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"Polyhedral Pluralism": Pope Francis, Deep Pluralists and the Practice of Hindu-Christian Studies

Reid B. Locklin

Abstract: Early in his pontificate, in the apostolic exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel" (*Evangelii Gaudium*), Pope Francis called for the cultivation of a "healthy pluralism" that resists liberal tolerance and embraces authentic difference (EV #255). What kind of pluralism does Pope Francis intend? In this essay, I propose that Francis offers a practical, political vision of "reconciled diversity" (#230) and "polyhedral" unity (#236) that resonates fruitfully with the "deep pluralism" of William Connolly, particularly in the latter's strategic decision to locate the "depth" of one's pluralism less in philosophical or theological principles than in character, disposition and embodied habit. As a distinctive form of such deep pluralism, Pope Francis's vision of "polyhedral pluralism" can offer a useful framework for engaging the legacy of founding figures of Hindu-Christian Studies, such as Swami Vivekananda, as well as contested questions of religious conversion. It also recommends a distinctive approach to the discipline itself, one that advances a pluralist agenda through practices of respectful, unitive struggle, rather than through the formulation of grand theories.

A couple of years ago, a quotation from the newly elected pope of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, began circulating on Facebook and other social media platforms. In it, the pope makes a dramatic, radically egalitarian claim about religious truth, proclaiming that:

. . . because Muslims, Hindus and African Animists are also made in the very likeness and image of God, to hate them is to hate God! To reject them is to reject God and the Gospel of Christ. Whether we worship at a church, a synagogue, a mosque or a mandir, it does not matter. Whether we call God Jesus, Adonai, Allah or Krishna, we all worship the same God of love. This truth is self-evident to all who have love and humility in their heart!¹

This is in many ways a lovely affirmation of religious pluralism, and one that might transform relations between Hinduism and Christianity, were it true that the leader of the largest Christian tradition in the world had said it.

He did not say it, of course. The news story was a hoax.²

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The confusion of those who circulated this false quotation is, to some extent, understandable. Pope Francis does sometimes talk in a way that suggests that he embraces some form of theological pluralism. Prior to leaving for an apostolic journey to Thailand in November 2019, for example, he tweeted that, “When Christians and Buddhists have the opportunity to appreciate and esteem one another, in spite of our differences, we offer the world a word of hope that can encourage and support those who are wounded by division.”³ Several years earlier, in a 2016 address to a group gathered in Rome from his native Argentina, he proclaimed that interreligious dialogue “is founded on one’s identity and on mutual trust, which is born when we are able to recognize the other as a gift of God and accept that [the other also] has something to say to us. The other has something to communicate.”⁴ In his programmatic 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis also called for the cultivation of a “healthy pluralism” that resists liberal tolerance and embraces authentic difference.⁵ Finally, and perhaps most dramatically, in 2019 he co-signed with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar a statement that includes an affirmation that “The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings.”⁶

On the other hand, Pope Francis can also be styled as a kind of conservative. He comfortably evokes the Devil in his preaching, he insists on fidelity to Catholic teaching, his teaching consistently focuses on the uniqueness and universality of salvation in Christ, and he actively promotes evangelical work.⁷ Indeed, *Evangelii Gaudium* translates into English as “the joy of the gospel,” and the Apostolic Exhortation

placed the Church’s missionary witness at the very center of Christians’ shared life. Here, Pope Francis exhorts Catholics and other Christians to proclaim their faith as a counter-witness against “relativistic subjectivism.”⁸ Elsewhere, he even encourages them to share the good news “without fear of pluralism.”⁹

So, it would seem, Pope Francis has complex views on religious pluralism. Pluralism represents a potential obstacle to Christian evangelism, and any form of pluralistic relativism stands under the judgement of the gospel. At the same time, there is also another kind of pluralism that is good—and which Christians are obliged not only to accept, but actively to promote. It is not enough, then, to ask whether or not Pope Francis can be characterised as a religious pluralist. One has also to ask: what kind of pluralist is he? The answer to this question will at least potentially have consequences for those who are engaged in the pursuit of interreligious learning, including in a field such as Hindu-Christian Studies.

