

Theology of religions: Models for interreligious dialogue in South Africa

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Introduction

To encounter a different culture, tradition or religion (which terms seem to be entwined with one another) one merely has to converse with a colleague or neighbour, turn on the television, read the news or go to a local store. Kärkkäinen (2003:17) observes that other religions used to be distant, almost exotic, and were merely vague topics for enjoyable conversation. These other religions – which could previously be ignored – ‘have come much closer to us whether we live in the West or elsewhere’ (Kärkkäinen 2003:17–18). What may also be true is that some Christians might still be blind to people from other religions, or purposely ignore other faiths. The World Council of Churches’ (WCC) Central Committee (2002:2), however, has made the point that religious plurality is becoming unavoidable, and in their 2002 report concerning religious plurality stated that almost all Christians all over the world live in religiously plural contexts. This in itself is not the problem being stated, but rather a promise of new and exciting opportunities for obtaining knowledge and understanding of different people and the characteristics that make them different.

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The problem which is stated is the reluctance of Christians to engage with fellow South Africans from other traditions. To put it more plainly: South African Christians seem to be struggling to find a comfortable standpoint about religious plurality and how to engage with people from other religions. Tutu (2013) refers to this struggle by saying that:

[I]n times such as our own – times of change when many familiar landmarks have shifted or disappeared – people are bewildered; they hanker after unambiguous, straightforward answers. We appear to be scared of diversity in ethnicities, in religious faiths, in ideological points of view. (p. 4)

Viewpoints on how to go about living and working (and for all intents and purposes, coexisting) with people from differing religions seem to extend from exclusivisms and particularities to inclusivisms and pluralisms (see Hedges 2010:20–27 and Knitter 2012 for the different approaches Christians have towards other religions). The WCC (in their 2002 report on religious plurality and Christian self-understanding) (WCC Central Committee Interreligious Relations and Dialogue 2002:2) voices their concerns about this by saying, 'persistent plurality and its impact on their¹³ daily lives are forcing them to seek new and adequate ways of understanding and relating to peoples of other religious traditions.'

Although the 2001 census found that the majority of South Africans are Christians (see Statistics South Africa 2011:24), a growing number of emigrating South Africans now find themselves living in countries inhabited by people who are not all Christians. In recent decades the population of the world has gained increasing access to foreign people, their culture and traditions, '[n]ot only are ideas migrating, so are people' (Knitter 2012:5). This is of course due to the advances in technology which have opened up new channels of communication for all the world to use.¹⁴ People across the globe have, as Kärkkäinen (2003:19) states, 'much more to do with each other, whether they want to or not, in schools, markets and workplaces, even in families through intermarriage.' Kritzinger, Meiring and Saayman (1994:83) ask this question, '[h]ow is one to think of other religions, and how are we to deal with the faithful of other religions?' This is the question being asked by South Africans who live in a country where they are surrounded by many cultures, languages, traditions and religions.

The case that is being stated is that although people from different religions might be segregated in terms of their traditions, places of worship and cultures, they are now confronted by one another within their neighbourhoods, classes, workplaces, media,

13.'This', 'their' and 'them' refer to Christians living in a religiously plural society.

14.See Knitter (2012:5) who states that obtaining knowledge about other religions can be easily done by browsing the Web or turning on the television.

social networking, and so on. Kärkkäinen (2003) refers to John Habgood (the Archbishop of York), who stated that:

Other faiths used to belong to other lands. At home rival religious claims could safely be ignored. Or, if not ignored, patronized. The superiority of one's own faith was so evident that the alternatives could somehow be brought within its purview without posing any real theological or social threat. Today things are different. Different faiths are practiced cheek by jowl in most parts of the world. (p. 17)

Therefore any attempt to avoid or ignore the religious Other is increasingly becoming a futile endeavour.

In my own church I often hear people talking about their relationships with colleagues who form part of a different religious tradition, they speak in awe of the fact that these people are in so many ways similar to themselves, although they still seem to be unsure of which topics are appropriate to discuss with these religious Others,¹⁵ and which are not. There seems to be a realisation amongst Christians that there can no longer be references to *us and them*, but rather to *us amongst them*.¹⁶ This is especially true in a country where citizens have the freedom to choose which religion they want to belong to, as well as where and how they practise their religions. This leads to religious people being allowed (not necessarily by their fellow South Africans, but by law) to be openly religious anywhere in South Africa, because they are protected by the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa.¹⁷

Another perspective which must also be acknowledged is that of *them amongst us*, which might seem to be a more accurate way of looking at the South African context, if one takes the latest census data into account, which state that Christianity is still the predominant religion in South Africa (see Statistics South Africa 2011:24). Therefore it would seem more accurate to view the South African context by saying that 'they', being the religious Others, are amongst 'us', who form the largest religious group in South Africa, the Christians. It can also be possible that there is no 'us', due to the fact that there can be many denominations, sects and ideologies in all religions, which causes there to be no unified 'us' or 'them'.

However, if one were to agree with the existence of the so-called *them amongst us* idea, the communication between these two groups can possibly be a challenge. But as

15.A term coined by Hedges (2010:5). He uses the term 'Other' with a capital 'O', out of respect for and recognition of people from a different religion.

16.See Knitter (2012:5) who states that '[t]oday the reality of other religions no longer exists across the border'.

17.Constitution of the Republic of South Africa [1996], Chapter 2 [Bill of rights], No. 15 [Freedom of religion, belief and opinion].

Kärkkäinen (2003:18) states, the communication with the religious Other can also be viewed as the most significant opportunity for the Christian church in the new millennium. The question is: What are these opportunities and what do they allow Christianity to do? This is a question which this chapter will attempt to come close to answering.

For this chapter, it is also important that a distinction be made between having *knowledge of* some other religious groups, and having *exposure to* other religious groups. There is a difference between being knowledgeable about religions other than your own and having been exposed to different religions. Knitter (2012:203) refers to comparative theology as having the same approach. This type of theology states that the foundation for a theology of religions might be found better in dialogue (therefore an experience of the religious Other) than in theology. What this means is that although a person might be acquainted with the principles, history and traditions of the various different religions, it does not mean they have had any experiences pertaining to any religion other than their own. The problem arises when one is exposed to various religions without having any knowledge of the histories, traditions and principles of these religions. It is possible that this exposure without knowledge can create a problem when people from different religions are forced to live and work together. This problem can possibly be cleared up, or at the very least be unravelled, by an openness to dialogue. It is through dialogue with people from different religions that one can become more knowledgeable about and considerate of their religion and how it affects the way they live their lives and the way they think (see Knitter 2012:41; Netland 1991:297–300).

Paul Hedges (2010:13) states that when we are informed by a particular thought world of what other religions are, it will affect how we engage the religious Other. The question is: Is it then not more effective to be informed by religious people themselves about what they believe? This will enable us to grasp an understanding of their particular thought world, which will make engaging with the religious Other far more efficient.

Nevertheless, interreligious dialogue introduces us to a host of new difficulties. The globalisation of political, economic and religious life brings new pressure to communities that have been living in geographical and social isolation for years.¹⁸ Hedges (2010:1) states within the first sentence of his book *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* that by its very nature the concept of interreligious dialogue is embedded within controversy. There are various reasons why dialogue between people from different religions may be difficult, especially when culture, economics, politics and a history of violence are involved. There is a history of warfare between the various religions (see Hedges 2010:1). A wall has been put up between them, a wall of protection

18. This viewpoint is shared by the report written by the WCC in 2002 on Religious Plurality and Christian Self-understanding (see WCC 2002:3).

from one another, and it cannot be said that no harm, based on religious views, has been done by one group to the others (and vice versa). Take Christianity for instance: This is a religion with a history of warfare, colonialism, crusades and persecution. It is this past that makes it difficult for Christianity to position itself in relation to other world religions (Hedges 2010:1). Unfortunately, Christianity is not the only religion with a violent past, whether the conflict has been between Christian and Jew, Hindu and Muslim, Muslim and Christian there have been many wars fought amongst the various religions.

From a Christian perspective one can merely take a look back into the past to see what role politics can play to create tension. In Christianity, the relationship between church and state has always been controversial. During the reign of Constantine (in Rome, from 272–337 CE), Christianity not only became the *religio licita*,¹⁹ but it very quickly became the only legitimate religion in the Roman Empire. With Christianity being the *religio licita*, certain compromises were inevitable. Bosch (2011:411) states that these compromises frequently involved social justice. During the reign of Constantine up to the dawn of the modern era, the membership of state and church overlapped, and this led rulers to think of themselves as being similarly responsible for both the religious and moral life of their subjects as they were for politics. Therefore, the realms of religion and politics seemed to collide (cf. Bosch 2011:411). The homogeneity of state and church unfortunately was not the best political route for all citizens.

Another example of injustice is the crusades of the 11th–13th century, which undoubtedly left a severe and tragic rift between Christendom and Islam. It is highly unlikely that the history of violence between Muslim and Christian will not have an effect upon dialogue between these two parties. In the Islamic culture the crusades are still regarded as cruel and savage onslaughts by European Christians, and traditions have formed around some of this history. Saladin, the Kurdish warrior, is still honoured as being a hero who fought against the crusaders (Reston 2007:XIV). The WCC (2002:3) refers to the contradiction that one finds in the history of Christianity: On the one hand, Christianity speaks of a God of love and acceptance, but on the other, ‘its history, sadly, is also marked by persecutions, crusades, insensitivity to indigenous cultures, and complicity with imperial and colonial designs.’ This leaves Christians at a disadvantage when approaching the sphere of dialogue. However, Christians have been cast in both the persecutor and the persecuted roles where the history of violence is concerned.

It is well known that Christians and Jews have not shared a past of camaraderie. The rift between Christendom and Judaism began with the start of the Christian movement, which emerged from Judaism, most of the first converts to Christianity were Jews. This led to the question of the authority of Jewish law concerning Christians who were not

19. Translated as approved religion or permitted religion.

formerly Jews. There was a break between those who were circumcised and living in accordance with the law, and those who were not (cf. McGrath 2007:445). Of course these problems led to antagonism between Christians and Jews. Lasker (1999:23) writes about the cruel way in which Jews were persecuted in the Middle Ages and says that Jewish life in Western Europe crumbled due to 'persecution, massacres, forced conversions and eventual expulsions.' He further paints the picture of worsening Christian attitudes towards Judaism due to economic, political and legal changes in medieval Christendom. This history has left scars and creates a backdrop of strain in the relationship between Judaism and Christendom.

The strain between these two religions is not the only schism between religions. The rift between Hinduism and Islam can also be mentioned. This rift started in 67 BCE in India and still bears some painful consequences.

The Sri Lankan Civil War was another historical event which created a painful rift between the Sinhalese people (who are predominantly Buddhists with a small percentage of Christians) and the Tamil (who are Hindus).

Colonisation is another historical event which had an effect on how different religions interacted with one another. For instance, European colonialist activities and policies towards other religions in India in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries led to Islamic people reacting with violence towards Christians. South Africa did not escape the effects of colonialism, and Christian missionaries were intrinsically involved in this process. Comaroff (1986) explains the result of the involvement of Christian missionaries in South Africa during colonisation by saying that:

[W]hile the mission introduced a new world view, it could not deliver the world to go with it. And this contradiction, in turn, gave rise to various discourses of protest and resistance. (p. 1)

A further theological challenge became apparent during the 19th century when missionaries from the West embarked on a mission to convert all the world, but quickly came to realise that there were common features amongst the various religions they came across. What does one make of these common aspects? Can one allow these aspects to change the way one views the religious Others? Should these aspects be allowed to cause one to view one's own religion differently?

Politics has evidently played a significant role in creating wars amongst adherents of different religions. When a political leader makes decisions based upon their own religious views, excluding citizens from other religions, it has dire consequences. Another unfortunate fact is that this history of violence (or at the very least animosity) has not remained in the past. One merely has to think of the current state of war raging in Syria and the Gaza Strip to know that violence and war are alive and well in the present. The further fate of the hundreds of young women being kidnapped in Chibok in Borno State,

Nigeria, on 14–15 April 2014 by Boko Haram (an Islamic Jihadist²⁰ and *Takfiri*²¹ terrorist organisation based in Nigeria) comes to mind. The persecution of homosexuals and the religious campaign of violence against these people (which has been predominant in African countries such as Uganda) have created a perception of religious people being restrictive, violent and intolerant.

These conflicts and tales of war have created scars, which make dialogue between different religious groups very difficult, something which must be handled with the utmost care and sensitivity. The WCC (2002:1) states that it is precisely because of these conflicts that we must become aware of the importance of interreligious relations, 'the rise of religious extremism and militancy in many situations has accentuated the importance of interreligious relations.'

Apart from the political hurdles, one must note that there will also be issues involving theology when interreligious dialogue is discussed. Paul Hedges (2010:1) focuses on the 'more theoretical and theological issues.' He explains why he does this, by using an argument put forward by Jeannine Hill Fletcher, '[t]heory has material consequences.' Moreover, these consequences have an impact on the way that the religious Other is viewed and treated, which can impact severely on a country in which so many religions and cultures are living together, working amongst one another and sharing the same space and resources (see Hedges 2010:1).

A primary theoretical difficulty concerning dialogue amongst religions is the impasse between various theoretical standpoints, such as liberal and postliberal, modern and postmodern, exclusivism and inclusivism, as well as pluralist and particularist views (Hedges 2010:1). This can be illustrated by taking a look at the different stances on the concept of salvation, one of these theological issues at the centre of interreligious dialogue: Is salvation only found within one religion, meaning that there is only one true path to salvation, or are there many routes one can take leading to salvation? If one states that all religions lead to salvation, one is faced with the issue of relativism, meaning that if all religions lead to salvation, they are all valid, leaving the idea of salvation as almost being *cheap*, with a feeling of *everything goes* (as in the proverb that all roads lead to Rome).²² However, if there is only one true path to salvation, one is faced with the question of

20.Jihad is seldom referred to as being one of the six pillars of Islam and refers to a 'struggle' against those who do not believe in the Abrahamic God, Allah. This struggle can be viewed as an inner struggle or in this specific case to a physical struggle. It is associated with those extremist Muslims willing to harm others for not believing in Allah or those who are not true to the Qur'an. The concept of Jihad is, however, ever-changing [according to historical circumstances] see Heck (2004).

21.Takfiri refers to a Muslim who accuses a fellow Muslim of apostasy (disaffiliation from a religion by a member of that specific religion).

22.Different paths can take one to the same goal.

which path is the true path to salvation and what becomes of those who do not follow this specific path? It can also not be valid to view one's own religion as the only true path to salvation, without having – at the very least – made an effort to obtain some grain of knowledge of other religious views.

The exclusivist stance claims that there can only be salvation in the Christian church, which means that other world religions have no part in salvation and play no role pertaining to salvation (see Knitter 2012:23, 27–28). This means that those who have not heard of Jesus Christ are eternally lost. This is the extent to which exclusivism goes. Pluralists, on the other hand, believe that other religions can certainly lead to salvation and that Christianity as well as other world religions hold salvation within them, thus there are many paths leading to the destination of salvation (see Kärkkäinen 2003:24–25). Another group one can mention is the inclusivists. According to Kärkkäinen (2003:25), inclusivists believe that 'while salvation is ontologically founded on the person of Christ, its benefits have been made universally available by the revelation of God.' These claims about salvation briefly illustrate the difficulties in terms of different standpoints pertaining to openness to dialogue.

Therefore, the problem at hand is how one crosses the bridge of uncertainty and all the issues involved with interreligious dialogue so as to be able to engage with people from different religions and what benefits are there to such an endeavour? Can the fact that there are quite a few religions being practised in South Africa be beneficial in terms of social justice? How can we make the best of the fact that there are so many religions in our country?

