance, of conveying meaning, of restoring symbols to life and eventually letting new symbols emerge. Hermeneutics is the method of overcoming the distance between a knowing subject and an object to be known, once the two have become estranged (1987:8).

Panikkar (1981) contends that to truly understand the cultural or religious other requires a conversion experience a new revelatory appropriation of otherness. This necessitates the revelatory generation of a new symbol the apprehension of a new human ultimate horizon, pointing beyond itself to the transcendent, thus: “a *dia-logos* means a piercing of the *logos* to attain a truth that transcends it (Panikkar 1979:243).” Genuine interfaith dialogue constitutes a spiritual practice that forwards transformation through under-standing of the cultural religious other, which means the other and “I” are “standing under the same horizon of intelligibility (1979:9),” or better, the ethical other and “I” stand under the same self.

Hermeneutics of Openness in the Theology of Religions

Moyaert (2011:1) points to the tension between commitment to one's own faith and openness to the religious other. She goes on to say that often it is theology “that sets the limits as to how far that openness extends.” She finds the application of the soteriological approach in the theology of religions as a methodological foreclosure on religious others. It is unacceptable because it colonizes the religious other by imposing on them a soteriological typology, (or perhaps one may add a pneumatological one). She suggests that we move from soteriological openness which imposes one's categories of thought on the religious other to hermeneutical openness.

She finds that “hermeneutical openness should precede soteriological appreciation/ judgment.” In other words, it is good that one enters into dialogue appreciating the salvatory value of other insights and religious traditions however soteriological thinking concurrently colonizes the other by way of judgment. The truth of the matter is, Moyaert (2005) claims, that identities cultures religions and commitments are interactive open systems and subject to change and transformation. Since openness is open by definition; and identities are dynamically open interactive systems, there is no more genuine stance in dialogue than total interpretive openness. In this respect Moyaert says: “Christians who appropriate hermeneutical openness can be surprised by what they learn about God (2011:47).”

The best way to understand the religious other is to hear their self-interpretation of themselves. Moreover, before entering into dialogue one has to engage in a critical study of the other's texts and ways of life. Further, there is a sense of freedom in not trying "to master the encounter with the religious other (Moyaert 2011:46)." Accordingly, there is a sense of openness in being able to understand the other through otherness; as there is a sense of freedom in being able to move in-between religious traditions. Concluding, Moyaert (2011) turns to Clooney (2008) in order to clarify her horizons of hermeneutical openness.

Clooney says:

The careful reader engaging the two texts in their own two traditions comes to know more than expected, and in a way that cannot be predictably controlled by either tradition [...]. As we learn more about religious traditions in their depth than has been possible before, we know more deeply the possibilities of several traditions and where they lead us, while yet we also lose the intensity and devotion possible for those who know only their own tradition. We are then left in a vulnerable, fruitful learning state, engaging this powerful works on multiple levels and paradoxically learn more, while mastering less; we have more teachers and fewer masters (2008:209).

Opening the Question Concerning the Global Poor and the Underprivileged in Interfaith Events

The most outstanding critique today is that many doubt the enterprise of interreligious/interfaith dialogue on the grounds that it is mostly an elitist project conducted in luxurious hotels the world over, either by liberal humanist scholars that claim to be spiritual but not religious, or by scholars at the boundary of tradition, or else by religious leaders representing an entire tradition in all its diversity for instance Christianity or Buddhism. Most importantly, dialogue is organized with vested interests such as matters of prestige that in and of themselves exclude laypersons, conservative religious adherents, as well as youth, but, firstmost, the poor (Fabrycky 2011, Hick 1982, Landau 2012, Knitter 1988, Michel 2010, Sheetz-Willard et al 2012, Zago 1980).

The problem concerning lack of adequate representation in interfaith events lies beyond the present scope. Sheetz-Willard et al (2012) addresses well this important question elucidates aspects of its complexity providing suggestions. The question of who represents what religion and to what extent is sometimes a difficult question to answer. However, better communication with participants in the organizational process can to an extent resolve this problem. As to whether scholars with liberal ideas participate in dialogue events the axiomatic of plurality in principle necessitates to the degree possible, that nobody is excluded and that all are welcomed to the event of friendship and dialogue.