One way to approach the question of Pope Francis’ pluralism would be to contextualize his position against the historical evolution of Catholic teaching on religious diversity in the modern period, including above all the Vatican II declaration *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and its creative and sometimes radical extension by Pope Saint John Paul II (1978-2005).¹⁰ In this essay, I propose to take a more ahistorical, schematic approach, focused on the very definition of “pluralism” as a theological concept. I have recourse for this purpose to two books published in 2005: David Ray Griffin’s *Deep Religious Pluralism* and William E. Connolly’s *Pluralism*. Usefully for my analysis, both advocate what they call “deep pluralism”; yet, each of them accounts for what makes his brand of pluralism “deep” quite differently. For

Griffin, the test of a true pluralism is found in one's philosophical or theological principles, whereas Connelly—and, I will argue, Pope Francis—places stronger emphasis on questions of character, disposition and embodied habit. In a first section, I develop this contrast between these two versions of the deep pluralist hypothesis. Then, from this analysis, I return to Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium* to develop what I will label his "polyhedral pluralism," an approach to religious diversity that celebrates difference in lived experiences of personal encounter and actively resists diluting or domesticating such difference in one or another metaphysical system. In the final section, I speculate briefly about what such a perspective on pluralism might mean for the scholarly practice of Hindu-Christian Studies.

Pluralisms—Shallow and Deep

In the classic formulation of Alan Race, "pluralism" represents one of three basic options for addressing religious diversity in the Christian tradition, along with the more conservative options of exclusivism and inclusivism.¹¹ Since Race first published his typology, of course, each of these categories have been further subdivided, new ones—such as "particularism" or "open exclusivism"—proposed, and the threefold schema itself periodically dismissed as inadequate.¹² For David Ray Griffin, as one important voice in this wider conversation, it is most critical to take note of a wide, categorical division within the broad ambit of theological pluralism. Some forms of pluralism, he suggests, are shallow or superficial; others are deep. Thus, in two introductory chapters of his edited collection, *Deep Religious Pluralism*, Griffin lays out a Christian philosophical and theological case for

accepting the plurality of religions as an expression of the deep structure of the created order—the "deep pluralism" of his volume's title. Any authentic embrace of plurality, he contends, entails first and foremost a "rejection of Christian absolutism, the idea that Christianity is the absolute religion, the sole vehicle of divine salvation."¹³ That is, it requires rejection of exclusivism and inclusivism, in Race's formulation. But this is only an initial step.

Among those philosophers and theologians who embrace the metaphysical self-abnegation of religious pluralism, Griffin further distinguishes between "identist" or "superficial" pluralists and "differential" pluralists. The former position all religions in relation to the same religious object and goal, whereas the latter argue "that religions promote different ends—different salvations—perhaps by virtue of being oriented toward different religious objects."¹⁴ These latter, differential theorists alone qualify as "deep pluralists,"¹⁵ and Griffin offers the Whiteheadian process theology of John Cobb as his primary illustrative example.¹⁶

As a political scientist rather than a theologian, William Connelly approaches the question of deep pluralism rather differently from David Ray Griffin, and he engages different conversation partners. Like Griffin, Connelly is concerned to avoid any absolutist faith or philosophy—what he calls "universalism" or "Bellicose Unitarianism"—as well as a pure relativism that divests religious commitments of their specificity and significance.¹⁷ Whereas Griffin, following Cobb, appeals to a metaphysical distinction between God and creativity to thread this needle,¹⁸ Connelly distinguishes between the diverse creeds that

persons hold and the “*sensibility* that colors how that creed is expressed and portrayed to others.”¹⁹ To cultivate such a sensibility, he suggests, persons and communities are required to recognize that there are multiple “*dimensions* or *types* of legitimate diversity” in public life, to cultivate “elements of dissonance or mystery within a faith,” and to foster what he calls “secondary practices of relational modesty.”²⁰ The result is an “ethos” or “culture” of “deep pluralism,” that is, “a culture in which people honor different existential faiths and final sources of morality.”²¹ Connelly also refers to this as a “bicameral orientation” which upholds both a distinctive creed and a modest, relational mode of advancing that creed in the public sphere.²²

These short summaries obviously do not do Griffin and Connelly’s proposals on “deep pluralism” full justice. Nevertheless, presuming I have not badly distorted their positions, it should be obvious that they share many of the same basic objectives, while also differing profoundly in some basic assumptions. It might be tempting to conclude that they are simply speaking about the same thing in the idioms of different disciplines—philosophical theology and political science, respectively. However, I suggest that they offer specifically different accounts of what constitutes the “depth” dimension of the “deep pluralism” that both equally advocate.