For the discussion about interreligious dialogue, one must involve the theology of religions. Interreligious dialogue is the *praxis*, which cannot be viewed without its *theoria*, which is the theology of religions. To have one without the other would have less value (Hedges 2010:13).

Kärkkäinen (2003:20) defines Christian theology of religions as attempting to 'think theologically about what it means for Christians to live with people of other faiths and about the relationship of Christianity to other religions.' This is also where the initial thoughts for this chapter started, with the question of the value and relationship that different religions (amongst one another) can have in the South African context.

■ Does the problem outweigh the solution?

With all these difficulties, controversies and the conflict between different countries and religious groups, one might ask whether it would be at all possible for people who adhere to different religions to converse meaningfully. However, there have been a few

occurrences which have been glimpses of hope for interreligious dialogue to take place in South Africa and for religions gathering and working together. The WCC Central Committee (2002) made the following statement more than 10 years ago, a statement I regard as one of these glimpses of hope, as it proclaims that the task of interreligious dialogue (and interreligious relations for that matter) is not a futile endeavour:

There is greater awareness of the interdependence of human life, and of the need to collaborate across religious barriers in dealing with the pressing problems of the world. All religious traditions, therefore, are challenged to contribute to the emergence of a global community that would live in mutual respect and peace. At stake is the credibility of religious traditions as forces that can bring justice, peace and healing to a broken world. (p. 3)

The WCC (2002:5) also notes that there is a pastoral need to equip religious people within Christian communities to live and coexist in a religiously plural context. This reveals a level of openness and willingness to communicate with the religious Other. It seems that not only has the situation shown the need for dialogue, but also that people have become more eager to participate.

We can celebrate certain events in history, which have provided that religious people do have the ability to work together and agree on certain issues. One of the most important efforts to promote dialogue between different religions was The Parliament for World's Religions which took place in Chicago in 1893. Swidler and Cornille (2013:6) describe this gathering as the 'birth of interreligious dialogue worldwide.' This was the first formal interreligious gathering to be held. The third gathering of the World Parliament of Religions returned to Chicago in 1993. Kenney (2000:252) refers to a document, *Towards a Global Ethic: An initial declaration*, which provided the essential focus of this gathering, 'Towards a Global Ethic articulated several of the moral and ethical directives held in common by the great religious and spiritual tradition.' This document became an important part of the Parliament's next gathering in 1999, named *The Call to our Guiding Institutions*.

South Africa was the next destination for the gathering of the World Parliament of Religions where 'The Call' was the guiding document. This gathering, which was held in Cape Town from the 1st until the 8th of December 1999, brought the directives to bear on the roles and responsibilities of the guiding institutions in the 21st century (Kenney 2000:252). The South African setting also provided thousands of people with the opportunity to witness at first-hand the role that religion and spirituality played in creating a democratic South Africa. This meeting was an important forum for people from different faiths to learn from one another's experiences (Martin 2000:61).

Kenney (2000) explains the intentions of the gathering in Cape Town just before the start of the new millennium as follows:

It was not the intention of those who gathered in Cape Town to create a new religion, or to diminish in any way the precious uniqueness of any path. Instead, they came together to

demonstrate that the religious and spiritual traditions and communities of Cape Town, of South Africa, and of the larger world can and should encounter one another in a spirit of respect, and with an openness to new understanding. They joined with one another in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation, seeking to discover new ways to rise to the challenges and the opportunities of life at the threshold of a new century. (p. 249)

Vatican II (1962–1965) can also be seen as a major event and turning point in history, concerning interreligious dialogue. At this event, a declaration on the relation of the Catholic Church towards non-Christian religions was passed by all Catholic bishops of the world as well as the Pope. In this declaration, which is known as *Nostra aetate*, it was made clear that the Catholic Church rejected nothing in these religions and urged all members of the Church to enter into dialogue and collaboration with the religious Other (cf. Swidler & Cornille 2013:7–8). Swidler and Cornille (2013:8) state that the Catholic Church immediately acted upon this declaration by setting up councils for relations between the Catholic Church, other Christian churches and non-Christians. It seemed as though dialogue had become important in the Catholic sphere. The Catholic Church's openness to dialogue urged all Christian denominations to become involved with this movement (Swidler & Cornille 2013):

[T]he full-bore entrance of the Catholic Church into dialogue exponentially increased the involvement of all the other Christian Churches as well as the Jews. Every church either expanded or created new approaches to foster dialogue. (p. 8)

Swidler and Cornille (2013:9) also refer to the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, which holds a special place in Swidler's life as it was established by himself and his wife, Arlene Anderson Swidler, as an 'excellent bellwether marking the progress of the Interreligious Dialogue Movement.' This journal is a scholarly periodical devoted to interreligious dialogue and involves Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist associates.

In 2007, six years after the attack of Al Qaeda on America, Islam entered the movement of dialogue. This was due to 138 Muslim leaders from around the world who opened up the gates for dialogue by publishing a public letter inviting all Christian leaders and scholars to join them in dialogue (Swidler & Cornille 2013:9–10).

Brian McLaren (2012:226–231) writes about some of his own experience of interreligious friendship and how people are able to support the religious Other in trying times. He shares the story of his own congregation reaching out to local mosques during the tragic events which occurred in the United States of America on 11 September 2001. As South Africans we can learn from these instances of successful interreligious dialogue (in the hope that more of these events will take place in our own country), not just in a formal or institutionalised manner, but in our daily lives.

In my own experience, members of the younger generation are becoming more open to dialogue. In my own family, more than one religion is represented and there is mutual

respect for every family member's religious views, denomination and traditions. During my studies, I have become acquainted with members of different religious groupings. On campus, there is an array of many cultures, religions and races. This openness towards others is probably due to the fact that segregation was not part of their (or my own) context whilst growing up. Members of the younger generation today are more comfortable with people who differ from them (cf. Knitter 2012:7–8), as they have grown accustomed to living in an ever-changing world in which people are constantly changing and evolving.

Another aspect which must be factored in are the similarities shared by different religions. Knitter (2012), in his book *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, highlights the mutual aspects in the different world religions by using a sports analogy:

[T]here's got to be something that the religions have in common that makes the game of dialogue possible in the first place. You might say that they all have to be playing soccer. If one religion, as it were, plays 'basketball' and the other 'baseball', they're not going to be able to play with each other. (pp. 110–111)

This means that on some level all religions have to have something in common for dialogue to take place. However, this does not mean all religions are essentially the same – this then would again fall back on relativism – but in every religion there has to be some similarity. Take humankind for instance, all humans are different, they differ in age, race and nationality, however, every human being in some sense has something in common with all other humans. For example, Knitter (2012:9) refers to Karl Rahner, who stated that all people have an inexhaustible need to know and to love '[t]he human being is a being that needs to know and to love/be loved.' Therefore, the need to be loved and to know are two of those things that all human beings have in common.

Knitter (2012:112–113) refers to three bridges that connect all religions to each other. The first of these so-called bridges is the philosophical-historical bridge. When we refer to the historical part, we can say that all religions are historically limited. When Knitter (2012:112) refers to the philosophical part of this bridge which all religions have in common, he means that there is the philosophical probability that there is one Divine reality within all religions. A second bridge, the religious-mystical bridge, rests on the fact that the divinity or 'the Divine', according to Knitter (2012:112), is experienced by any one religion and yet it is also present in the mystical experience of all of them. The last of these bridges refers to the ethical concern of all religions and is called the ethical-practical bridge. The suffering of the Earth and its inhabitants is a central concern for all religions. Knitter (2012:113) says that this suffering is important to all religious people and calls all religious groups to action, 'which if taken seriously will enable them to realize an even more effective dialogue with each other.'

It is therefore clear that although there are many difficulties involved in dialogue amongst religions, dialogue can and has already been a successful endeavour amongst the various religions. This is due to the fact that there are similarities between the various religions (as mentioned above). My hypothesis is that the difficulties do not outweigh the solution, but rather point to the fact that a solution is of the utmost importance. In a country where so many cultures, traditions, languages and religions are involved, there seems to be no better time than the present for us to start communicating with one another.

■ Methodology

The methodology of this study can be referred to as being a mixed-method approach, as quantitative as well as qualitative research will be used. In a certain sense this study is also a literature study, therefore a broad overview of recent research in the field of interreligious dialogue and theology of religions will be given. The *praxis* of interreligious dialogue can be helpful, especially for a country like South Africa, because this country is the home of many different religions, including African traditional religions and ancestor veneration. Therefore, the different models and theories involving the theologies of religions (*theoria*) will be researched and brought to light. Recent theologians, such as Paul Hedges, David Cheetham and Paul Knitter, have devoted their attention to the theology of religions. The aim is to study recent literature and to bring the work of the various writers into conversation with one another. The work of these theologians, as well as others, will also be brought into conversation with the South African context. This is where the quantitative as well as the qualitative data are relevant.

Census results will be used to paint a broad picture of the South African context and the role of predominant religions. The data retrieved by Statistics South Africa (census) are the quantitative facet of the study. The study will, however, also have a qualitative facet: The aim is to converse with adherents of the different major religions in South Africa and to gain some information about their experiences with other religions, as well as to gain some perspective on the significance which the respondents attach to their religious views in relation to people who differ from them. Therefore, a set of questions will be put to respondents drawn from the different major religions in South Africa (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and African traditional religions). These respondents are more than just anonymous dialogue partners, they are fellow researchers. Buddhism will be discussed as well, although as Buddhists constitute less than 0.05% of the population of South Africa, I have been unable to find a respondent to participate. Therefore, the census data will be used when referring to Buddhism in South Africa. A number of relevant questions have been compiled, however, the dialogue partner will determine the direction that the conversation takes.

■ Why the South African context?

Kritzinger et al. (1994:80–81) use the results of the 1980 census in South Africa to sketch the religious make-up of our rainbow nation. The results showed that there was quite a small percentage of Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and other non-Christian South Africans living in South Africa during the 1980s. Kritzinger et al. (1994) referred to the country as being ‘overwhelmingly (nominally) Christian’ and also stated the following that is of importance for this present study:

This, however, does not mean that the interreligious dialogue will not be an important feature of South Africa in the years to come. It is questionable if we are quite ready for this exercise. (p. 81)

South Africa has been a democratic country for 20 years, during which the Constitution has protected the citizens of this nation and allowed them the freedom to choose their own religious views and to voice these views. Maybe now is as good a time as ever for interreligious dialogue. The argument of this study is just this: As a country, South Africa is currently at a time in its history where its citizens are more ready than ever to take part in interreligious dialogue (cf. Knitter 2012:7). This dialogue might be long overdue.

Being a South African myself, studying in an environment where many of my peers are from various religions, and due to the fact that I was born into a multifaith family, I have experienced interreligious dialogue. I have also experienced how rewarding interreligious dialogue can be, but have witnessed how if not treated with sensitivity, dialogue could damage relationships. Diversity is a predominant characteristic of South Africa and it is a part of the everyday life of South Africans, therefore it is an ideal context in which to initiate such dialogue.

Due to the fact that the information used by Kritzinger et al. (1994:81) is gained from the results of the South African census in 1980, these data are admittedly outdated. However, one is faced with a predicament when trying to gain knowledge about South Africa’s current religious statistics. In the latest South African census (2011) no inquiries were made involving religious views. When further investigation is done about the reason why the question of religion was no longer inquired about in the census done in 2011, Statistics South Africa provides the answer by saying that:

In 2008, Stats SA embarked on a series of user consultations, to get advice as to what questions should be asked in the questionnaire. The question on religion was low on the list of priorities as informed by the users of census data, and it therefore did not make it onto the final list of data items.²³

23. See the Statistics South Africa website at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census2011/faq.asp> for more on how the latest census was conducted.

We can assume that because the Constitution of South Africa permits all people living in South Africa the freedom to choose their own religious views, the users of the census data viewed questions concerning religion as irrelevant. As there are no new statistics on the religious make-up of South Africa, one is forced to use the statistics gathered by the census done in 2001.

This chapter consists of four sections. Firstly, the problem on which this study will focus is described as well as the parameters of the study: This being the South African context. Secondly, a focus on the *theoria*, which is the theology of religions, will follow. The different models for the variety of approaches found in the theology of religions pertaining to the existence of many different religions will be discussed. Paul Knitter's book on the theology of religions (*Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 2012) will be the main source used, as he gives a detailed account of the different approaches towards the existence of various religions.

The third section will focus on the South African context. The situation of the context will be sketched by using census data as well as information that has been gathered by conducting interviews and discussions with respondents. In the last section the focus will be on the benefits of dialogue, and Knitter's (1995) approach to dialogue will be discussed (as a possible approach for interreligious dialogue in South Africa) and Tutu's (2013: 21–24) views on ubuntu will be examined to determine how dialogue may serve the interests of South Africans.

■ The theology of religions

In this section the focus will be on defining the concept of theology of religions and the models that have been formulated by this theology, so as to explain the different ways Christianity has reacted towards other religions. Various definitions of the theology of religions will be provided and compared with one another. Knitter's (2012) use of four main models concerning the theology of religions will be examined and brought into conversation with other views on how Christianity has reacted when faced with the reality of a multireligious world. Practical examples of these models will be provided and the dialogues will be categorised according to these models.

■ What is the theology of religions?

The theology of religions is the discipline of theological studies which attempts to measure the value of other religions as well as to account theologically for the meaning of these other religions (Kärkkäinen 2003:23). This field of study is occupied

with questions pertaining to the existence of multiple religions. These questions lead to many other questions that must be considered. Barnes (2002:6) refers to these questions as:

Open-ended questions of the possibility of God in the world of many faiths ... [*that*] have emerged in recent years as a distinct area of theology, often referred to as the theology of religions. (p. 6)

Kärkkäinen (2003:23) lists some of these questions: If there is but one Deity (being God), how is it then not possible to have only one religion? Are all these religions valid? How does one decide upon only one religion? Do all the different religions relate to one another or is the content of these religions conflicting? Gorski (2008:5) adds to these questions: Does God act within other religions? Can these religions lead to salvation, and are non-Christian religions true religions? The attempt of Christian theologians to answer these questions (and others that arise subsequently) constitutes this discipline, the theology of religions (Knitter 2012:2; cf. Gorski 2008:5).

This area of theology requires theologians to study Christian Scripture and traditions as well as the work of historians and 'comparative religionists' (Knitter 2012:2). They will then have to view this knowledge in relation to the fundamental texts of other religions as well as conversing with the followers of other religions in order to understand them more adequately (see Hedges 2010:17).

Hedges (2010) says that in its basic form theology of religions:

[I]nvolves constructing an interpretation of how Christianity relates to other religions, what the nature of these other religions is, and what may happen to followers of other religions soteriologically (to do with salvation). (p. 16)

He refers to the theology of religions as being a subbranch of the larger discipline of Christian systematic theology, 'which deals with the superstructure of Christian faith in terms of doctrine and belief' (Hedges 2010:6–17). The existence of other religions in relation to Christianity forms a part of systematic theology.

There are various theological positions on the relation of Christianity to other religions. Knitter (2012) refers to these major theological positions as 'models' and identifies four of the predominant models as: The replacement model, the fulfilment model, the mutuality model and the acceptance model. Every model is in some way based on or in accordance with the views of a theologian who influenced the conception of the specific model. Each of these models, as well as the views of the theologians who are influential on these theologies, will be discussed subsequently. Relevant contributions will also be discussed.

■ The major theological views on the relation of Christianity to other religions²⁴

These theological views are expressed as models, which makes the *theoria* of the theology of religions more substantial.