But of outmost concern here is the exclusion of the masses of poor communities which in numbers constitute the majority of humans on the planet. Planetary poverty as manifested today points to an eclipse in our humanity. It is a global travesty disclosing our cultural and religious bankruptcy. Hence, this pressing issue urgently needs be readdressed by the interfaith movement not only as part of its activist agendas, but more-so for the success of planetary interreligious dialogue.

Fr. Michel (2010) rightly determines that today interreligious dialogue with the cultural or ethical other is steered by the "well-fed, well-housed, well-educated, and well-placed in society" (5). In this regard, Father Michel goes on to say, dialogue decontextualizes the issues without reference to the tangible needs of the peoples constituting real cultural religious communities, peoples which more often than not are excluded in oppressive societies marginalized and crushed by intolerable poverty. According to Fr. Michel, interreligious communication becomes wholesome dialogue only when both the socio-cultural and religious factors affecting interfaith encounters are taken into consideration, and this merits the inclusion of hearing the polyphony of indigenous as well as migratory voices of the oppressed the destitute and poor. Thus, interreligious dialogue is effectually transformed into wholesome communication if it actually begins from the daily concerns and social reality of the deprived and poor. Otherwise, our interpretive understanding of the poor remains elliptical becomes a general concept

diffusing the issues, rather than fusing with the truth and reality, the being and world of the poor themselves.

Fabrycky (2011) notes that

Fr. Michel's essays remind us that the difficulties of interfaith encounter often have little to do with theology *itself*. Rather, the conflicts are political in a basic human sense—how common life is organized, how children are raised, how one interprets history, and how one understands what it means to live faithfully...in a fallen world (84).

Fabrycky ascertains the interfaith encounter will cease to “symbolize either the worse of crusading imperialism or the flaccid religious blather of modern dialogists” when the starting point of commitment is our common humanity and that necessitates that we primarily hear the underprivileged—but even our cultural religious adversaries and enemies (83). Only thus the interfaith encounter becomes “gracious engagement,” bears transformative power, humbling “our religious and cultural self-righteousness” for the sake of wholesome truth, and not for a biased and partial understanding of it (84).

The Factum Brutum of Global Poverty: An Unjustified Closure

The whole truth regarding the magnitude of the global phenomenon of poverty is discouraging. Only a brief statistical glance grounds the measure of humanity's fallenness, making it imperative that the interfaith movement wholeheartedly highlight grassroots approaches that primarily include the many voices of the poor, address their real communal needs.

According to the World Bank's (2008) poverty development indicators, 80% of humanity lived at or below US \$10 a day. Tragically so, the more recent estimates of the 2015 'World Bank's Overview', show that in 2012 almost one third of planetary population 2.2 billion people, lived at or below US \$3.10 a day. But most recently, according to the United Nations Development Programme (2014), 'Human Development Report,' almost half the planetary population (more than 3.2 billion people), lived on less than US \$2.50 a day; and more than 1.3 billion lived in destitution earning less than US \$1.25 a day. Hence, globally, many disadvantaged human communities are living at poverty or below poverty level, confronting everyday issues of deep impoverishment: hunger, malnutrition, the ellipse of clear water, health care, medication, and sanitary conditions, crime, as well as drudgery. Most tragically, many of these peoples are concurrently facing war disease stunned children, or suffering many other deprivations like lack of education and no electric power. For many communities today the past looks destitute unbearable the future bleak. Moreover, according to the Word Bank Overview (2015), “for those who have been able to move out of poverty, progress is often temporary: economic shocks, food insecurity and climate change threaten to rob them of their hard-won gains and force them back into poverty.”