In the first of his chapters, for example, Griffin notes that the move to pluralism has various exigences, including sociological, theological and ethical concerns. But the most fundamental shift is “ontological,” and he devotes much more time and attention to metaphysical questions.²³ Connelly, for his part, devotes a full chapter to the pluralist cosmology

of William James, which might suggest a similar judgement.²⁴ Yet, in Connelly’s analysis, what qualifies James as a “deep” pluralist of the type Connelly advocates does not actually follow from the metaphysical system he constructs. It originates in something much more fundamental: that is, James’ personal disposition of “relational modesty” in advancing his proposal. James, Connelly writes, “joins a rigorous *defense* of his philosophy to *modesty* about its status.”²⁵ The depth of this pluralism is most securely located in the personal disposition of the creed-holder, not in the description, defense or details of the creed itself. It is thus compatible with many such creeds, philosophies, ideologies, or metaphysical proposals.

Read structurally, then, Griffin’s pluralism places highest value on what I will call “depth-of-description,” whereas Connelly’s pluralism positions all descriptive claims at a more superficial level, relative to a more fundamental “depth-of-disposition.” The first presumes that the most fundamental, motivating dimensions of human life are the ontological judgements we make about what is true. The other recognizes that human beings do make such judgements, and indeed that we must do so. But it also contends that, performatively, beneath every such metaphysical judgement is a living, breathing person who may or may not possess a pluralistic sensibility, a person whose life habits are or are not conducive to negotiating complex terrains of substantive religious difference. It is this disposition, and not the particulars of creed or system, that is most likely to support and creatively to engage diversity as an interpersonal reality.

"Polyhedral Pluralism" in the Teaching of Pope Francis

The distinction between "depth-of-description" and "depth-of-disposition" versions of the deep pluralist hypothesis help bring into clearer focus the different interpretive judgements of David Ray Griffin and William Connelly. In this section, I would like to suggest that the distinction may also assist in making sense of the specific, somewhat idiosyncratic pluralism advocated by Pope Francis. At a descriptive level, at least arguably, Francis is not a pluralist in any respect. He freely universalizes the truth of God's incarnation in Christ as the embodiment of mercy for all humankind,²⁶ and he insists that this gospel must be continually preached "to *those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.*"²⁷ In Griffin's terms, Francis is frankly universalist, if not absolutist on this score.

Things change, however, if we shift focus from "depth-of-description" to "depth-of-disposition." At a dispositional level, Francis would seem to advocate and embody something close to Connelly's version of deep pluralism. In a recent interreligious meeting with youth in Mozambique, for example, Francis proclaimed that "all of us are necessary: with our differences, we are all necessary. Our differences are necessary."²⁸ And, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, he characterizes a "healthy pluralism" as "one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such."²⁹ In these places and elsewhere, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of human difference—including, it would seem, religious difference—as a gift of the Holy Spirit, a resource for mutual enrichment and an opportunity for authentic encounter.³⁰ His language evokes something similar to Connelly's core civic virtues of "agonistic respect" and

"critical responsiveness,"³¹ imagining the encounter across difference as a site of reciprocal witness and peaceful contestation. In an address to an international peace conference in Cairo, for example, the pope identified three fundamental principles of dialogue: "*the duty to respect one's own identity and that of others, the courage to accept differences, and sincerity of intentions.*" "[T]rue dialogue," he continues in the same address, "cannot be built on ambiguity or a willingness to sacrifice some good for the sake of pleasing others."³²

On what basis does Pope Francis make such claims and defend such values? There are, of course, various ways to approach this question.³³ One useful locus of enquiry is a series of four heuristic principles he enumerates in *Evangelii Gaudium* for building a culture of peace: 1) "Time is greater than space"; 2) "Unity prevails over conflict"; 3) "Realities are more important than ideas"; and 4) "The whole is greater than the part."³⁴