■ The replacement model

In the problem statement an exclusivist view or exclusivism was referred to. This model is just that. Hedges (2010:20) puts it plainly that, ‘exclusivisms are the range of beliefs that say only Christianity leads to salvation and that, generally, anyone who adheres to a different religion must therefore be going to damnation.’ Plantinga (2000:400), who argues against other theologians’ (Knitter 2012:113–114)²⁵ pluralist views, defines his views on exclusivism by saying (see Meeker 2006):

[F]ollowing current practice, I shall call [*exclusivism the view*] ... that the tenets or some of the tenets of one religion – Christianity, let’s say – are in fact, true ... [*and*] any propositions, including other religious beliefs, that are incompatible with those tenets are false. (p. 194)

Knitter (2012:19) further explains what this concept of exclusivism or replacement means, by saying ‘Christianity is meant to replace all other religions. This is the first of the Christian attitudes toward other faiths.’ There are differing views on how Christianity must replace all other religions and how such an endeavour should take place, but ‘Christian missionaries throughout the centuries have cast forth into the world with the conviction that it is God’s will to make all peoples Christians’ (Knitter 2012:19).

This model is based on the conviction that there is but one God and that it is the will of this one God that all people belong to only one religion, this religion being Christianity. It is not necessarily true that this model supposes that all other religions are of no value. However, if these religions are in some way of value it is merely of transitional or conditional value. This means that other religions are only truly useful if they lead the religious person to Christianity (Knitter 2012:19).

What does this mean for the salvation of humankind? Knitter (2012:19) explains the model’s stance on salvation as follows, ‘God’s love is universal, extending to all; but that love is realized through the particular and singular community of Jesus Christ.’

24.This section is compiled using the research of Paul F. Knitter (2012). Other sources will be used and referred to in the text.

25.Specifically John Hicks’ pluralistic views, which will be referred to when the mutuality model is discussed later on.

Knitter (1995) says that the replacement model suggests that:

[A]ny recognition of the truth or saving power of other religions or religious figures is a slap in the face of God; it denigrates what God has done in Jesus.²⁶ (p. 27)

This model might seem outdated, but Knitter (1995:26) stated in the mid-1990s that it was alive and well, and repeats this statement in a later publication in 2012. In both publications he places this model first on his list of Christian theologies of religion, as he believes that this model should not be underestimated because it is the predominant attitude amongst Christians when assessing the value of other religions.

This model can be separated into two different positions: The concepts of total replacement and of partial replacement.

Total replacement

The approach of the total replacement model is based on the conviction that all other religions are completely lacking, aberrant and unwonted and that Christianity will inevitably have to take the place of all other religions (Knitter 2012:19–32). This model has historically been the predominant view of mainstream Christian churches (Knitter 2012:23).

The theologian who has been most influential with regard to this model is the Protestant Karl Barth (1886–1968). According to Knitter (2012:23) Barth laid the theological foundations for the replacement model's understanding of other religions. Karl Barth's theology was not necessarily aimed at being a theology of religions, however, his view on religion in general is the main focus of this model. Barth formulated his theology in a changing context where Christianity had to adapt to the humanism which came with the Enlightenment of the 1920s and 1930s. In reaction to the liberalism brought forth by the Enlightenment, Karl Barth set out to find a way to relate the message of Christ with the changing times. In his writings he came to the conclusion, which he believed to be the message of the Gospel, that 'human beings cannot get their act together by themselves. But with God, they can. Yet, for this to happen, humans have to step back and let God be God' (Knitter 2012:24).

For Barth the four *solas*²⁷ embodied the good news of the New Testament. The first sola, *sola gratia*, states that humankind cannot save itself; human beings are burdened by sin and their fallen nature and cannot be freed of these things by themselves (ourselves). It is therefore grace alone which ensures that sinners can be freed. The second sola states

26. This is more of a total replacement statement, than a partial replacement statement.

27. 'Sola' means alone or only.

that humankind is saved by faith alone, *sola fide*. Humans can be saved, but this salvation is not due to the good deeds or any work that has been done. This means that trust is extremely important (Knitter 2012):

[T]o trust to do nothing else but turn oneself over completely to someone else, is so frightening that it feels impossible – Barth would say it *is* impossible. Thus, the need for the third ‘alone’.
(p. 24)

The third sola, *sola Christo*, states that it is in Christ alone, that God has granted salvation. It is through Christ that humankind is reconciled with God. This sola has serious implications for religions that do not acknowledge the existence of Christ as the Son of God. The last sola, *sola scriptura*, states that it is through the Bible that the reality of Jesus and this salvation he grants becomes clear to humankind (Knitter 2012:24–25).

Barth (1956–1975), makes the following statement about religion, based on the Bible and his belief in the *solas*:

Religion is disbelief. It is a concern, indeed, we must say that it is the one great concern, of godless man ... From the standpoint of revelation religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in His revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and wilfully evolved by man. (pp. 299–300)

Barth portrays humankind to be, because of religion, exactly what it should not be. Humanity does not stand back and allow God to be God, but creates rituals, laws and beliefs of their own, instead of merely trusting God (Knitter 2012:25). This is Barth’s way of saying that religion is man-made and not the product of divine work. Religious people are not saved by their religions, beliefs or works of faith, but by the grace of God. Therefore, all religions are inadequate, not only non-Christian faiths, but Christianity too. Knitter (2012:25) states that not only other religions are harshly judged by Barth, ‘he levelled [*his criticism*] not only at “other” religions but also, and especially, at Christianity.’ Kärkkäinen (2004:17) points out that ‘Christianity is not immune to criticism of religion.’

One then wonders if there is any true religion. According to Barth there is. Even though Barth placed all religions in the same category of active idolatry, he states that Christianity is the true religion (Knitter 2012):

Christianity is the true religion because it’s the only religion that knows it is a false religion; and it knows, further, that despite its being a false and idolatrous religion, it is saved through Jesus Christ. (p. 26)

Barth’s view of Christianity being the only true religion places Christ at the centre of the argument. Christianity then has no need to partake in dialogue with any other religion; these religions have no saving grace, they have no Jesus and therefore there is no need for

dialogue. There can be no relationship between Christianity and other religions. Barth (1956–1975:295–296) states this clearly by saying ‘we have here an exclusive contradiction.’ The only option for the Christian is to ‘lovingly and respectfully announce the Gospel and let the light of Christ take the place of the darkness that exists without him’ (Knitter 2012:26).

It is important to note that Karl Barth’s theology is not the only foundation for the total replacement model. Something that must be factored in is that the New Testament plays an essential role in this model. Knitter (2012:27) states that it is because Barth’s theology of religions is ‘normed by the biblical witness’, that it has such an impact on this specific view of religions. The Bible and specifically the New Testament is of fundamental importance to the Christian religion; it is what Christians base their lives on and therefore it plays a significant role in the lives of all Christians, no matter what church they belong to. Knitter (2012) highlights the imperative role of the New Testament in Christian thought about other religions, by saying:

One does not necessarily have to take the Bible literally to recognize that one of the most evident and central messages of the New Testament is that Jesus is the means, the only means, that God has given to humans by which they can figure out what life is all about and get out of the mess they’re in. (p. 27)

There are a number of New Testament texts which plainly state that Jesus is the only way to salvation. These texts include Acts 4:12, 1 Corinthians 3:11, 1 Timothy 2:5, John 14:6 and 1 John 5:12. These are not the only texts that could be listed as essential to this model. There are texts that highlight the hopelessness of humankind without Christ²⁸ and texts which focus on the necessity of hearing and believing the gospel in order to be saved²⁹ (Knitter 2012:28). One cannot avoid these texts when dealing with the Christian theology about other religions. These texts are central to the way Christians view their faith and therefore have a significant impact on the way Christians view other religions.

For Christians, who base their lives on the New Testament as followers of Christ, it is not difficult to believe that there is only one way to salvation and that this is exactly what God has provided through Christ. Therefore, based upon their belief in the Bible they make it clear that if Jesus is the only way to salvation, all other religions and paths to salvation must be false and must therefore be replaced by Christianity. Knitter (2012:30) states that due to living in a world with so many uncertainties and difficulties, humankind in some way seeks one solution, one path to a unified, cooperative truth that they can be sure of. The replacement model provides just that: A singular God-given way which makes complete sense.

28. See the first three chapters of the letter addressed to the Romans.

29. See John 3:36, Romans 10:14, 17.

However, there is a less exclusivistic version of the replacement model, which focuses on the presence of God within the sphere of other religions. In what follows the concept of partial replacement will be discussed, which is the second branch developed in the model of replacement.

Partial replacement

What differentiates the partial replacement model from the total replacement model is that this branch of the replacement model states that God is revealed to all people (Knitter 2012:33–49). Whereas in the total replacement branch it is stated that other religions have no value, because God is not present in any religions besides Christianity, this model rejoices in the genuine revelation of God in other religions (Knitter 2012:33). The partial replacement model ‘represent[s] ways in which God gives answers and reaches out to the human search’ (Knitter 2012:34).

Knitter (2012:34) states that the reason why Christians should be open to recognising God’s presence in other religions is that there are various texts in the Bible stating this. Examples are Romans 1:20 and 2:15, which speak of God communicating to people through nature (creation) and the human conscience. Acts 17:27 states that God is not far from ‘each one of us’ and Paul announces to the Athenians that it is through God that they (we) live and exist (or as the text puts it ‘have being’). Knitter (2012:34) lists the beginning of the Gospel of John (Ch. 1, vv. 1–4) as one of those texts that state that God is present in all people. The Gospel according to John states that the Word gave life and that ‘this light was the life of *all* people.’

One can also refer to the Reformers, specifically Martin Luther and John Calvin, who spoke of a sense of God inherently instilled into human nature (Knitter 2012:34). This sense of the divinity (*sensus divinitatis*) or a seed of religion (*semen religionis*), as it is also referred to, has been planted into all humankind by God (McGrath 2007):

God has endowed human beings with some inbuilt sense or presentiment of the divine existence. It is as if something about God has been engraved in the heart of every human being. (p. 161)

What is referred to here is ‘not so much a case of God speaking to people, from above and beyond; rather, God’s voice is heard within’ (Knitter 2012:34–35). Calvin also spoke of the universality of religion as a consequence of this built-in sense of God.

Other theologians such as Paul Tillich and Wolfhart Pannenberg speak of the presence of God in all human beings in their own way. Tillich speaks of the fact that the presence of God is revealed when one is grasped by what he refers to as an ‘Ultimate Concern’. Pannenberg, on the other hand, refers to the process of history as being the vessel for God’s presence in the lives of humans (Knitter 2012:35).

Therefore, it is clear that the partial replacement model declares that God speaks not only to Christians, but that he is present in other religions as well. These religions can make believers aware of the existence of God and of his loving, caring nature. All religions have redemption as a theme and create the awareness that God is needed for salvation. Therefore, all religions reveal some truth about God (Knitter 2012:36).

When this model maintains that God is present in all humankind and that all religions in some way have value, it does not mean that salvation can take place through other religions. Although these religions may be of some value and there may even be revelation in them, there can be no salvation without Christ. This model (Knitter 2012):

[C]annot affirm that God also brings to other believers to what Christians call salvation – that is, unity with God, to a sense of being loved, affirmed, forgiven, and held by God, and to the assurance of eternal life after death. While these theologians say clearly that God reveals in other religions, they just as clearly declare that God does not save in other religions. (p. 36)

The partial replacement model bases the declaration that salvation cannot be found through other religions on the New Testament. Although the New Testament makes references to God revealing himself to all humankind, it makes no statements of general revelation as vehicle for salvation. We are yet again back to the *sola* which declares that it is through Christ alone that one is saved (Knitter 2012:37; cf. Knitter 2012:24). The rift between God and humanity, caused by sin, has been mended by Christ and it is solely through Christ that humanity is reunited with God.

Braaten (1981; see Knitter 2012:37) speaks about the way salvation is understood in terms of this model:

In the texts of the New Testament and early Christian traditions Jesus is depicted not as a saviour but as *the* Saviour, not as a Son of God, one among many in a pantheon of gods and half-gods, but as the one-and-only Saviour of the World, God's only begotten Son. This exclusivity claim is part of the kernel of the gospel, not so much husk that can be demythologized away ... Jesus is the one-and-only Saviour, or he is not Saviour at all. (pp. 74–75)

Pannenberg (1990:100–101; see Knitter 2012:37–38) had his own reason for stating that Christians must insist that Christ is the only Saviour: Christ himself made this statement about himself. He bases this claim on what Knitter (2012:3) calls 'the surest thing we can know about the historical Jesus', which is that Jesus thought himself to be the eschatological prophet. Pannenberg (1990) puts it this way:

[S]ince the impending future of God was becoming present through him [*Jesus*], there is no room for other approaches to salvation besides him. [...] The presence of God in Jesus was not first a matter of Christian experience, but a claim of Jesus himself and this claim involved eschatological finality. (pp. 100–110)

To say that humanity can be saved by anyone (or anything) other than Christ would be to contradict Christ himself (Knitter 2012:38). Not only is Christ seen as the only Saviour, but it is also only through Christ that humanity knows that it can be saved by faith alone. This means that to be saved and to 'know and truly feel the power of God's love and presence, they somehow have to come into contact with Christ' (Knitter 2012:38). This then leads us back to *sola scriptura*, because it is through the Bible that one comes into contact with Christ. Therefore, it is through the preaching of the gospel that one comes into contact with Jesus, who then makes humanity aware of the need for salvation. This again means that the revelation which takes place through other religions cannot lead to salvation; these religions 'can't bring this revelation to fruition' (Knitter 2012:38).

According to this model the Christian idea of salvation differs acutely from other religions' view of salvation (Knitter 2012:39). In these other religions there is a need for the followers of these faiths to save themselves. In other words, the followers try to win God's love and salvation by doing good deeds, they do not trust in God or his grace. Brunner (1980:122) states that in 'non-Biblical religions, humans seek themselves, their own salvation; even in their surrender to the Deity, they want to find their own security.' Two other criticisms that this model has against other religions are that they either personalise³⁰ or depersonalise³¹ God (Knitter 2012:39). Tillich adds another critique by saying that all religions lose sight of the fact that rituals and words are merely symbols for the Divine and that they are not the Divine itself; no words or rituals can become God, they are used only to express something about God (Knitter 2012:40).

Although this model maintains that salvation is impossible through any other religion than Christianity, its approach to revelation being a possibility in other religions allows for the possibility of dialogue between Christianity and other religions. No matter the state of their salvation, the religious Other is still a child of God and therefore should be respected. Netland (1991:297–300) states that there are topics that can be discussed amongst religious people from different faiths and that these discussions can be valuable. In dialogue with one another, people from different faiths can trade information about the content of their religions; this can be conducive to correcting the prejudices, mistrust and conflict between religions. Social, environmental and political concerns can be shared in the attempt to create cooperation amongst the differing faiths, to resolve some of the possible issues in concerning these topics (Knitter 2012:41).

The dialogue will, however, inevitably lead to the differences and similarities between the religions that take part in this dialogue, and based on the replacement model the differences will undoubtedly outweigh the similarities. Pannenberg states that this, the

30.Making God out to be a divine being whose actions are predictable or can be dictated.

31.Making God out to be an abstract concept or principle that cannot be grasped or understood.

similarities and differences between religions, are exactly what has become the subject of dialogue (see Knitter 2012:41). Knitter (2012) explains what is meant by this statement:

Persons from different religions can best help each other by talking about their disagreements – where they think the other is wrong; why each party believes that its views is superior to others ... This is where the dialogue becomes interreligious, where religious people are not just trading information or working on social matters but talking about what really matters to them: God's truth. (p. 41)

It is also important that dialogue be carried out with mutual respect for the religious freedom of the religious Other – this is especially important in the South African context, as religious freedom is enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa.³² A dialogue carried out with respect becomes evangelism, not proselytising³³ (Knitter 2012:41). The partial replacement model states that if dialogue is handled with respect and sensitivity and does not lead to the condemning of one another, then Jesus will prove himself to be the name in which people come to know God. Thus, according to this model, other religions do pave the way for the acceptance of the gospel, 'but it is a negative preparation: they provide questions, or indicate directions, which only Jesus can answer and guide' (Knitter 2012:41).