In this light, Fabrycky's (2011) point is well made, the interfaith movement needs to dialogically address and integrate the political and cultural problem of the global poor from the bottom up. When poor communities are integrated into the interfaith movement then the encounter with the ethical or religious other will indeed become “gracious engagement,” rather than specialized (often adversarial and metaphysical) religious talk. Furthermore, it is ungracious but also unseemly not to have rich participation of poor communities in interfaith initiatives. Most importantly, it is imperative to organize and successfully undertake local regional and global interfaith events that envision and clearly communicate their intended aim to address the material educational and spiritual needs of the poor.

But in the final analysis, the interfaith movement will embrace wholesome truth only when it collectively opens up to under-standing and embracing the world of the poor. Then its committed spiritual praxis will graciously manifest the aim to alleviate the suffering of the impoverished: trustingly, ethically, more-so religiously. Differences in our pluralistic age ‘can be vital resources for our humanity’ they mandate the challenge of creatively entering into dialogue with our core human being—with ethical

diversity—that is into dialogue with each other (Hebblethwaite 1997). One may add: this necessitates that we dialogue with the global poor constituting more than half of planetary population.

Beyond Sameness and Difference: the Open Commitment of the World's Religions Toward the Poor

In a different tone, Ruf (2005) claims that religious cultural and ethical differences are surpassed not by polemics and conflicts among faiths but by recognizing the common core of the world's religions and of our humanity, our empathic compassionate loving and caring response to “liberating people from impoverishment and suffering into joyous living (25).” Foremost, love compassion and mercy towards all others especially alleviation of suffering and assistance to the poor and disadvantaged is in accord with the inmost commitment of all religions.

For Hindus love and compassion (*karuna*) is extended infinitely to all beings, reinforcing the oneness of all from which it emerges. For Jains *karuna* translates to the practice of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) in all spheres of life. For Moslems to align with the will of Allah the God of mercy means to generously give alms to the poor (*Zakat*). For Jews to care for the one God and for justice means to care for the weak the vulnerable and powerless, the disabled and disadvantaged: the old, widows, orphans, the poor, as well as the needy stranger. For Christians the greatest act of charity (*charis*) and *agape* translates to helping the ‘least brethren’ is likened to serving the Christ itself. For Theravada Buddhists *karuna* loving-kindness means to follow the compassionate example and teaching of the Buddha. For Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists *karuna* bespeaks the nature of wisdom, basic-goodness, there is no wisdom without compassion: wisdom equivocates to extending liberating compassion infinitely, toward all sentient and not-sentient beings. For Confucians it is quintessential to persistently cultivate both interiorly and exteriorly the hub of all virtues: *ren* (humanness or humanity)-, throughout the nexus of social relations and societal structures that run the whole gamut of the hierarchy, from the poor peasant to the merchant the scholar the emperor. For Daoists self-cultivation translates to restoration of social cohesion by healing individual and collective disease, with the aim to reestablishing nature's flow to its pristine balance, wherein the primeval peace brings order to society and harmony in living among the people. Harmony with the *dao* strengthens *de* the moral self and inspires. The *dao* exemplifies—the Way—of impeccable ethical behavior throughout the country and universe.

An Intercultural Interfaith Community Opens to the Question of Global Poverty

To build an interfaith community is indeed potentiating. Today, with the dissemination of knowledge through the web and other telecommunication networks, even a small group can have a much greater impact than expected. A few months ago, whilst performing a random search on Google I was curiously surprised to find myself grasped by the title of a web page that read: “Reducing the gap - Interfaith riches (Reducing the gap 2015).” Reading on, I came to realize that a small group of thirteen young people from different countries and continents, adherents of the Jewish, Christian and Moslem faiths, gathered together for seventeen days during the summer of 2015 at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Geneva, to build an interfaith community with the aim “to discuss the vital theme of wealth and poverty in our world today (Reducing the gap 2015).”