According to Francis, "time" refers to "the horizon which constantly opens before us," whereas "space" conveys a sense of "enclosure" and possession.³⁵ So when he proposes that "time is greater than space," he evokes a disposition of radical openness, aimed at initiating ever-new processes of engagement and transformation that may or may not bear immediate fruit, rather than attempting to possess spaces, or to define and delimit certain outcomes.³⁶ The principle that "realities are more important than ideas" similarly inveighs against the limiting power of abstract concepts and mere systems of thought—which he enumerates as "ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom," "ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism," and political

programmes that are “stuck in the realm of pure ideas.”³⁷ Here we witness something not far from a specific rejection of the priority placed by a philosopher like David Ray Griffin on judgements of metaphysical truth. Ideas certainly have their place, Pope Francis suggests, but Christian convictions that the “word became flesh” reveals that concepts too must “take flesh” in “works of justice and charity” to “make that word fruitful.”³⁸

The heuristic principles that “time is greater than space” and “realities are greater than ideas” highlight the virtues of openness and creative action against the inevitable human tendency to conserve, delimit and define, and thus to take possession of what properly belongs to God. The remaining two principles offer visions of what may be possible through such creative openness. According to the principle that “unity prevails over conflict,” Francis suggests that we can and should overcome the limitations of closed horizons to seek “new and promising” syntheses and a “reconciled diversity” that seeks unity in renewed relationships rather than formal agreement.³⁹ Finally, when he insists that “the whole is greater than the part”—or even, he will clarify, greater than “the sum of its parts”—the pope draws a metaphorical contrast between the sphere, which obliterates difference, and “the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness.”⁴⁰ Francis’s position might be described as a “polyhedral pluralism,” one that valorizes diversity at the concrete level of action and affect. This pluralism, like that of William Connelly, seeks a “depth of disposition” rather than a “depth of description,” sharply subordinating metaphysical systems of all kinds

to ongoing practices of relational engagement, reconciliation and creative action.

In the Cairo address noted above, Pope Francis draws on the land of Egypt and the Sinai covenant as suitable symbols for his distinctive, differentiated vision of pluralism and encounter:

In Egypt, not only did the sun of wisdom rise, but also the variegated light of the religions shone in this land. Here, down the centuries, differences of religion constituted ‘a form of mutual enrichment in the service of the one national community.’ Different faiths met and a variety of cultures blended without being confused, while acknowledging the importance of *working together for the common good*. Such ‘covenants’ are urgently needed today.⁴¹

The language of “variegated light” and “covenants”—the latter carefully rendered in the plural—both evoke the “polyhedral” character of Francis’s approach to cultural and religious diversity. Difference is neither ignored, nor dissolved, nor rationalized away by recourse to one or another philosophical or theological system. Instead, Francis insists, it must be engaged directly, to foster “mutual enrichment” and to pursue the shared, relational ideal of the common good.

Deep Pluralism and the Practice of Hindu-Christian Studies

In the previous section, I have tried to develop Pope Francis’s approach to religious diversity as a particular form of the “deep pluralism” advocated by Griffin and especially Connelly, a “polyhedral pluralism” that functions at the level of personal disposition, sensibility, or ethos rather than at the level of theory. Not only does Francis not propose a

theoretical account of relational pluralism; he commends a kind of scepticism or modesty toward theorization itself. What matters is pluralism in ethics and action, not in systems or theories. The lived reality of human persons, in their uniqueness, their manifold differences and their shared capacity for transformative encounter, claims absolute priority.⁴²

What consequences might such a vision of pluralism hold for the practice of Hindu-Christian studies? Obviously, it must first be recognized that some interlocutors may find the more dispositional approaches of William Connelly and Pope Francis philosophically or theologically inadequate. Other interpreters of Pope Francis, such as Stephen B. Roberts, also question whether it is so easy to insulate one's theological convictions from the challenges a truly open, pluralistic disposition will inevitably raise.⁴³ In either case, perhaps, the best strategy might simply be to seek more fertile soil.