Once again Braaten's (1977) views can be used to summarise the relationship of Christianity with other religions, according to this model:

Religions are not systems of salvation in themselves, but God can use even them to point beyond themselves and toward their own crisis and future redemption in the crucified and risen Lord of history. (p. 109)

Therefore, God can make use of other religions, they are not merely useless and thus cannot be rejected completely (Knitter 2012:42).

It must, however, be stated that amongst exponents of the replacement model there is no consensus about the salvation of people who have never heard of Christ. Some state that these people perish (see Knitter 2012:45, where he refers to opinions of fundamentalists who follow this line of thinking), others invoke a kind of Christian agnosticism. They do not know what happens to a person who has never heard of Christ and the salvation found in him. There are, however, those optimists who believe that in some way God will save those who have never had the opportunity to accept Christ as Saviour. Whether he saves them by giving them a choice after death, sending them a messenger in their last minutes of life or determining whether they would have accepted Christ if they had the chance, in some way they could be saved (Knitter 2012:46–47).

32. See Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), Chapter 2 (Bill of rights), No. 15.

33. Convert or attempt to convert (someone) from one religion, belief, or opinion to another.

In what follows, the second model, the fulfilment model, will be explored to show how Christianity will inevitably have the task of fulfilling the many other religions.

The fulfilment model

In this model the keyword is no longer *replace*, instead it is *fulfil*. This model uses the insights of the replacement model, affirms them, but also aims to answer the question posed by it (cf. Knitter 2012:63–98). Knitter (2012:63) states that the fulfilment model offers a theology that gives equal emphasis to the two foundational Christian convictions we have already heard about, ‘that God’s love is universal, extending to all peoples, but also that God’s love is particular, made real in Jesus Christ.’ He further states that this model embodies the majority of present-day Christianity.

The work of Karl Rahner was most influential with regard to this model, he is ‘arguably the most influential Catholic theologian of the twentieth century’ and he is the theological pioneer of the fulfilment model (Knitter 2012:68; see Kärkkäinen 2004:31). Rahner based his theology of religions on a statement which is central to Christianity: God is love. These three words, however, have certain implications. For Rahner, the implications of this central Christian concept of God being love are that ‘God wants to reach out and embrace all people and beings’ (Knitter 2012:68). Therefore, God wants to save all people. This influential theologian ‘reminded us that what God wants, God does’ (Knitter 2012:68). This means that God will in some way act. If he is love and therefore wants to save all people, he will take the necessary steps to save humankind.

Rahner states that the way in which God acts is by communicating or revealing himself to all human beings. Knitter (2012:68–69) explains this concept by saying that God makes himself present and that this leads to all people being enabled to feel the reality (‘the peace, the affirmation, the tug, the lure’) of God’s presence. A term that remains central here is (yet again) grace, ‘God gives saving grace to every single human being. Otherwise, God really doesn’t love every single human being’ (Knitter 2012:69).

Rahner adds that humankind’s human nature is not so natural after all. Kärkkäinen (2004:33) says that human beings are not merely a part of ‘nature’, but they are ‘oriented toward an infinite, mysterious horizon of being that Christians know as God. In a sense, the human being as such is “super-natural,” oriented to something beyond nature.’

Knitter (2012:69) offers his own explanation of Rahner’s thinking by saying that if we as humans truly had the capability of being ‘natural women and men’, human beings would feel something more than their human nature, ‘we would feel our *graced* nature.’ This means that humankind would then be able to feel the power and presence of the Divine. Rahner refers to this as supernatural existential. Again Knitter’s (2012) explanation of the concept of supernatural existential is useful:

[O]ur very existence is more than nature – it is ‘super-nature’ – much, much more than what we think we are. Rahner used to say that there is no such thing as ‘just nature’ (*nature pura*): by being human, we are more than human. More simply: to touch and feel what we really are is to touch, or be touched by, the Divine, the Spirit of God. One might even say that human nature is of a piece with divine nature. (p. 69)

Rahner describes various ways in which the Divine and grace are present in human nature. It is an in-depth feeling, ‘vibrating’ within the most human activities. For him “grace” is not like a suit that we put on to look like God’s children; rather, it is like the electricity that lights up a light bulb to make it what it is’ (Knitter 2012:69). This analogy means that the love of the Divine does not merely welcome or receive humanity, it enters into the human being, fills humankind and permits a person to live differently, to be transformed. This transformation happens from within (Knitter 2012):

Among many particular examples that he [*Karl Rahner*] gives of how we can feel this divine presence within us, the most basic is what he called, in German, the *Vorgriff*. Signifying something built into our human nature, it means, loosely, ‘reaching for more’. In all that we reach out to, we are always reaching for more than what we try to, or do, grasp. (p. 69)

This concept of reaching for more can be best seen when one thinks about the need of every human being to know and to love. No matter the amount of knowledge a person has, there is always a need to know, the more a person knows the more they want to know. Knowledge leads to further questions, some to which answers are found and others which merely lead to more questions. The same can be said for love, the need of a human being to be loved and accepted, when responded to and reciprocated, is extremely satisfying, however, the need never becomes completely satisfied (Knitter 2012:69). Knitter (2012:69) states that it is in the love that a person receives or gives to another that the ‘tug’ of a greater love is experienced, ‘it is in loving and being loved by finite others that we love and are loved by the infinite Other.’

Rahner does not deny the existence of sin or selfishness, but views the relation between sin and grace, in the same way Paul did when he spoke of grace in his letter to the Romans, ‘[w]here sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (Rm 5:20). This is what Knitter (2012) refers to as being the good news

If we have fallen into a deep ditch, we’ve also been given the means to crawl out of it. If selfishness and greed are, as we hear so often, simply ‘part of human nature’, the ability to love and care about others is even deeper, more powerful and satisfying part of human nature. (p. 70)

This is the reason why Rahner refers to himself as someone who is optimistic about salvation. He believes that goodness and evil are not in a 50/50 relation to one another, goodness always prevails. Goodness or grace is much stronger than evil, ‘our potential to be “saved” is greater than our reality as “fallen”’ (Knitter 2012:70).

Rahner also makes the startling claim that God is active in all religions. He comes to this conclusion by taking a look at God's presence in human history (Knitter 2012):

If we believe that God acts and breathes throughout human history, and we believe that that breath has to take visible, material shape, then the religions are the first areas we should investigate for clues of that Divine breath or Spirit. (p. 1)

Rahner believes that salvation is possible through religions other than his own. God is drawing all people closer to him through their distinctive religions. According to him non-Christian religions can have a positive effect on people, because they are a means of gaining the right relationship with God and thus the attainment of salvation. This means that the religious Others cannot merely be saved *despite* their religion, but rather *because of* their religion.

Knitter (2012) states that Rahner did not approve of all religions, he merely established the possibility of the Divine in other religions:

Whether the possibility is a reality has to be a further conclusion from the concrete study of, and dialogue with, persons of other faiths. Rahner was just opening a possibility – but one that never before was open for Christians. (p. 71)

However, Rahner did not doubt the fact that there are corrupt and illegitimate facets of all religions and that all people have the responsibility to use their own discernment to decide what the imperfections and fallacies in these religions are. Rahner's theology of religions can be summarised in three parts. Part 1 states that God's grace, his nurturing presence, is part of human nature; the second states that grace must always be embodied; and the third part ensures that his theology of religions is a Christian theology of religions, by stating that all grace is Christ's grace (Knitter 2012:72). This means that if God's grace and his presence are infused in human nature and history, it is solely due to Jesus Christ's acts in humanity. Rahner uses theological terms to indicate the way Jesus is involved in salvation: Christ is not the efficient cause of salvation. He is, however, the final cause of salvation. Knitter (2012) explains what this means:

Efficient causes produce something that wasn't there to begin with. Final causes represent the goal of what is being produced and so make possible and guide the entire production ... Jesus, says Rahner, is not the efficient cause of God's saving love. Such love has always been there, a given part of God's very nature. But Jesus is the final cause of this love insofar as in him we see what God is up to, what God intends to bring about in giving the Divine Spirit to all people. (p. 72)

Therefore, Jesus is in this case depicted as the total and final assurance of God's love and care being present in humanity, and he also assures humankind of their final destination in this life and the next (Knitter 2012:73). In Rahner's view the differences between the replacement model and the fulfilment model are evident; whereas the replacement model

states that salvation is only possible if one knows Christ, the fulfilment model states that those who do not know Christ can still experience the Divine saving love. However, they will not be able to see where this saving love is leading and what its purposes and possibilities are (Knitter 2012:73).

This view of salvation leads to an interesting view of the religious Other. People who are not part of the Christian religion are in a certain sense already Christians – they experience what Christians experience and they are also directed towards Christ, but they do not realise it yet. They can be referred to as anonymous Christians. It was, however, never Rahner's intention to depict the religious Other as anonymous Christians, but to liberate Christians to think differently of the religious Other, to help Christians realise that God himself can form Christians in whatever way he wishes (Knitter 2012:73–74). Rahner's view therefore does not set limits for the way in which God is present in humanity, or the way God acts towards humankind. Tutu (2013), however, has an opposing opinion and admonishes Christians:

[N]ot to insult the adherents of other faiths by suggesting, as sometimes has happened, that for instance when you are a Christian the adherents of other faiths are really Christians without knowing it. We must acknowledge them [*the religious Other*] for who they are. (p. 6)

What does Rahner's concept of the anonymous Christian mean for the church? Rahner (1966:133) says that the church should consider itself the 'historically tangible vanguard and the historically and socially constituted explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church.' Therefore, the task of the church is merely to make visible and clearer, that which is already there (Knitter 2012):

This means that the purpose of the church is not to rescue people and put them on totally new roads (although sometimes it will be necessary); rather it is to burn away the fog and enable people to see more clearly and move more securely. (p. 74)

It is clear that Rahner's theology of religions is much more inclusive than is suggested by the replacement model, however, it is still limiting in a certain sense. As Knitter (2012:75) says, Rahner's view of other religions still has an 'only', that cannot be surpassed and/or bypassed by other religions – only Jesus Christ is the final cause of salvation. Knitter (2012) uses a biblical figure to explain Rahner's theology of religions:

[O]ther religions, with all their possible truth and goodness, are to serve, as it were, the role of John the Baptist: to prepare the way, to make people ready to take the last step to join the Christian community, and thus, finally, to realize the meaning of the riches they had already been given ... Once other religions truly encounter Christianity, once the Gospel is really announced to them ... then the religions, like John the Baptist, have to step aside and make way for Jesus Christ. Before Jesus, all other religions lose their previous validity – or better, they *fulfil* it. (p. 75)

Whereas the first model, the replacement model, leans towards the particularistic position (salvation is found only through Christ), the second model, the fulfilment model,

leans slightly more towards the universalistic position (God wants to save all people and salvation is found outside of Christianity, when people are led to the realisation that Christ is the Saviour of humanity).

This model allows for the possibility that other religions can be channels of the Divine's saving love and that the 'Divine Spirit can breathe in other religions ... The Spirit touches people through other people, through stories, gestures, music, and dance – and may do so through other religions' (Knitter 2012:101). The belief that salvation and revelation, as well as the presence of the Divine, can be found in other religions, and therefore amongst the religious Others, places dialogue at the heart of this model. Dialogue then becomes essential according to the fulfilment model. This dialogue would have to take place in an atmosphere of mutual participation, respect and willingness to listen and learn.

There is, however, one particularity which is non-negotiable³⁴ according to this model, and this is the conviction that although the Divine's saving love and their presence cannot be limited to Christianity, Christ remains the fulfilment of all religions.

The mutuality model

The mutuality model places even more emphasis on the universality of salvation as it states that there are many true religions and that all of these religions are called to dialogue (see Knitter 2012:109–157). Knitter (2012:109) speaks about how the time we are living in has had an effect upon people's views on the various religions: 'We are living in a time when many Christians are beginning to let go of exclusivist [*read replacement model*] and absolutist [*read fulfilment model*] claims.' There has therefore been progression in people's approaches to other religions. Borg (1999:96) speaks of this progression by saying that persons who agree with the mutuality model feel that the traditional theological telescopes that show other religions as ultimately having either to be replaced or fulfilled by Christianity are not really showcasing the possibilities in either other religions or the gospel of Christ.

This model seeks to find a way for Christianity to have a more authentic and/or sincere relationship with people from other religions; the mutuality model therefore views dialogue as a necessity for all religions (or as Knitter [2012:110] puts it, dialogue is a 'rock-bottom concern'). This model views all people as 'potential dialogue partners' (Knitter 2012:110). Secondly, this model seeks to find or create a fair space of equality for dialogue, as equality is important. This equality of all religions does not entail that all religions are equal, but that every religion has equal rights to voice their views and to be heard. Christians cannot expect all people to listen to their views without being prepared

34.Cf. Knitter (2012:102–103) for other non-negotiable convictions in Christianity.

to listen to the various voices of the religious Others. A dialogue amongst the various faiths then seeks to preserve and celebrate the differences and diversities in all religions, and also seeks to find the things that the various religions have in common (see Knitter 2012:110–111).

Lastly, this model seeks to find a clearer understanding of Jesus' uniqueness, which will sustain dialogue (Knitter 2012:111). Clearer understandings of Jesus and his unique characteristics are important to this model, because some traditional understandings of Christ and his church can create doctrinal complications for 'the ethical obligation to engage in authentic dialogue with others' (Knitter 2012:111). This model, therefore, seeks to celebrate and cherish the uniqueness of Christ, without diluting the uniqueness of other religions.

This model focuses on three bridges or connections between all religions, which were described earlier. These bridges are: Firstly the philosophical-historical bridge (that focuses on the historical limitations of all religions and the philosophical possibility of the one Divine Reality behind it); secondly, the religious-mystical bridge (based on the belief that the Divine is both more than anything experienced by any one religion and yet present in the mystical experience of all religions); and thirdly the ethical-practical bridge which focuses on the fact that all religions have a common ethical concern and responsibility to those who suffer (Knitter 2012:112–113).

The pioneer of the first bridge, the philosophical-historical bridge, is a theologian named John Hick. Hick's theology of religions seeks not to place the church, or Jesus, at the centre of the religious sphere of humanity, but to place God at the centre. This God he prefers to refer to as the Real, so as to ensure that people do not merely associate the image of the Divine with Christianity's view of God (see Knitter 2012:114).

Hick's hypothesis is based on the existence of the Divine Reality. If there is a Divine Reality, 'it forms the heart of all the different religions' (Knitter 2012:115). One of the reasons Hick provides for this Divine Reality's presence in the heart of all religions is that it serves the practical purposes of communication and cooperation between all religions:

[I]f there is not a common source or goal for the religions, then not only do they speak different languages, but they're going in different directions ... For a creative Intelligence to have come up with such an arrangement would not speak well of creativity or intelligence. (p. 115)

Hick provides another explanation for Divine Reality being at the centre of all religions. From his study of religious history, he has found that from as early as 800–200 BCE religions have had a common goal or agenda: Improvement of the human condition on Earth, by urging humanity to leave behind its self-centred lifestyle and turn towards a Reality-centred (God-centred) way of life (Knitter 2012:115). Knitter (2012:115) adds to this thought by saying that this is the reason why all those who are perceived as being

'holy' in the different religions, despite these religions being different in many ways, seem to be depicted in the same way, '[t]hey are persons who are profoundly at peace with themselves and trying to live in peace with others' (Knitter 2012:115). Another similarity between religions, which Hick describes, is the double nature of the Godhead in all religions. God transcends what can be experienced by humanity, but is also finitely experienced by humanity. The Godhead is infinitely above humanity's earthly experiences, but is also involved in all that is created by them. (Knitter 2012:115).