Their statement of declaration is interesting and pertinent to our scope, worth quoting extensively:

All of us recognize that the need for a more equitable distribution of wealth is an issue which deeply affects us, both as citizens of our countries, but also as human beings, called by our religions to care for the welfare of humanity. How we engage with and give voice to those who are the poor constitutes a very visible mark and symbol of our concern for “the other,” a concern that lies at the heart of each of our faiths. During our three weeks together we have become more aware of how the need for global justice in the area of wealth and poverty interfaces with other pressing global

concerns, such as the need for greater responsibility and care for the environment. Our religious traditions have valuable resources to encourage and enable us to respond critically to the topic of wealth and poverty in our world. We learned that in the Jewish tradition, the Midrash Rabbah Exodus 31:12 notes that, ‘There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty—the most terrible of sufferings. Our teachers said: All the troubles of the world are assembled on one side, and poverty is on the other’ (Reducing the gap 2015).

Given the global historical context a fusion of horizons with these youth, who think graciously of the future of humanity and the world to be inherited by posterity, is enough to drive us to action. But why we humans-, constantly fail to be compassionate to bring equity? Why do we stubbornly refuse to fuse horizons with the world and being of the global poor? What are the prejudicial conceptions we cling to that cannot at once be superseded? What fixed identities and commitments keep us asleep dreaming our own separateness?

Waking from the Illusion of Separateness: Openness to Otherness

In an article titled, “Waking from a dream of separateness...,” Thurston (2015:84) sheds light on “the most pivotal moment” in the very active interfaith period of Thomas Merton’s almost thirty year engagement with interreligious dialogue. It involves a religious experience that happened to Merton on March 18th 1958, on a street corner in Louisville. Thomas Merton the following day wrote in his journal:

Yesterday, in Louisville, at the corner of 4th and Walnut, suddenly realized that I loved all the people and that none of them were, or, could be totally alien to me. As if waking from a dream—the dream of my separateness, of the ‘special’ vocation to be different. My vocation does not really make me different than the rest of men [...]. I am still a member of the human race [...]. Thank God! Thank God! I am only another member of the human race (Cunningham 1996:181-82).

Panikkar’s (1999) vision of being ‘another member of the human race’ is of equal interest:

Our relationship with the other is not an external link but belongs to our innermost constitution, be it with the earth, the living beings—especially the humans—or the divine (xvi).

Hermeneutical Openness to Pressing Global Issues Potentiates the Greatest Œuvre in Interreligious History

Abramovich (2005:239) calls for interfaith dialogue to open to “a dialogical community organized intentionally to bring about transformation for the good of the people, things and the world.” The interfaith movement already has the know-how and an extensive interreligious community networking system -that also wields great political influence- to bring radical opening and transformation. Further, change and transformation of our global world today cannot be founded on individual but collective efforts, the interfaith movement has to network with the United Nations, the World Bank, with the governments of the G-20 and other wealthy nations, and with many other extant organizations no need to mention more.

Panikkar (1995) finds that religions have an important place in the bringing of world peace. He articulates well the dynamic of the opening wherein, the religious and political worlds fuse and *intermingle* in matters of the attainment of peace:

Human peace is political and religious at the same time – and this, precisely because it is human, and Man is a totality (58-59).

Panikkar's unique spiritual depth of appropriating the earth all living beings as well as the religious or ethical other -and here the political other- as part of my self, opens new horizons in addressing pressing global issues, is especially useful for understanding and addressing issues of global poverty and the environment in interreligious engagement.

But above all, to properly understand the cultural world of the poor masses entails being open to a religious revelatory vision of *justice for all*, that emphasizes justice for the environment as well as interprets understands and translates to praxis the multifarious ways that will enrich the cultural and social realities—that is the faith—of the global poor. Our time and age is urgently calling on each and every one of us to a new opening and this mostly holds true of all religions: to eliminate the phenomena of global poverty and environmental degradation. This translates to uphold our humanity by accepting the responsibility of a fusing of horizons with nature as a whole, and, a fusing of horizons with the realities of the poor and all underprivileged and underrepresented fellow humans. Hence, we must act as *one heart* to compassionately bring love friendship and hope to every human heart.