If, on the other hand, one grants the "polyhedral pluralism" of Pope Francis at least provisional value, then this would seem to open some new avenues of enquiry and provide additional support to existing proposals. Here, I limit myself here to three possibilities.

First of all, principles like "realities are greater than ideas" and "the whole is greater than the part" and also "the sum of its parts" suggest a path to revisit the historical legacy of those scholars and religious leaders of previous generations whose vision opened space for our field. Consider, for example, the Advaitin missionary, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). In recent years, scholars have challenged several elements of the received image of Vivekananda, raising questions about his religious nationalism,⁴⁴ the precise relation between his views and those of his master, Śri Ramakrishna

(1836-1886),⁴⁵ and whether his much-vaunted pluralism actually amounts to a Hindu variant of universalist inclusivism.⁴⁶ Setting Vivekananda in parallel with a figure like Pope Francis, however, it might become possible to recognize the vital importance of such historical and philosophical engagements with Vivekananda's life and legacy without also diminishing his significance as an icon of pluralism and Hindu-Christian encounter. The depth of Vivekananda's pluralism will be found, on this reading, not primarily in the theological consistency of individual speeches and writings, but in his consistent willingness to engage in an agonistic, constructive engagement across boundaries of religious difference.

One element of this engagement was Vivekananda's criticism of Christian missionaries and his frequent exhortations for Hindus to "conquer" the world with their spirituality.⁴⁷ That is, Vivekananda engaged religious difference, at least in part, by entering into contested questions of mission and conversion.⁴⁸ On one side of this controversy, Hindu critics such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930-2015) have drawn a sharp contrast between Christianity and Hinduism as "missionary" and "non-missionary" religions, respectively, accusing the former of "spiritual violence."⁴⁹ On the other side, some Christian theologians have argued for a strict equivalence between proselytism and conversion in Christianity, in the Sangh Parivar and even in global organizations like Vivekananda's Ramakrishna movement.⁵⁰ The two sides appear to be at an impasse, and in many cases the so-called "conversion controversy" turns on particular, contested judgements about traditions themselves. Is Hinduism inherently tolerant, as its advocates claim, or is it a source

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of oppression for Dalits and Ādivāsīs attracted to Christian faith? Is Christianity a tool of Western imperialism, as its critics allege, or has it provided new, indigenous spaces for persons and communities to exert their agency and to express the distinctness of their identities?

For those of us who do scholarly work in this area, or those who are (like the present author) deeply informed by those who do, the answer to these questions may simply be, “yes, Hinduism and Christianity are all of those things, and more.” However, as a second possibility, the pluralisms of Connelly and Francis would also seem to commend a shift of emphasis, from definitional questions to relational ones, and from a focus on the intrinsic character of Christianity or Hinduism to those lived practices of engagement shaped by particular Hindus and particular Christians—sometimes at great risk to themselves, their communities or their reputations—when the matter of religious difference *matters* for questions of law, justice and public order. Such a practice can take the form of clarifying the two traditions’ competing claims, as Ankur Barua does in his *Debating ‘Conversion’ in Hinduism and Christianity*,⁵¹ or it may involve proposing new ways to understand missionary activity, as we find in the work of the Jesuit theologian Michael Amaladoss and the Hindu philosopher Arvind Sharma.⁵²

None of these studies exist in a vacuum, and in the case of the conversion controversy in India, it is impossible to avoid the grim legacy of European colonialism and Western neocolonialism, on the one hand, and the rise and current supremacy of Hindu majoritarianism in the Bharatiya Janata Party, on the other.⁵³ In this context it is hard to imagine any vision of pluralism—much less one proposed by the highest authority of the