Hick also states that the Real cannot really be known, only an image of the Real can be known, this is due to the fact that the mind has its own way of processing that which is being perceived. Therefore, the Divine is real and also mysterious. This means that what the different religions claim about the Real is true, but it is merely a fraction of the entire truth.

Knitter (2012:116) quotes Hick, who says that the many religions of humanity therefore 'constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving, and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied versions of it.' Each religion, therefore, paints its own picture of who the Real is, of that which they believe to be true. They do this by using symbols, myths and metaphors. Each religion has its own symbols, myths and stories about the Real, 'Hick goes on to remind us that if that which is symbolized – the Real – is one, the symbols by which it is perceived and expressed will be many' (Knitter 2012:116–117). There are many symbols for the Real, because the Divine is versatile and humanity is characterised by diversity in culture.

The danger involved with the notion that there is but one Divine Creator, the Real, is that it could lead to relativism, if there is but one Divinity, 'reality' behind all the various religions, then does that not mean that no matter what religious path a person follows, it will inevitably lead to the same place? Then the differences in faiths would not be of any consequence, because all religions then lead to the same destination. Knitter (2012:118) states that this is not what Hick proposes. Differences in religions are of consequence. and not all religions lead to the same destination (Knitter 2012):

This is evident to anyone who has paged through the book of religious history. No one can deny how much damage the religions have done ... there are many things in history and present-day practice of religion that are simply intolerable. (p. 118)

These things include the crusades, apartheid and torture, amongst others, and prove that despite all the good and positive features in all faiths, there is also a lot of evil. Therefore, we should be able to tell the difference between those practices that are good and those that are evil, so that the practices that lead one down a path of evil can be avoided.

Hick does not state that all religious views, events, beliefs (or people, for that matter) are of equal value (Knitter 2012:118). He also provides a way in which one can evaluate whether a religious view or practice is of value. If the practice is focused towards

promoting the self-sacrifice for the good of others and it is a voluntary renunciation of ego-centeredness and a self-giving to, or self-losing in, the Real, then it has value, because it will then promote compassion, acceptance and love for all humanity (Hick 2004:325). Knitter (2012:119) maintains that the guiding factor Hick uses to avoid relativism is ethical, rather than doctrinal or experiential. Hick also states that one can never truly evaluate or rank the various religions (Knitter 2012):

Whether any one religion excels all the others can be known only when the journey is finished ... when history has ground to a close ... So what can be known only at the end should not distract us during the journey. For now, we should keep trekking – walking together and helping each other along our different paths. (p. 119)

Knitter (2012) explains the way Hick suggested Christians should approach dialogue with regard to the subject of Jesus:

[B]efore their brothers and sisters in other religions, Christians can and must continue to announce that Jesus is *totus Deus* – wholly God. But they cannot, and should not, claim that he is *totum Dei* – the whole of God. All that he was and all that he did and said were transfused with, and so expressive of, the Divine Spirit. But all that the Divine Spirit is and does cannot be confined to Jesus, or to any human incarnation of the Divine. (p. 123)

Hall (1988:33) states clearly that 'Jesus as he is depicted in the Gospels and the Epistles of the newer Testament, does not wish to be considered (as it were) all the God of God there is.' Hick (1973:159) concludes that this leaves the possibility open that other religious leaders and figures might also be *totus Deus*, 'wholly God'. This may be a difficult concept for any Christian to grasp, as most Christians learn from a young age that Christ is Lord, he is the human incarnation of God. This means that accepting that Christ is not the whole of God might be challenging for Christians. However, Jesus' double nature – fully human, but also fully God – can help in this instance, as Christianity states that the Divine is a transcendent Deity. Therefore, Christ (and the Holy Spirit) are immanent in God, therefore wholly God, but not all there is to God.

There is a second bridge to consider: The religious-mystical bridge. This bridge relates to those who believe that the Divine, the 'Mysterious Real', is being experienced within the many different religions and that there is (Knitter 2012):

[A] core mystical experience pulsating within the religious traditions that have endured through the ages. And if there is a core mystical experience pulsating within the religious experience, there is a core Mystical Reality within them all. (p. 125)

This accounts for the differences in religions, because each individual and each community has their own distinctive social context, thus they each experience the same mystical reality, but in a different way. This bridge seeks not to avoid or neglect the differences in the different faiths, but to show how these differences do not contradict the mystical similarities in the different faiths. This model takes the mystical path in trying to

understand something about religious pluralism, and that all religions are unified and that this unity can be experienced on a mystical level (Knitter 2012:125–126).

The person who has been most influential to this bridge is Raimon Panikkar. Knitter (2012) explains Panikkar's views as follows:

[W]hat he [*Raimon Panikkar*] sees from a vantage point of mystical experience is something that feeds both the prolific variety and the deeper unity of all religions. He has called it 'the fundamental religious fact'. It's a fact that 'does not lie in the realm of doctrine [*but*] may well be present everywhere and in every religion'. It's something that can be only known through experience, but once experienced, it tells us something very real about the world and about ourselves. As an experience, it imbues us with a sense of being at-one, connected, united, part of. (p. 127)

This Mystery which humanity is united with is an immanent reality which consists of three components: The Divine, humanity and the world. These three components are directly connected to one another, they differ but are intimately related to one another, the one is 'life-givingly related' to the other (Knitter 2012:125). Panikkar refers to these three components and their mystical relatedness as a cosmotheandric³⁵ reality. Panikkar (1993) elucidates the concept as follows:

The cosmotheandric principle could be formulated by saying that the divine, the human and the earthly – however we prefer to call them – are three irreducible dimensions which constitute the real, i.e., any reality inasmuch as it is real ... What this institution emphasizes is that the three dimensions of reality are neither three modes of a monolithic undifferentiated reality nor three elements of a pluralistic system. There is rather one, though threefold, relation which manifests the ultimate constitution of reality. (pp. ix–x)

This means that whatever the Divine is, 'it breathes within human and material' (Knitter 2012:127). This relationship between the divine, humanity and the earth is not static, but is ever-changing and growing. Panikkar (1973) continues:

Man and God are neither two nor one ... There are not two realities: God *and* man/world, but neither is there one: God *or* man/world ... God and man are, so to speak, in close constitutive collaboration for the building up of reality, the unfolding of history, and the continuation of creation ... God, man and the world are engaged in a unique adventure and this engagement constitutes true reality ... Cosmotheandricism is in a paradoxical fashion (for one can speak in no other way) the infinity of man/world ... and the finiteness of God. (pp. 74–75)

Therefore, it is this cosmotheandric experience of reality that dwells within and is made available through the various faiths of the world (Knitter 2012:128).

Panikkar prefers not to speak of a common denominator in all religions, as he does not think there is such a thing (Knitter 2012:128). He defines the concept of unity by

.....
35. In Greek: *cosmos* = the world, *theos* = the Divine and *aner* = human [Knitter 2012:127].

saying that one cannot measure one religion by the other, 'or all of them by a common yardstick' (Knitter 2012:129). What does this then mean for the unity of the different faiths? Knitter (2012) explains Panikkar's viewpoint by saying that:

[I]f there's any unity within the world of religions, it's surrounded and protected by a wall of diversity. You can't find the unity without the diversity. Why is this so? For Panikkar the 'Mystery' within the religions is a reality that doesn't exist 'in itself' – that is, without humans and the world. So it has its being within the diversity of humanity and the world. (p. 129)

This then leads to the conclusion that God or the Divine is itself as diverse as the different world religions. Because the Spirit of the Divine is above reason, it cannot be boxed in. Therefore, Panikkar (1974:517) says that all religions must 'give up any pretence to monopoly of what religion stands for.'

For Panikkar dialogue is important, as in dialogue religions can learn, grow and expand their own identities (Knitter 2012:130). Panikkar uses the term *perichoresis*, that the early Greek theologians used to explain the Trinity as connected (or how the Trinity 'dances together', Knitter [2012]):

Just as the three persons of the Triune God receive, maintain and deepen their differences precisely by dancing in and out of each other, so the religious traditions of the world can dance in dialogue with each other and so grow in both difference and togetherness. (p. 130)

The last bridge connecting Christianity with other religions is the ethical-practical bridge. The thesis is that the ethical responsibility that all religions share can be the pillar on which an interfaith bond can rest. Knitter (2012:134–135) states that this is global responsibility and says that 'in being responsible for our endangered globe and all its inhabitants, the religions have new opportunities to understand both themselves and each other.' This bridge deals with what all religions are faced with, the existence of suffering (Knitter 2012):

There is a tremendous amount of suffering in our world today. If there's not more of it than ever before, we seem to be more aware of it. Also, it seems to be more threatening and unsettling than ever before. (p. 137)

There are various forms of suffering, which include poverty, victimisation, violence and patriarchy (cf. Knitter 2012:137). It is, however, not just humankind which suffers – this suffering extends to the Earth and all creatures. As humanity keeps growing, the Earth suffers increasingly, trying to keep up with this growth and consumption. Suffering is therefore not confined to one particular faith – all people are affected by it (Knitter 2012:138). All religions are faced with this problem.

Knitter (2012:138) states that if there were to be a religion that denies the experience of suffering and does not see it as a challenge which must be faced by all religions, then

that religion would have lost its relevance, 'if a religion has nothing to say about ... suffering, whatever else it says is either uninteresting or distracting.' Rabbi Irving Greenberg, former chair of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, put it more boldly when he said that no theological statement should be made that could not be credible in the presence of burning children (Kearney 2013:60). The existence of suffering and the challenge of easing this suffering becomes the common ground for all faiths, where they must take a stand, 'a common stand' (Knitter 2012:138). Tutu (2013) speaks very passionately about the responsibility of all religions to ease injustice (a form of suffering which has been experienced in South Africa and across the globe):

[P]eople of religion have no choice in the matter. Where there is injustice and oppression, where people are treated as if they were less than who they are – those created in the image of God – you have no choice but to oppose, and oppose vehemently and oppose with all the force you have in your being, that injustice and oppression. (p. 19)

In his view of injustice and suffering, Tutu (2013:19) refers directly to the South African context by referring to the suffering caused by apartheid and racism.

Even if there are many different religions, they all share the same endangered context, the Earth. All religions have the same agenda. This shared agenda creates a bridge for dialogue. Knitter (2012:139) says that this bridge creates the platform for stating that talking after acting will make for better talking, 'if religious persons first spend time acting together in order to relieve eco-human suffering, they will be able more successfully to talk together about their religious experiences and beliefs.' It is when different faith communities work together that they will find themselves becoming friends (Knitter 2012):

In this kind of religious sharing among those who have struggled for justice and well-being, people will likely discover that they have 'new ears with which to hear' what a friend from another religion is saying. (pp. 141–142)

Knitter (2012) also notes the importance of the ending or easing of human suffering in the good news brought by Jesus:

[F]or Christians who follow Jesus the liberator, the first order of business in a theology and dialogue of religions will be to ask where and how these other religious communities might be trying to bring about what Christians call the Reign of God – where are they seeking to replace a world of human suffering and injustice with a society of compassion and equality. (p. 146)

It is therefore clear that the advocates of the mutuality model are realistic about the plurality of religions, and that this is the reason they seek bridges to connect the different religions in the hope that dialogue will be possible and the many different faiths will find common ground on which to walk. This model states that in some ways all religions are the same but also unique, and therefore the mutuality model seeks a context in which all religions can be enriched by each other.

The acceptance model

The last model, the acceptance model, maintains that there are many true religions, and therefore it seeks to find ways to bring about peace amongst all faiths (see Knitter 2012:173–247). Knitter (2012) explains this model as:

[A]n approach to other faiths that feels it can better speak to the way people nowadays understand themselves and their world and at the same time fix those aspects of previous theologies that don't seem to work very well. (p. 173)

This model seeks not to find the similarities between the different religions, but to accept the diversity in all religions, '[t]he religious traditions of the world are really different, and we have to accept those differences – that, you might say, is the one-line summary of this model' (Knitter 2012:173).

This model was formed in and for the postmodern times that we are living in. Postmodern views do not embrace the concept of universal truths, but rather view difference as being 'life-giving' (Knitter 2012:175). It is therefore in a postmodern world view that diversity is embraced, as the *many* cannot be boiled down to the *one*, '[d]ifferent things can be interrelated, connected and brought into unifying relationships, but never to the point where you lose diversity' (Knitter 2012:175). Because of this one can say that truth is always many truths. Truth takes many different forms, to the point that it becomes not one, but many. Knitter (2012:175) declares that if there were to be one absolute truth, humankind would never know it, not in the present. He further states that 'truth is always plural not singular because (1) all human experience and all human knowledge are filtered and (2) the filters are incredibly diverse.' No person can separate themselves from the cultural, historical and social filters through which they view the world (Knitter 2012:175), therefore one world view cannot be measured according to the religious-cultural filters of another (Knitter 2012:176–177).

A theologian that has been one of the leading influences in this model is George Lindbeck. He provides a new perspective on religion, which can be referred to as the cultural-linguistic perspective (Knitter 2012:180). Lindbeck (1984:33) explains what he means by the postliberal cultural-linguistic perspective, thus '[a] religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought.' Knitter (2012) explains what this assertion means for the role of language in religion:

[T]he sequence is not: first the idea and then the articulation in words. Rather, it's the word and images that we are given by our religion that give shape to our religious thoughts and convictions. Really, words enable us to have thoughts in the first place! No one can think nakedly, as it were. Thinking is always dressed in some images and words ... Without religious words, we would not have religious feelings. (p. 180)

Lindbeck (1984:34) is of the opinion that a person must first have 'external thoughts' given to them by their culture and religion, before it becomes possible to have internal words in their minds and hearts. What then is also true is that the religious language a person receives from their culture makes and shapes the religious experience they have. Lindbeck (1984:33) says that 'communicative symbol systems are a precondition ... for the possibility of experience.' Therefore, people's individual identities are not truly individual (Knitter 2012:180). Genetics obviously plays a role in who a person is, 'but also ... who we are is determined by the communal and religious worldview that we are born into' (Knitter 2012:180). Lindbeck (1984:33) regards religion as a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals 'rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.'

Lindbeck's view is that not only does an individual have filters through which they understand the world, but these filters determine what is being seen (Knitter 2012:181). Knitter (2012:181) states that these filters do not just identify meaning, they give meaning; they do not merely mediate, they create. Therefore, religious language creates the world we live in (Knitter 2012:181). Due to this, it is difficult for people who are pioneers of the cultural-linguistic approach to talk about that which religions have in common. If languages create the world and/or context in which people live, and these languages are different, then the worlds of these people will be different – therefore there can be no common ground (Knitter 2012:181).

This is the reason why Lindbeck (1984) rejects an inner experience of God which is common to all human beings:

There can be no experiential core because ... the experience that religions evoke or mould are as varied as the interpretive schemes they embody. Adherents of different religions do not diversely thematise the same experience, *rather they have different experiences*. Buddhist compassion, Christian love, and ... French Revolutionary *fraternité* are not diverse modifications of a single fundamental human awareness, emotion, attitude, or sentiment, but are radically (i.e., from the root) distinct ways of experiencing and being oriented toward self, neighbour and cosmos. (p. 40)

Therefore, it is impossible to translate one religion into the religious language of another; religions are untranslatable (Knitter 2012:181). However, there are overlapping terms in the different faiths, but these have different meanings and functions in the different faiths, because these faiths are different. Knitter (2012:182) explains that Lindbeck is insisting on a lack of common ground, and the impossibility of one religion really understanding and judging another – not because he wishes to isolate the different religions from each other, but because he wishes to preserve, protect and honour the differences between the different religions (Knitter 2012:182).