Mostly by focusing on and attending to the material and spiritual needs of the poor communities, the globe over, the interfaith movement will necessarily undergo a radical transformation establishing the grandest *œuvre par excellence* in its history. Indeed, it will in a unique historic moment recapture wholesome momentum and integrity unifying east and west towards a common goal, elevate the love of humanity and interfaith dialogue to a new level to the dimension of their proper height.

Henceforth, the interfaith community will become a movement that generously harmonizes cultures and faiths as well as the eastern and western hemispheres. It will grandly embody the noblest of religious ideals: the total identification with and alleviation of the pain from the poor masses: that is making *interreligious faith* a serious spiritual practice, the paragon of all religious social justice missions and of all open dialogue. However, compassionate identification with the poor and underprivileged masses is no easy task; it entails and presupposes a spiritually manifest unconditional and complete hermeneutic of openness, wherein the horizons of oneself and the ethical other phenomenologically fuse into-each-other. In total convergence, oneself becomes *-is-* the disadvantaged other, through mystery and otherness judgment is suspended, and appropriation of the ethical other occurs *qua* otherness. As such, the depth of the encounter spontaneously issues forth humble action to restore human dignity and justice, on behalf of the deprived cultural other.

Cisneros (2011:246) adds yet another dimension, determines that in our global age we need to appropriate the other as other and to be just with the other “we need to communicate values clearly and constructively across cultures and religions...to find shared solutions to the issues affecting human communities across the world.” Of course, to understand ethical otherness “requires a considerable amount of commitment and empathy”. It is “an act of faith in the other’s values if we are to properly understand them.” Hence, intercultural and interreligious dialogue becomes “an act of faith” when it supersedes conflict and misunderstanding, here “the theory of hermeneutics needs a specific epistemological dimension—namely that of ‘appropriation’—that entails we borrow the other’s epistemological outlook,” we adopt and “integrate the other’s values into the constellation of our sources of meaning.”

A hermeneutics of openness in encountering the cultural or religious other avoids the moral pitfalls of imperialism and violence, colonization and projection, endless polemics, argumentation and ethical adversity. Equally, the hermeneutical stance of openness toward religious otherness rises to meet the global challenge—overcomes the categories of sameness and difference—mostly helps promote intercultural interreligious networking communities of learning and solidarity that collectively aim to alleviate world suffering and combat global injustice. Hermeneutical openness clarifies and affirms the richness of cultural and religious diversity and the plurality of traditions and perspectives ultimately advances intercultural communities of human flourishing to help guide humanity out of the deadlock, to best help redirect the global political and economic system toward advancing social cohesion and the common good.

Conclusion

In the 21st century we are still witnessing the potential threat of a nuclear holocaust, while the rapid advance of environmental disasters and global warming daily anchors in news headlines spreading fear to an already despairing humanity. Social injustice and fragmentation runs rampant, fundamentalism is on the rise and so are the global poor whereas alienation and hopelessness plaques multitudes in modern cities. Moreover, war and instability is the plight of millions drives against all odds hundreds of thousands fear ridden refugees hoping for a better future in migratory patterns toward western or other affluent nations. Concurrently, powerful nation states are engaged in a rally of military political and economic dominance in the international arena, whilst the global political and economic system constituting of an interdependence of financial markets networked via internet colonizes cultures peoples and social values at the beck and call of the few elite.

But most importantly, in our highly globalized world where few cultures remain self-contained or sharply contained, and encounters between diverse peoples and cultures are an everyday occurrence, humanity is gradually awakening to a new historical phenomenon a radically plural world of cultural and religious interdependence. More than any other epoch in history our times necessitate intercultural interreligious dialogue. It is time to work across cultural and religious divides for the strong affirmation of global justice founded on the principle of humanity, a *principio universalis* that calls for the eradication of all forms of suffering, promotes world peace and an ethics of care, accentuates the moral enhancement of human well-being amidst global turmoil. It is the contention of this paper that the global scale of suffering calls for hermeneutical openness in interreligious dialogue as the most appropriate stance for encountering the cultural or ethical other, to respect hear and reckon the truth of the other *qua* otherness as such. After we listen deeply and really hear the otherness of the poor and the plea of the earth we will know what to do.

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