Catholic Church—making a significant impact. Yet, it is still possible for interpreters to seek out those persons and movements on the ground that already embody the kind of disposition or sensibility envisioned by Francis or Connelly in their life and work. Such exemplars as Mohandas K. Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, as already noted, recommend themselves for renewed inquiry, particularly in light of their ambivalent relationships with contemporary Hindu nationalism. In recognition of his very recent passing, however, I would draw attention here to the case of Swami Agnivesh (1939-2020). As president of the World Council of Arya Samaj for a decade, Agnivesh spoke from a place of religious specificity—even, some might argue, Hindu militancy. Nevertheless, in his public life, the specificity of his religious commitments did not prevent him from advocating strongly on behalf of bonded laborers, women and religious minorities, even in the face of harsh resistance from some fellow Hindus. The leaders of such organizations as Sadhana, Hindus for Human Rights and Agnivesh’s own Bandhua Mukti Morcha have taken up many of the same causes in pursuit of justice and religious harmony, in both India and the United States.⁵⁴ They might thus be said to embody a deep, lived sensibility of pluralism, on the ground. And Pope Francis’s principle that “time is greater than space” might in turn provide some encouragement in the face of long odds that such activism will bear tangible social and political fruit, at least in the foreseeable future.

The two possibilities surveyed so far have to do with the history of Hindu-Christian Studies and a particular, controversial area of enquiry. But I would contend that the “polyhedral pluralism” of Pope Francis also has consequences for the scholarly practice of

Hindu-Christian Studies in the context of the North American academy, as embodied in this Society and this journal. In her 2008 book, the *Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, Catherine Cornille explores the conditions of the possibility of authentic dialogue. These foundations she locates not in a metaphysic of "differential pluralism," as David Ray Griffin might suggest, but in the cultivation of particular embodied habits or virtues: "humility," "commitment," "interconnection," "empathy" and "hospitality."⁵⁵ Just under a decade later, in his Teape Lectures, Francis X. Clooney has taken up Cornille's list of virtues and added several more, specific to the engagement of Hinduism and Christianity. These include: "risk-taking"; "patience with ambiguity"; a cultivated ability to become "analogously yet still deeply, an insider in the other community"; a willingness to accept an inevitable sense of "marginality" in one's home tradition; and, for good measure, those personal qualities that mark the qualified student (*adhikārin*) in the popular Advaita treatise, the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*.⁵⁶ Both lists of virtues suggest thinking about the practice of Hindu-Christian Studies precisely as a practice, as a form of ethical discipline or moral formation. One need not adopt a particular point of view to engage this practice fruitfully, but one does have to become a certain kind of person. Able scholars of Hindu-Christian studies are, on this reading, those who can balance the manifold tensions of commitment and openness, of belonging and marginality, ambiguity and risk. Such scholars are called, in other words, to adopt a disposition or sensibility of deep pluralism, with or without any substantive change in their intellectual commitments.

Conclusion

Catherine Cornille wrote her book five years before Francis's election as pope; Francis Clooney gave his lectures a few years later. Both are, however, Catholic theologians. So perhaps it comes as no surprise that they echo key points of Pope Francis's vision. Nevertheless, as I hope I demonstrated in my brief comparison of Griffin and Connelly, both Cornille and Clooney are also faced with real choices about whether—and how—to embrace a pluralistic approach to questions of diversity and dialogue. They choose pluralism. But they also, like Francis, choose emphasize the cultivation of pluralist virtues, rather than the construction of pluralistic theories or metaphysical systems. What is required are pluralistic persons, not pluralist proposals.

"Any ethical theory," wrote the great Hindu philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in 1937, "must be grounded in metaphysics, in a philosophical conception of the relation between human conduct and ultimate reality. As we think ultimate reality to be, so we behave. Vision and action go together."⁵⁷ Though Radhakrishnan was enormously wise and right about many things, in this respect he may have slightly missed the mark. Ethical theory, as theory, may well depend on metaphysics. But out in the world, the motivations behind ethical behaviour are complex, and persons often respond to dilemmas instinctively, out of engrained habit, rather than from one or another of their philosophical conceptions.⁵⁸ In the "deep pluralism" of William Connelly, the "polyhedral pluralism" of Pope Francis and the living witness of many Hindus and Christians on the ground, in India and in North America, we can see that the most important pluralism is one that is lived out, in affect and in action—and this

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may be compatible with many different metaphysics. In our work of comparison and dialogue, then, we may most fruitfully advance a pluralist agenda through our embodied

practices of respectful, unitive struggle, rather than through the formulation of grand theories.⁵⁹

Notes

¹ David Mikkelsen, “FALSE: Pope Francis Declares All Religions are True,” *Snopes*, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/true-lies/>, accessed 19 July 2020.

² Ibid.