The question now is what the acceptance model says about dialogue. If religions are so completely different, is dialogue even possible? Knitter (2012:183) states that this

model is not against dialogue, but it seeks to be realistic not only about the advantages of dialogue but also its limitations and its 'dangers'. This model uses the concept of the different faiths being good neighbours to each other. Knitter (2012) explains what it entails to be a good neighbour:

Religions are to be good neighbours to each other. But to do that, each of them needs to recognise that, indeed, 'good fences make good neighbours'. Each religion has its own backyard. There is no 'commons' that all of them share. To be good neighbours, then, let each religion tend to its own backyard, keeping it clean and neat. In talking with one's religious neighbour – and that's what good neighbours do with each other – one is advised to do so over the back fence, without trying to step into the other's yard in order to find what they might have in common with oneself. (p. 183)

The key is that a neighbour must not attempt to make his own and his neighbours' backyards look exactly alike, as this would lead to a religion trying to fit into a culture and philosophy that is not its own. This may cause a religion to lose its own unique identity (Knitter 2012:183). How can one faith then be a good neighbour to another? Knitter (2012) says that:

[I]n a neighbourhood of religions, the first step in being good neighbours will not be to remove the fences and try to build a religious commons, but to try to be who we are as authentically as possible and to let our neighbours see who we are as we talk over our fences. (p. 183)

So the first key is just for religions to observe who their neighbours truly are, which means that every religion must just be true to themselves and live as authentically as they possibly can (Knitter 2012:184). This is then the foundation for further dialogue. Knitter (2012) states that this is an advantage for the different faiths:

[B]ecause postliberal Christians do not presume to know what is at the heart of all religions. Therefore, they don't start measuring each religion according to how much each one shows that common heart. (p. 184)

For this reason, there is no agenda for dialogue. Every religion will have to decide what the next step in this dialogue will be '[t]he conversation and the relation between religious believers will just happen, if they happen' (Knitter 2012:184).

A second theologian identified by Knitter who has impacted this model, is S. Mark Heim. To Heim religions are different from one another in every way: They have different endpoints and are different realities. He speaks of the concept of salvations, stating that all of the different faiths of the world are envisioning and attaining salvations, not salvation, '[t]hey're all moving toward different destinations, and, we can presume, they are arriving' (Knitter 2012:193). He believes that there is no such thing as a sole fate for all humanity, therefore until the end of time religions will stay different, 'and this means that after death people will be "happy" and "fulfilled" in very different ways' (Knitter 2012:193).

Heim (1995:153–155) extends these differences further by saying that there is not only one Ultimate or Divine, but a multiplicity of Ultimates '[t]his view suggests that when we're dealing with what is "ultimate" or "most basic" or "transcendent", we're better off using the plural rather than the singular' (Knitter 2012:194). Heim, therefore, states that there is a plurality amongst the religions, because there is a plurality within God. He then uses the image of the Trinity to explain what he means.

Heim also declares that to be is to be in relationship '[o]ne cannot simply exist; one must exist with. And that means that every-one needs an-other one' (Knitter 2012:195). Knitter (2012) explains what Heim's conclusion is:

[W]hat is true of God, is true of the world God created: to affirm that the being of God must be Trinitarian – that is, community of differences in relationship – is to also affirm that all beings must draw their existence and life from differences that give rise to relationship. (p. 149)

In Heim's (1995:175) own words, 'there is no being without difference and communion.' Therefore, there are many really different ways in which humanity relates to and finds fulfilment in God. The concrete form of these many different ways of relating to God is the many different religions (Knitter 2012:195).

Heim's viewpoint of many salvations creates a new perspective on dialogue. People from different faiths differ so much that no agreement or disagreement can be a threat. There is no fear of pushing the religious Others away nor a need to make them convert, as this model makes the dialogue partners comfortable with the fact that one faith's way is not the only way. Heim (1995:175–176) says that this dialogue is different from the dialogue made possible by the other models, because when a dialogue partner is facing someone who they know is utterly and unimaginably different from themselves, then this person has the opportunity to face another religious truth that is both 'real and alternative', and can open themselves to the possibility of learning something new. Knitter (2012:197) states that this model is extremely positive about dialogue. Heim is therefore also committed to dialogue and states that even though all religions are vastly different, they can and must talk to and learn from one another (Knitter 2012:198).

This dialogue will be characterised by the fact that a religious person will always view their own religious views as superior, but must then also accept the validity of other similar claims (Knitter 2012):

[A]nd to accept means to take seriously, to open oneself to the possible truth of such claims. Now we can better grasp what Heim means when he insists that we can be challenged by another religion only when we accept that it is really different from our own. (p. 198)

Dialogue cannot only lead to new knowledge about other religions, it can also bring forth a change in oneself (Knitter 2012:199). This model also states that dialogue can have an effect upon the state of suffering and the relief of injustice (Knitter 2012:200).

Heim is also an advocate of a Christocentric approach to dialogue. Knitter (2012) states the two reasons why Heim is Christ-centred:

First, it is only through Christ that Christians have come to experience and understand God as triune – that is, as inherently and profoundly relational both within God's self and with all creatures; but, second, Christ makes clear (or should make clear) to his followers that precisely because God is so personal and relational, God thrives on *particularity and diversity* in the way God relates. Since God's creatures are so different, God's relationships with them – God's revelations to them – will be really different. (p. 201)

This approach then 'enables Christians to balance the wobbly seesaw between full commitment to Jesus and a full openness to other religions' (Knitter 2012:201). Heim (1995:201; see Knitter 2012:201) says that when Christians resolve to follow Christ with their whole mind and heart, they must also keep the same mind and heart open to what God may do through other religious figures, 'Christ tells them [*Christians*] that God loves particularities, lots of them' (Knitter 2012:201). Therefore, Heim believes, as a Christian, that God can make use of other systems to reveal himself and save (Knitter 2012:201–202).

Other theologians who are advocates of the acceptance model view the process of forming a theology of religions in a reverse way, which means they state that dialogue must not be the final destination of a theology of religions, but that dialogue should be the starting point in the process of forming a theology of religions (Knitter 2012:203). These theologians state that a Christian theology of religions will be the fruit of dialogue and not the 'prelude' to it (Knitter 2012:203). They also state that any theology of religions must be a comparative theology of religions. According to Knitter (2012:204) this will mean that Christians will have to forget about 'what they think their tradition and theology tell them about other religions and simply go and see what the other religions say about themselves.' This is then the suggestion that comparative theology makes (Knitter 2012):

[B]ecause Christians do not yet have enough data, as it were, to put under their theological microscopes and because theology without data can easily become a blinder or an inoculation to what other religious traditions are proposing, let's call a temporary moratorium on all our theologizing about other faiths so that we can allow ourselves to actually talk with and learn from them ... The different models for a Christian theology of religions seem to be stuck; so let's leave them on the side of the road and look for help elsewhere – in the actual study of other faiths. (p. 204)

The proponents of comparative theology declare that not only does comparing one's own religion with others helps a person to form a Christian theology of religions, it also helps a religious person with their own self-understanding. The question is, however, how does one start to engage in this dialogue? Knitter (2012) explains what the comparative approach is:

Instead of taking up broad, often complex, issues like ‘the Christian and Buddhist notion of Ultimate Reality’ or ‘the Self in Hinduism and Christianity’, comparativists suggest that we zoom in and focus on particular texts or movements or images. In other words, limit the territory and explore it carefully. What one finds by way of similarities or differences in one small plot of dialogue will be road signs for further paths of conversation and exploration. (p. 222)

These dialogues will have to be entered into with respect, patience and trust (Knitter 2012:223). The comparative theologians put emphasis on friendship, ‘[m]ake friends who will guide you along the way’ (Knitter 2012:223). Comparative theology states that it is in friendship that we learn most about the religious Other – more than can be learnt in studying texts.

It is clear that the acceptance model wishes to create a feeling of comfort and acceptance for the many different religions, and seeks to celebrate these differences and uniqueness in all religions, without having to make one religion conform to another. In this model dialogue is a key component. This model seeks not to ask where all religions are the same, but rather wishes to embrace diversity.

■ Evolution from replacement to acceptance

In this section the different Christian theologies of religions have been described. There has been a clear evolution from the replacement model to the acceptance model, the first model stating that the only valid religion is Christianity and the last model embracing the many different religions. There has also been an evolution of the importance and possibility of dialogue, which seems impossible and futile in the total replacement model, but seems to be a necessity for all religious persons according to the acceptance model. Therefore, all the models, with the exception of the first model (the total replacement model), could be viewed as possible models for interreligious dialogue in South Africa.

The evolution from the first model to the last model does not mean that the first model (the replacement model) has now been left in the past, the replacement model has not been *replaced* by other models. There still seem to be advocates for all the different models. This will be delved into deeper in the next section, in relation to the interviews conducted with various respondents.

However, it must also be stated that these approaches are not the only ones there are regarding the many different faiths. It is also possible for a religious person to agree with many of the statements made in the various models, without committing to any specific one. Knitter (2012:216) states that the theory behind some of these models may lead a person away from some models in favour of others. Others might come to the conclusion that they do not fit into any of the stated models, and for these people the exploration

will continue. Whatever the case may be, these models are merely a broad overview of the leading theological approaches to the reality of religious pluralism.

In the next section the South African context will be sketched and the responses of a number of South Africans to the issue of multifaith dialogue examined.

■ The South African context

In this section the main focus will be on South Africans and their religious views. Firstly census results will be discussed, and a better perspective found of what the predominant religions in South Africa are. Secondly, information gathered through dialogues (or interviews) will be provided. The results of these dialogues will be discussed in light of the models which were the main focus of the previous section. Therefore, the strategy will be to relate the findings of the dialogues with the theories provided. Information in the previous section was based on the recent literature, and constitutes the literature review section of the mixed-method approach of this study. The current section was compiled using both quantitative information (census statistics) and qualitative information (findings of the dialogues).

■ What the statistics say about the South African context

As already stated, the most recent statistics about the religious groupings of the South African population were gathered in 2001 by Statistics South Africa during the national census. In the more recent census (which was held in in 2011) the section on religious groupings was not included in the questionnaire.

During the 2001 census Statistics South Africa (2011:24) gathered information about the religious groupings of South Africa and compared their findings with the statistics gathered in the 1996 census. In the 1996 census the information gathered showed that approximately 30 million South Africans (or people who are not citizens, but live in South Africa) stated that they were Christians (Statistics South Africa 2011:24). These Christians fall under various categories, such as mainline Christians,³⁶ African Independent churches, Zion churches, Pentecostal or Charismatic, and some merely stated that they were Christians from another denomination. In 2001 the statistics showed that the Christian population had grown, as 35.8 million people who

36.The mainline churches in South Africa are Reformed churches, Anglican churches, Methodist churches, Presbyterian churches, Lutheran churches, Roman Catholic churches and orthodox churches as well as the United Congregational Church in South Africa [Statistics South Africa 2011:24].

live in South Africa stated that they belong to a Christian religious group of some kind (Statistics South Africa 2011:24). Statistics South Africa (2011:24) found that in both the 1996 and the 2001 censuses one-third of the population stated that they were associated with one of the mainline Christian religious groupings. In 2001 another one-third of the population stated they belonged to one of the independent Christian churches³⁷ (Statistics South Africa 2011:24). This means that in 2001, 79.8% of the South African population consisted of people who viewed themselves as Christians (Statistics South Africa 2011:28).

The 2001 census found that merely 0.3% of the population in South Africa viewed themselves as being a part of the African traditional belief. The Jewish population also had a very low percentage, with only 0.2% of the South African population stating that they were Jewish. Hinduism and Islam had nearly the same percentages: Hinduism – 1.2% and Islam – 1.5%. Under the category of ‘other religions’ the percentage was 0.6%, however, 0.9% of the population stated that they were participants of an Eastern religion. Buddhism was not listed as one of the religions that were practised in South Africa (in 2001), but it can be assumed that Buddhism forms part of these Eastern religions (Statistics South Africa 2011:24, 27–28).

Furthermore, 6.8 million people living in South Africa during the time of the census in 2001 stated that they had no religious affiliation whatsoever. This constitutes 11.7% of the people who took part. This number increased between the censuses of 1996 and 2001, as there were only 4.6 million people in South Africa who had no religious affiliation in 1996 (Statistics South Africa 2011:24).

It would be unwise and invalid to make any assumptions about what the statistics for religions in South Africa would be today. There has been no quantitative study, like a census since 2001, therefore one cannot be certain about what the current statistics would be. It is clear when one compares the information gathered in the 1996 census with the information gathered during the 2001 census that everything did not stay the same – some religious groupings grew in numbers, others declined, but none of them stayed the same. Therefore, we can only speculate that this would be the case if new statistics were gathered. What we can be somewhat sure of is that the religions mentioned in the censuses done in 1996 and 2001 would not have ceased to exist in South Africa, as it was not very difficult to find respondents from each of these religions to participate in this study (with the exception of the Eastern faiths).

It is, however, of some assistance to view these older statistics in order to get a (narrow) view of the religious groupings that have been practising in South Africa and to learn more about the religious make-up of this country.

37. This group includes Zionist churches, iBandla lamaNazaretha and Ethiopian-type churches (Statistics South Africa 2011:24)

■ Why interviews?

The previous section focused on the different approaches in Christian theology of religions towards the religious Other, and it seemed important to obtain more insight into these religions. It seemed futile to do a study about the relationship between the various religions without obtaining more information on how people from the various religions in South Africa approach their fellow South Africans who are adherents of different faiths. What better place to learn more about religious people's approaches towards other religions, than from various religious people themselves? This study is about the possibility of interreligious dialogue – therefore dialogue simply had to be a part of this study.

It is important to note that with these interviews the aim was not to make generalisations concerning the different religions in South Africa. It would be inaccurate and irresponsible to base the approach of an entire religion towards other religions on a few participants' views. However, these interviews can be used as examples of theories. These interviews were also helpful as the respondents assisted this study by giving their perspective on other religions, as a result of which, not only a Christian voice (or perspective) was considered in trying to come up with a solution to the problems that were listed earlier.

Six respondents agreed to participate in this study. They are all South Africans, but differ in age and originate from different provinces in South Africa. Most of the respondents currently live in Gauteng province. All of the respondents will remain anonymous. They are all from different faiths, these being: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and African traditional religion. In what follows is an overview of the dialogue conducted during the interviews with the various respondents, and will then be compared to the theories discussed earlier. It is important to note that it is highly unlikely that any one of these dialogues would fit exactly into the parameters of merely one of the models. Therefore, the aim is to identify the various similarities (and differences) between these dialogues and the models discussed.

■ Dialogues with the religious other

■ Respondent A – Islam

Respondent A is a Muslim woman in her twenties, who recently got married. We met during the holy month of Ramadan. I met her at her place of work, which is in Pretoria, and she was extremely accommodating and easy to talk to.

She was open to the idea of talking about her religious views and spoke with ease about her culture and traditions. When I asked her to describe her religious views, she

referred to herself as being a Muslim, who believes that there is only one God. She specifically mentioned that she does not believe that the Son of God had lived amongst humans, this of course in relation to what Christianity believes Jesus Christ to be. She did not seem at all phased by the existence of other religions and said that she accepts that her own religion is not the only religion, and that all people believe differently in some way. However she views Islam as the last religion, although she is knowledgeable about the fact that it is not the first religion. Therefore, she perceives Islam as being the youngest, most recent religion and the one to which she devotes her life.

Respondent A mentioned that she has never lived with anyone from a different religion and that she previously lived in a predominantly Islamic area before she got married. Growing up in Pretoria and living in Erasmia, which is a neighbouring suburb of Laudium (an area situated northwest of Pretoria) ensured that she lived in a predominantly Muslim and Hindu context. The residents of Laudium are predominantly Hindus or Muslims, having equal representation of each religious group. She and her husband now live in a complex where not all of the people are Muslim. It seems that they do not have close relationships with their neighbours. This is more likely due to their having recently moved into this new home. Respondent A and her husband both also work full-time and do not have a lot of time to become acquainted with their neighbours.