³ Pope Francis, Twitter Post, 21 November 2019, 4:38 am, <https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/1197449216706121728>, accessed 19 July 2020.

⁴ Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Symposium Sponsored by The Organization Of American States and by the Institute for Interreligious Dialogue of Buenos Aires” (8 September 2016), *The Holy See*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/september/documents/papa-francesco_201609_08_simposio-americas.html, accessed 19 July 2020.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), *The Holy See*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/september/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20160908_simposio-americas.html, accessed 19 July 2020, no. 255. For more examples, see Pope Francis, “In His Own Words,” in *Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue: Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives*, ed. Harold Kasimow and Alan Race (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 7-81.

⁶ “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together: Full text,” *Vatican News*, 4 February 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-02/pope-francis-uae-declaration-with-al-azhar-grand-imam.html>, accessed 20 July 2020. See also the further discussion in Gerald O’Collines, SJ, “Saluting Difference, Staying Faithful,” *SEDOS Bulletin* 51.3-4 (2019): 39-40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X19826181k>.

⁷ For further discussion along these lines, see e.g. Juan Cole, “Top Signs Pope Francis is an Honest Conservative,” *Informed Comment*, 23 September 2015, <https://www.juancole.com/2015/09/francis-honest-conservative.html>, accessed 19 July 2020.

⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 70.

⁹ Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the International Pastoral Congress on the World’s Big Cities,” *The Holy See*, 27 November 2014, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20141127_pastorale-grandi-citta.html, accessed 19 July 2020.

¹⁰ See, for example, Stephen B. Roberts, “Is the Pope Catholic? A Question of Identity in Pope Francis’s Practical Theology of Interreligious Dialogue,” in Kasimow and Race, *Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96095-1_6 and the essays collected in Paul Crowley, ed., *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).

¹¹ Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

¹² See, for example, the presentations of possible views in Paul F. Knitter and John Hick, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987); Gavin D’Costa, ed. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992); Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); and Paul M. Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

¹³ David Ray Griffin, “Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep,” in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁶ David Ray Griffin, “John Cobb’s Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism,” in Griffin, *Deep Religious Pluralism*, 39-66.

¹⁷ William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), quotations at 65, 3-4.

¹⁸ Griffin, “Cobb’s Pluralism,” 44-45.

¹⁹ Connolly, *Pluralism*, 47.

²⁰ Ibid., 61.

²¹ Ibid., 137.

²² Ibid., 4.

²³ Griffin, “Religious Pluralism,” 8-21.

²⁴ Connolly, *Pluralism*, 68-92.

²⁵ Ibid., 82.

²⁶ See Mary Madeleine Todd, OP, “Embodied Mercy: The Centrality of the Incarnation in the Thought of Pope Francis,” in *Pope Francis and the Event of Encounter*, ed. John C. Cavadini and Donald Wallenfang (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 17-37.

²⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 14.

²⁸ Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness, Interreligious Meeting of Youth" (5 September 2019), *The Holy See*, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/september/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20190905_giovani-mozambico.html, accessed 19 July 2020.

²⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 255.

³⁰ See David Wallenfang, OCDS, "Pope Francis and His Phenomenology of *Encuentro*," in Cavadini and Wallenfang, *Pope Francis*, 57-71.

³¹ Connelly, *Pluralism*, 123-27.

³² Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Participants in the International Peace Conference" (28 April 2017), *The Holy See*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/april/documents/papa-francesco_20170428_egitto-conferenza-pace.html, accessed 19 July 2020 (emphasis in the original).

³³ The anthropologist Valentina Napolitano, for example, addresses apparent contradictions in Pope Francis' public ministry by means of the distinctively Latin American interpretive category of *criollo* or *creole* identity. See her "Francis, a Criollo Pope," *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 10 (2019): 63-80. <https://doi.org/10.3167/arrs.2019.100106>.

³⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 222-237. I am grateful to Robert van Alstyne, SJ, who underscored the importance of these principles in his presentation, "Why is time greater than space? Superessentiality, Polarity, and Gift," Second Annual Conference for Collaborative Philosophy, Theology and Ministry, Christ the King Seminary, Buffalo, NY, 22-23 February 2019.

³⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 222.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 223.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, nos. 231-32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 233.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 228-29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 236.

⁴¹ Francis, "Address to International Peace Conference." The quotation is drawn from an address by Pope John Paul II, at the beginning of a similar apostolic visit to Egypt in 2000.

⁴² See Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K., "Christian Mission in a Pluralistic World: The Vision of Pope Francis," *SEDOS Bulletin* 51.5-6 (2019): 57-63.

⁴³ Roberts, "Is the Pope Catholic?," 136-41.

⁴⁴ See Shamita Basu, *Religious Revivalism as Nationalist Discourse: Swami Vivekananda and New Hinduism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Joanne Punzo Waghorne, "Global Gurus and the Third Stream of American Religiosity: Between Hindu Nationalism and Liberal Pluralism," in *Political Hinduism: The Religious Imagination in Public Spheres*, ed. Vinay

Lal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 125-29.

⁴⁵ Gwilym Beckerlegge has provided a helpful overview of this scholarship in *The Ramakrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. 27-51, and Gwilym Beckerlegge, "Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) 150 Years on: Critical Studies of an Influential Hindu Guru," *Religion Compass* 7.10 (2013): 444-53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12073>.

⁴⁶ See Bradley Malkovsky, "Swami Vivekananda and Bede Griffiths on Religious Pluralism: Hindu and Christian Approaches to Truth," *Horizons* 25.2 (1998): 217-237, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0360966900031169>, and Ankur Barua, *Debating 'Conversion' in Hinduism and Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), esp. 121-25.

⁴⁷ See the discussion and analysis in Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), esp. 228-38.

⁴⁸ For background, see especially Sebastian C.H. Kim, *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); and the collection of essays by Michael Amaladoss, Arti Dhand, Judson B. Trapnell and Anantanand Rambachan in the *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 15 (2002).

⁴⁹ See Swami Dayananda Saraswati, "An Open Letter to Pope John Paul II: Conversion is Violence," *Indian Express*, 29 October 1999, <<http://www.indianexpress.com/Storyold/129355/>>, accessed 5 May 2011; Chad M. Bauman, "The Violence of Conversion: Proselytization and Interreligious Controversy in the Work of Swami Dayananda Saraswati," *Open Theology* 1 (2015): 175-88. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2015-0006>.

⁵⁰ See C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission: A Historical Analysis of Modern Hindu Missionary Ideologies and Practices* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999); J. Kuruvachira, "Hinduism as a Missionary Religion," *Mission Today* 8 (2006): 265-84; and J. Kuruvachira, "Hinduism's World Mission," *Mission Today* 9 (2007): 39-56;

⁵¹ Barua, *Debating 'Conversion'*, esp. 12-42.

⁵² Michael Amaladoss, *Making All Things New: Dialogue, Pluralism and Evangelization in Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990); Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011); and Arvind Sharma, *Problematizing Religious Freedom* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), esp. 129-73, 217-31.

⁵³ See, for example, the nuanced (if now somewhat dated) account in Anantanand Rambachan, "Evangelization and Conversion Reconsidered in the Light of the Contemporary Controversy in India: A

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Hindu Assessment,” *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 15 (2002): 20-27. <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1275>.

⁵⁴ See “Our Vision,” *Sadhana*, <https://www.sadhana.org/>, accessed 11 September 2020; “Our Mission and Vision,” *Hindus for Human Rights*, <https://www.hindusforhumanrights.org/>, accessed 11 September 2020; and “About Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BLLF),” *Swami Agnivesh.com*, <http://www.swamiagnivesh.com/aboutbmm.htm>, accessed 11 September 2020.

⁵⁵ Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2008).

⁵⁶ Francis X. Clooney, SJ, *The Future of Hindu-Christian Studies: A Theological Inquiry* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 113-15.

⁵⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 80.

⁵⁸ On the question of ethical motivation, see the moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s discussion in *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), esp. 112-27.

⁵⁹ I would like to express my gratitude to Connor Kokot for bibliographic assistance on this essay, as well as to my co-presenters at the 2019 annual meeting of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies, two anonymous reviews, and Dr. Gopal Gupta for their feedback on the argument. The essay is stronger as a result of my engagement with this extended community of conversation.