Respondent A mentioned that she does have quite a few friends who are Christian and that she works in an environment where she is only one of two Muslims. This does not hinder her at all, she seems very content with her work environment and colleagues. She spoke about one of her close friends, who happens to be one of her colleagues. This friend of Respondent A is a Christian. She spoke about the fact that this friend often shares her Christian beliefs with her and that she seldom refers to Bible texts during these conversations. Respondent A said that it is during these conversations that she notices many of the similarities between her own religion and Christianity.

Although Respondent A went to an Islamic school, she mentioned that she had spent a lot of time growing up amongst Hindu friends. She describes her parents as being open-minded, and this had an impact on her. As a family they have respect and acceptance for other people's religious views. However, she mentioned that her own parents are more open to non-Muslims than her husband's parents, who shy away from close relationships with non-Muslims.

Respondent A said that she views South Africa as a hub for many different religions and cultures. She seemed comfortable with religious plurality. This respondent mentioned that she has visited Muslim countries and felt at home in these countries, and supposed that it would be culturally and religiously more comfortable for her if South Africa was an Islamic country, even though she is not bothered that it is not so.

On the sensitive topic of salvation, she referred to the *Kalimahs* (or *Kalima*, which is Arabic for 'word') which are memorised and repeated by Muslims, in which they proclaim

their belief. She talked about belief in the oneness of God and said that salvation lies in the hands of God (Allah) and that he is the One who decides who will spend eternity in paradise and who will not. She was reluctant to say that others who are not Muslims will not go to paradise. However, she explained that this does not mean that she thinks that all people will go to paradise. Therefore, Respondent A does not condone relativism, but does not want to reduce salvation only to Muslims. She clearly reflected traditional Islamic thoughts and beliefs when speaking about the concept of salvation. People cannot decide who will be saved, only Allah can make this decision.

She views communication and dialogue amongst the different religions not only as important, but also as something that cannot be avoided. She mentioned the importance of the different religions conversing with each other, because she believes that this is important for South Africa. If all the religions could work together in some way and agree on a few ethical viewpoints, it would be for the greater good of our nation.

Respondent A, being aware of the fact that her interviewer was not a Muslim, had no reservations about talking about her own religious views and how these were in many instances similar to those of other religions. She also mentioned the ways in which her religion differs from others. In short, the conversation with Respondent A was positively experienced by the interviewer, because the respondent was extremely friendly and willing to share her views and personal experiences. The interview was informative and both interviewer and respondent were open to learn and share with one another.

Comparing the dialogue with Respondent A with Knitter's acceptance and mutuality models

Early on in the conversation with Respondent A, the word *acceptance* came up. This was almost the first thing she said. It was as if before she stated her own religious views, she firstly wanted to make the fact clear that she accepts other people's views and has no problem listening to the religious Other. This immediately brought the acceptance model (cf. Knitter 2012:173–247) to mind. What further made me, what this respondent said, relate to the acceptance model is that she highlighted some of the differences between her religion (Islam) and others (Christianity) – almost as if she was at ease talking about the differences between her own religion and other religions and believed that differences need not be the end of further conversation, it certainly did not put an end to the dialogue.

However, in the reference she made to Jesus she stated that she did not view him as being the Son of God. She did not make this statement to attempt to halt the conversation, rather it seemed as if she was merely highlighting the differences between her belief and the views of her dialogue partner.

When Respondent A started talking about her close friendship with a Christian friend and/or colleague, she started highlighting the similarities between her own religious views and Christian views. She even spoke about the similarities between the Bible and the Qur'an. The similarities she emphasised made what she stated lean more towards the mutuality model (Knitter 2012:109–157), as she expressed some of the *mutual* aspects between Islam and Christianity. This then moves away from the acceptance model (Knitter 2012:173–247), as it states that all religions are completely different because religious views are formed by linguistic and cultural influences. Religious people speak different languages and therefore they are different.

She moved back to the idea of acceptance when speaking about her own parents, and stated that they have respect and acceptance for other religions. However, she spoke of how her husband's parents are not open to the religious Other, which makes their approach to other religions lean more towards exclusivism – which recalls the replacement model.

Something Respondent A said about the South African context which also seemed to move towards the acceptance model is that it would possibly be more comfortable for her if South Africa was an Islamic country, but at the same time she maintained that she does not mind the religious plurality in South Africa. Respondent A views this country as being a hub for many religions. Naturally, each person prefers their own religious views, but this does not mean that they do not accept other religious views.

According to the partial replacement model (Knitter 2012:33–49) other religions (besides Christianity) play some sort of role in religious people attaining salvation. This can be related to Respondent A's statement of the important role the *Kalimahs* play in salvation – therefore the importance that Muslims recite their beliefs. However, she declared that only Allah can decide who will be saved and who not. She does not have exclusivist (or replacement) views about salvation, as she was extremely reluctant to say that people from religions other than Islam will not be saved.

Respondent A highlighted the importance of dialogue. Her view of dialogue and the purpose of it is similar to the ethical-practical bridge which is referred to in the mutuality model. According to her, dialogue may ease some of the injustice in South Africa. In her approach to this conversation she also seemed to be open to dialogue and comfortable with discussing her religious views. Overall it seems that this dialogue had many similarities with the acceptance model and the mutuality model.

Respondent B – Christian

Respondent B is a Christian man in his late twenties. He was the second respondent that I met with. He was eager and open to speak about his religious views and seemed very interested in the study. We met in Pretoria, where he works. He stated that the city took

a lot of getting used to, because he is originally from the Free State, where he grew up on a farm.

The first question on the list was easy for him to answer: I asked him to describe his religious views. His answer was that he is a Christian who believes that there is only one God and that this God is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He spoke of God the Son as the Saviour and used the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, which are, 'my only comfort in life and death is that I belong to Jesus Christ.' He further described himself as a follower of Christ.

When I asked him about how he views other religions, he said that he is comfortable with other religions. However, he believes that these religions are merely people's attempt to follow the one true God in the way that makes sense to them in their culture. He also mentioned the responsibility of all Christians to 'convert' these people to Christianity. In other words: Christians are sent by God to share his loving message with others. He said that this 'sharing of God's message' is done through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and according to each Christian's specific gifts and talents.

Respondent B currently lives alone and has never lived with someone who was not a Christian. He grew up in a Christian household, but he views himself as more open-minded than his parents, who he perceives being fundamentalists who do not sway in their views. He mentioned that he only met people from other religions after he left school. He has no close friends who are from one of the other major religious groups in South Africa. However, Respondent B mentioned that within his circle of friends there are non-believers. He referred to some atheist friends and that he has quite a few friends with whom he regularly has debates and conversations concerning their religious views. He works in an environment where most of his colleagues are not vocal about their religious views, but he is aware of a few Muslim and Hindu co-workers who he enjoys working with. However, he would not classify them as being his friends and said that they keep to themselves.

He does not necessarily view South Africa as being a religious hub, but views South Africa as a predominantly Christian country, and said that South Africa is rather a hub for many Christian denominations, because all of the other religions are in the vast minority.

Respondent B views salvation as being granted to those who believe in Christ as the saviour of all humankind. He mentioned that salvation is offered to all people through the grace of God granting it by sacrificing his Son for the sins of humankind, but that humankind has a choice as to whether to accept this salvation or not.

He views dialogue between religious people as important, whether they share the same religious views, or not. According to him interreligious dialogue can be viewed

as an opportunity to share God's love with people who have yet to accept him, but he is also aware of the fact that these types of dialogue must be carefully and respectfully dealt with.

Respondent B was very open to conversation and eager to share his views. He is a devoted Christian and well informed about the Christian tradition, but has not had very much experience with other religions.

Comparing the dialogue with Respondent B with Knitter's partial replacement and fulfilment models

The dialogue with Respondent B brought forth some concepts which are similar to the partial replacement model (Knitter 2012:63–98) and the fulfilment model (Knitter 2012:33–49). He stated that he is a Christian and finds comfort in the feeling of belonging to Christ. He stated that other religions are the attempts of people to follow (the One) God in their own culture and traditions. This stated *attempt* of others to follow God leads one to think that this respondent attaches some value to other religions, as they in some way lead people to God. This is similar to the fulfilment model and Rahner's concept of anonymous Christians – it is almost as if Respondent B stated that the religious Other is already a Christian, but is just not aware of it yet. In a certain sense Respondent B's view of other religions also recalls some of the partial replacement model, because if other religions are the attempts of people to follow the true God, then something of this God has to be revealed in these religions for followers to have the need to follow – and as the partial replacement model states, revelation is possible in other religions.

When speaking about the importance of dialogue, Respondent B stated that it can be a window for Christians to share God's love with the religious Other. This closely relates to what the partial replacement model says about dialogue. In this model dialogue (when carried out with respect and sensitivity) can be evangelism (see Knitter 2012:41). This means that if dialogue is handled correctly and does not lead to the condemning of one another, Jesus will prove himself to be the name in which people come to know God (Knitter 2012:41).

Respondent B shared his views on salvation and stated that it is only through accepting Christ as the only Saviour of humanity that someone can be saved. This relates to the partial replacement model, which states that Christ is 'the one-and-only Saviour of the World' (Braaten 1981:74; see Knitter 2012:37). However, Respondent B's views on salvation are also parallel to the fulfilment model and Rahner's views on grace. According to Rahner God grants all people his grace, because God loves all people. Respondent B

shares this view and stated that God's gracious act of saving humanity is meant for all human beings (see Knitter 2012:69).

Respondent B depicted South Africa as being predominantly Christian with the other religions being in the minority. This relates to the census data gathered in 2001 (Statistics South Africa 2011:24). Therefore, Respondent B's view of the South African context is (or at least was) accurate. However, this respondent still views interreligious dialogue as important and is open to it, despite the fact that he is part of the majority religion, Christianity. However, he depicted dialogue as being a one-way street, speaking only about what Christianity can bring to the table. Respondent B did not refer to the effect that dialogue could have on him or any other Christian involved in an interreligious dialogue, he focused on what effect interreligious dialogue between a Christian and the religious Other can have upon the religious Other.

Respondent C – Christian who converted to Islam

Of all the respondents who were interviewed, Respondent C had the most intricate and interesting religious journey. Respondent C is a Muslim woman in her mid-forties. She was born and raised in Pretoria. What makes her religious views and the conversation that was held with her interesting is the fact that she was raised as a Christian. At the age of 37 years she married a Muslim man and converted to Islam. She was previously married to a Christian and had four children with him, but due to being abused by this man, got divorced. She then entered a loving relationship with a Muslim and had to convert to Islam so that they could get married. Respondent C refers to her conversion from Christianity to Islam as a 'reversion', as she views herself as only becoming a truly religious person after becoming a Muslim.

When asked about her religious views, she stated that she was raised as a Christian and still views herself in many ways as being a Christian, who is 'protected by the blood of Christ'. This respondent believes that Christ is the Son of God. She believes in the oneness of God, and therefore it was possible for her to convert to Islam, as there is only one God. She says that the process of becoming a Muslim was not easy, because of one fact: Muslims do not believe that Christ is the Son of God. Respondent C also mentioned that she found the Muslim way of life difficult at first, because it is vastly different from the way she was raised. She mentioned that from the day she converted to Islam she had to get used to dressing differently, eating differently and worshipping God differently. She was honest about how it took her quite some time to get used to the segregation of men and women in the Mosque (this became clear during her second marriage ceremony, which was vastly different to her first wedding).

Because Respondent C converted to Islam, she was asked to express in her own words what her experience of Islam has been:

The Muslim Religion has provided me with an immense amount of insight into what loving God and having faith, trust, etc. in Him, means. A Muslim is such a devout person and it saddens me that I didn't see more of this in people, when I was growing up as a Christian. The Muslim community views themselves as being an enormous family, who is always there for those needing assistance, whether it be financially, spiritually or otherwise.

This respondent highlighted many similarities between Islam and Christianity and spoke of how she feels, that she definitely still worships the same God, just in a different way. She spoke of many things which are similar between the Christian message and the Islamic message: God is depicted as the Creator, the One true God; Muslims and Christians are similarly urged to take care of those in need; love is central to both ways of living; Christ is described in both holy texts, et cetera. Respondent C spoke of the one true Creator being the central point of both Islam and Christianity.

Respondent C said that in her work environment she is not the only Muslim, but that there are quite a few colleagues who are from different religions. She has only lived with Christians, her parents and siblings, and now her (Muslim) husband. They reside in Johannesburg, but she grew up in Pretoria (and her husband in Cape Town). She stated that her family and children have been immensely supportive of her religious choices and they have embraced her new religion. However, some of her friends have not been so welcoming to her new religious views.

She is very comfortable with religious plurality. She declared that she has respect for people from different religions. However, she does believe that there are many religions who worship idols, but mentioned that it is not her place to judge others, as Allah is the only one who can decide who will be saved. She maintained that all people will answer for their sins and that it is Allah who will decide upon their fate.

Respondent C referred to South Africa as being a wonderful country to live in due to the fact that it has many different religions, cultures and races. She is comfortable with calling South Africa a hub for many different religions, and referred to her travels around South Africa and her experiences with different religions. When the focus was on interreligious dialogue she stated that it can be of use only if all parties taking part are open-minded and respectful towards one another. According to Respondent C people can benefit from dialogue if they are willing to put their judgements aside. She said that it would be beneficial to all South Africans if they could understand the adherents of different religions more adequately.

The conversation with Respondent C was extremely insightful. She seemed comfortable and spoke with ease. This respondent was extremely helpful and kind and can be described as an ideal dialogue partner. It was interesting to note how comfortable she was speaking about both Christianity and Islam, and how in some ways she is devoted to both religions.

Comparing the dialogue with Respondent C with Knitter's mutuality model

In this dialogue it is quite difficult to discern a specific model due to the interesting religious journey of this respondent. Knitter's models are broad theories which do not consider the fact that religious people may have intricate stories which do not fit into the parameters of any specific model. Of course the mutuality model (Knitter 2012:109–157) comes to mind, as this respondent spoke of the things that Islam and Christianity have in common, and this model states that there are many true religions and that all religions are called to dialogue. It seems as if although this respondent has an internal dialogue, she brings Christian views into dialogue with Islamic views. She was also able to highlight many factors that Christianity and Islam have in common. This means she can identify many topics which could be the foundation for dialogue to take place.

In the mutuality model, dialogue is central. The mutuality model views all people as 'potential dialogue partners' (Knitter 2012:110). This model promotes equality and creating safe spaces for dialogue. However, it is important to note that the equality which this model seeks does not declare that all religions are equal, but rather that every religion has the equal right to voice their views and to be heard. This was also a point made by Respondent C. She wanted to make it clear that she does not necessarily feel that all religions are equal, and acknowledges the existence of religions which are idolatrous.

A further characteristic of the mutuality model is that it seeks to celebrate the uniqueness of Christianity, but does not want to water down the uniqueness of other religions (Knitter 2012:111). Respondent C also acknowledged that her view of Christ is unique, because it is different from Islam's view of Christ. She therefore, views herself as being a devoted follower of Christ whilst being a Muslim.

Some of what Hick stated can be brought into relation with the views Respondent C shared. Hick stated that the Divine reality is the heart of all religions (Knitter 2012:115). This respondent stated clearly that God, the Creator of all things, is the central point of both Christianity and Islam. He remained the central point of both the Christian life she led as well as her Muslim life.

Respondent C briefly mentioned the ethical responsibility of both Islam and Christianity to take care of those in need. This relates to the ethical-practical bridge, which forms part of the mutuality model. This bridge states that even if there are many different religions, they all share the same concern for those in need (Knitter 2012:134–138). The mutuality model is based on the realisation that in some ways all religions are unique, but religions share some of the same aspects and concerns. Respondent C seemed to be aware of the similarities and the uniqueness of both Islam and Christianity.

This respondent stated how important it is that when approaching dialogue, people from different religions should be respectful. What was interesting is that she mentioned her family's respect for her new religious views and how they have embraced her conversion to Islam. She did however mention how some of her friends were not so open to speak about her new religious views. It is therefore important to note how valuable close relationships can be for interreligious dialogue (see Knitter 2012:223). This respondent's family, that is closest to her, is open to dialogue, but those who are not so close to her are less understanding.

Respondent D – Hindu

The fourth respondent, Respondent D, is a Hindu woman in her early twenties. The meeting took place on the main campus of the University of Pretoria and Respondent D was an eager and friendly dialogue partner. She was born and raised in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, but due to her studies had to move to Gauteng and currently lives in Pretoria.

When asked about her religious views, Respondent D, described herself as a Hindu, but stated that she has found many truths in the religions of others and has come to respect people from different religions. She stated that she enjoys taking part in other religions' traditions. She went on to say that culture, to her, plays an important role in a person's religious views, because she believes that the Divine reveals itself to all people in different ways and cultures. The Divine therefore uses a person's culture to reveal some parts of themselves to all people. She therefore found it important to explain that all religions are valid, because all religions have their own way of expressing their passion for the Divine.

She stated that she grew up amongst other Hindus, but had many experiences with Muslims who lived in her neighbourhood. She has had many different experiences with various religions, and currently most of her peers are Christians. She has become close friends with many Christians and says that most of her encounters with other religions in the past two years have been with Christians. She lives in a student hostel where all the other girls on the floor that she lives on describe themselves as Christians. She has gone with them to a Christian Bible study where she spoke about her religion. She mentioned that she has had a few conversations with peers who describe themselves as atheist, something she finds strange.

Respondent D views South Africa as a country with many different religions and agrees with the depiction of South Africa as a hub for many different faiths. She views South Africa as segregated in terms of religion; there are Hindu parts, Muslim parts, Christian parts, et cetera. It seems to her that the different faiths, in certain areas of the country, keep to themselves. She is comfortable with all other faiths. To her all faiths are valid.

What is important is the vigour and passion in every religion. She believes that God is present in all people – she calls this the ‘atman’, the ‘spark of God in all people’. She stated that Hinduism as a religion does not seek to devalue any other religion.

When Respondent D spoke of salvation she said that Hinduism states that salvation is for all people and that no one is denied salvation. One does not have to be a Hindu to attain salvation. Salvation to her is self-realisation, because in her faith salvation means to realise the fact that a person is not merely a perishable body, but an immortal soul, in which God dwells. She believes in reincarnation and that once a person is perfected, moksha is achieved, which is oneness with God. She maintained that Hinduism does not believe in an eternal heaven or hell, Hinduism rather refers to states of being, where karma is burnt off. People are then reborn once karma has been burnt off. Respondent D declared that all people have one path, which is the path to God.

She believes that it is not necessarily important for different religions to engage in dialogue, but it can be the source of joy if one is open to it. However, this depends on every person’s own path in life. Therefore, if dialogue with others is brought into a person’s path, it can enrich their lives as long as all parties involved are respectful. Therefore, Respondent D would not refer to dialogue as being important for all people, but said it can be enriching to those who choose to partake in it. However, she does not think it is necessary for a person to seek out dialogue. If a person is true to their faith and does not come into contact with adherents of other faiths, then so be it.

Respondent D declared that from an ethical or social justice standpoint interreligious dialogue can be fruitful to the South African context and can lead to religious people understanding each other better, as it might help dissolve some misconceptions about the different faiths.

The conversation with Respondent D was interesting as she was able to speak passionately about other religions as well as her own faith. She was open to answer all the questions directed at her and could share her own religious views eloquently.

Comparing the dialogue with Respondent D with Knitter’s acceptance model

The dialogue with Respondent D related closely to the acceptance model (Knitter 2012:173–247), as she stated that she is a Hindu but has also found many truths in other religious traditions. The acceptance model maintains that there are many true religions, and it seeks ways in which there can be peace amongst the various religions (Knitter 2012:173).

Respondent D mentioned that culture has an influence on religion and due to the fact that there are many different cultures, there are many different religions. This is a view

which echoes what Lindbeck (1984:33) states. He maintains that religions are a kind of cultural (and linguistic) medium 'that shapes the entirety of life and thought' (Lindbeck 1984:33; see Knitter 2012:180). A person's culture can be viewed as a filter for the way in which they perceive the Divine. The acceptance model does not seek to find similarities between religions, because if languages and cultures are different, then the world and the way all people perceive the Divine are also different (see Knitter 2012:181). It was clear during the dialogue with Respondent D that she is knowledgeable about the religious Other (especially Muslims and Christians), but she did not feel the need to express similarities between the different religions.

In the acceptance model Knitter (2012:183) explains how dialogue between adherents from different religions can be possible, by saying that religions are to be good neighbours to one another and should not seek to be exactly like one another or to break down the fences that make good neighbours. This relates to what Respondent D stated about interreligious dialogue: If one is confronted with the religious Other (or is led to conversation with the religious Other), they must respectfully enter into dialogue with this person. She also maintained that dialogue can be a source of joy, if it is brought onto someone's path.

Respondent D stated that salvation is not only for Hindus, but for all people. This again relates to the acceptance model, because this model declares that religions differ so vastly, therefore no agreement or disagreement can be threatening. Therefore, there will be no need to force any person to convert to the other's religious views (for salvation to be attained), because this model seeks to make people comfortable with the differences between faiths. Respondent D certainly seemed comfortable not only with her own faith, but other faiths as well.

The acceptance model encourages dialogue, on the other hand this respondent does not see dialogue as a necessity for a religious person. However, like Knitter (2012:223), Respondent D notes how important respect is if dialogue naturally enters one's path.

Respondent E – African traditional religions

The fifth respondent, Respondent E, is a man in his late twenties, who spoke to me about African traditional religions, which he views as an intricate part of his life. He lives in Pretoria but grew up in Ulundi, a town in KwaZulu-Natal. He seemed open to conversation and did not hesitate to share his experiences.

When asked about his religious views, he said that he has been influenced by Christianity and celebrates Christian holidays. However, due to the way he was raised he remains deeply connected to his African traditional heritage. He declared that he believes in one God, the Creator of all things, and the sacredness of what this God created.

He mentioned that he believes in the existence of both good and evil spirits. Respondent E stated that because of the way in which he was he feels a close connection with his ancestors and their beliefs. He said that even though he views himself as a Christian, he cannot separate himself from traditional African views, they are part of his culture and come naturally to him.

Respondent E mentioned that it is difficult to speak about the broad concept of African traditional religions, as they are closely related to culture and Africa is diverse when it comes to culture. Each culture has its own interpretation of religion. Therefore, this respondent merely attempted to express his own views on African traditional religions.

Currently, Respondent E lives alone, but when he lived with his parents in KwaZulu-Natal he lived amongst many different people who were, like him, true to their African traditional heritage. He mentioned that he studies in Pretoria and has many Christian friends and some friends who grew up with African traditional beliefs. He said that although the campus where he studies has a variety of students with different cultures and religions, he does not come into close contact with any of these students.

Respondent E described South Africa as the home of many different religions and cultures. He stated that even though there is seldom segregation between different religions and cultures, they are all connected in some way, as they all live in the same country and are all responsible for the preservation of it. When asked about his thoughts concerning religious plurality, he said that he respects all people's beliefs. He does not view his own religion (or culture) as being superior to others. He maintained that just as there are different cultures, there are different religions. According to this respondent culture has a big impact on religion.

Respondent E declared that although he finds no fault with other religions, many people do not share the same sentiment, as African traditional religions are frequently perceived to be barbaric and savage. Therefore, his wish is that others would be more accepting of African traditional religions, just as he is open to learning more about the religions of others.

When asked about his views on salvation, he expressed what the African traditional religions' views are about salvation and also what his own views are. Respondent E said that African traditional mythology states that there was a time when the Divine and humanity lived in a state of harmony. This was paradise. However, God withdrew and now humanity is separated from him. This condition is permanent. There is no mythology that refers to salvation or that God would restore the previously experienced harmony. In African traditional religions, there is no belief that the unity between God and humanity will be restored. The highest goal people aim to achieve in African traditional religions is ancestorship. This is, however, merely a continuation of the earthly life. It is also important to note that ancestorship does not necessarily refer to being (re)united with

God – when you are an ancestor you are not in the same ‘place’ as the Divine. The decision of where an ancestor is, is up to God.

Therefore, it is clear that the Christian idea of heaven is not present in African traditional religions. Rather, the focus is on the hope of becoming an ancestor. Heaven is not found after death, it takes form in this reality when one is healthy, has a good harvest, has healthy children, et cetera. These are the forms of salvation experienced in this life. He maintained that when a person lives a wicked life, where they are promiscuous, harms others, destroys harmony and is not respectful towards creation, they are punished and do not experience this earthly salvation. Such a person will have to be cleansed by a diviner. Respondent E said that through these rituals a person can be reconciled with their community and ancestors.

For Respondent E becoming an ancestor is the equivalent of heaven. According to him the ability to watch over your loved ones is similar to God’s relationship with humanity. Therefore, he maintains that to be an ancestor is a divine state. He is, however, not sure that as an ancestor you could or would come into direct contact with God, but mentioned that no living person can be sure of how life after death will be. What will happen after this life is in God’s hands.

This respondent spoke about how important it is for people from different religions to communicate with one another. This can help the various religious people to dispel some of the negative views about other faiths. He thinks this can be especially important for religious people whose religion is viewed as negative or violent. According to him, religious people are often judged for the wrongdoings or only a few of the violent acts that have taken place in the name of their religion.

He maintained that South Africa can benefit from dialogue across religious borders, because that will allow people to obtain an understanding of one another. Respondent E declared that when we understand one another we can live in better harmony with one another.

The conversation with Respondent E was a positive experience and he spoke with ease. He did not seem to be bothered by the fact that his dialogue partner was not well informed about African traditional religions, and was very informative. He attempted to be as descriptive as possible.

Comparing the dialogue with Respondent E with Knitter’s mutuality and acceptance models

It was yet again challenging to distinguish which of Knitter’s models relate to this specific dialogue, as this respondent is influenced by both African traditional views and Christianity.

Respondent E spoke of the important influence that culture has on a person's religious views. This is the reason why one cannot refer to one single religion in the African traditional religions. This relates to the acceptance model (Knitter 2012:173–247), because, as was previously stated, this model focuses on the diversities in the different religions, due to the fact that culture and language shape a person's religious views (see Knitter 2012:10). This respondent seemed to be comfortable with both the diversity in culture and religion. However, he has also experienced exclusivism, as he stated that African traditional religions are often viewed as being barbaric.

The mutuality model (Knitter 2012:109–157) also relates to some of what Respondent E spoke of. He spoke of South Africa as the shared home of many religions and therefore of the shared responsibility towards this home. This reminds one of the ethical-practical bridge embedded in the mutuality model, which speaks of the shared responsibility towards the suffering of the Earth (and of course the suffering of all living things). This bridge maintains that the Earth suffers increasingly due the expansion of humanity and trying to keep up with this growth (Knitter 2012:138).

In the partial replacement model (Knitter 2012:33–49) Netland states that there are topics which can be discussed amongst religious people from different faiths. These topics include speaking about the essence of each religion. The reason why this can be valuable is because such a dialogue can be conducive to correcting the prejudices and mistrust between people of different religions. Respondent E echoed this view. He said that through dialogue some of the negative feelings towards African traditional religions can be defused. He declared that harmony is important and that dialogue can be used to create some sort of peace between religions. This relates to the acceptance model, which seeks to find ways in which there can be peace amongst all faiths (Knitter 2012:173).

Respondent F – Jew

The last of the respondents was Respondent F, who is a Jewish man in his fifties. He was born and raised in Johannesburg and currently still lives there. The conversation with this Respondent was insightful. However, he seemed uncomfortable talking about his religion at first, but as he would be conversing about his religious views with someone he has known for a long time, he agreed to take part. Respondent F mentioned that he does not find it easy to speak about his religious views.

Respondent F described his religious views by saying that he is Jewish and believes that there is only one God. He refers to this God as *Hashem*. *Hashem* is the creator of all things. Respondent F stated that this creator is beyond all comprehension, but is still part of every person's everyday life.

Respondent F attended a well-known Jewish school in Johannesburg, and grew up in a Jewish environment, amongst other Jews. His close friends are all Jewish and some attended the same school. He mentioned that he works for a company owned by Jews, where only a few co-workers are not practising Jews. He referred to his uncle who married a Christian woman. This marriage created tension between his uncle and the rest of the family. He is, however, still in contact with his two cousins, the children of this uncle. Both of these cousins were raised with many Christian and Jewish traditions, but married Christians. Therefore, Respondent F is mostly surrounded by other Jews, but has some contact with his extended family, who view themselves as Christians. Respondent F has respect for the way his uncle raised his children, but states that it is different from the way he was raised in many ways. Respondent F has never lived with a person from a different faith.

This respondent was comfortable with talking about South Africa as a hub for many different religions. However, he maintained that in many ways the Jewish community in South Africa keeps to themselves and most of the Jews in South Africa live in Johannesburg or Cape Town, with small Jewish communities in other areas such as Port Elizabeth and Durban. He views his own religion as being one of the minorities in South Africa. He described South Africa as a country with two predominant religions, these being Christianity and Islam, and that the rest of the country's religions are formed by only small groups.

When asked about his views on salvation, Respondent F said that salvation is found in living a righteous life. Therefore, it is important to uphold the Torah. Every person has the free will to choose if they will live a righteous life. The Torah states that a person must do good. A person is saved by living a good and righteous life. This is done by making the right choices and living in accordance with the Torah. He maintained that every person has the potential to live a good life, as all people were created in God's image. The Torah urges people to live a good life and live according to the commandments that it provides. Respondent F, however, maintained that every person sins. Therefore, living a good life does not mean that a person can never sin, no person is free of sin. If a person did not sin, repentance would have no use. Respondent F mentioned that repentance is important for one to be saved. Therefore, one is saved by attempting to live a good life and repenting when they sin.

He spoke about how the Jewish community views non-Jews, by saying that all people are part of God's covenant and can have a relationship with God. God is not only the God of Jews and does not only love Jewish people. God reigns over all people, however, Respondent F declared that Jews were called for the specific task to exemplify the covenant with God. Therefore, Jews have to adhere to the 613 *mitzvots* (the commandments of the Torah), to live a good life. Non-Jews also have to live a good life to be saved and therefore

they must keep the new commandments given to Adam by *Hashem*.³⁸ Respondent F stated that the Jewish community does not believe in trying to convert non-Jews. He stated if someone is not Jewish, they cannot become a Jew – Jews are born Jewish. This does not mean that non-Jews will not receive salvation. If the religious Others live a righteous life they can be saved, but that, he said, is up to *Hashem* to decide.

According to Respondent F dialogue between different religions can be important, but also dangerous. He said that if the dialogue is about the differences in belief or the similarities between religions, it is of no use and can lead to one person trying to convert the other. However, he maintained that interreligious dialogue can be important in the South African context, if it is based on trying to solve the major problems in this country. He maintained that all religions are knowledgeable about the fact that violence and suffering should be ended, and the different religions can help each other to make a bigger impact to relieve some of the societal problems.

The dialogue with this respondent was insightful and he seemed to have felt comfortable with what he shared. He stated that he knew other Jewish people would not agree with all he had said. Respondent F seemed well informed about the traditions and rituals of Judaism and spoke about his faith with ease.

Comparing the dialogue with Respondent F with aspects of Knitter's models

It became quite clear during the dialogue with Respondent F that what he said did not seem to be confined to merely one or two of Knitter's models. In some ways, various aspects of the four models are involved.

Firstly, it seemed as if some part of the total replacement model (Knitter 2012:19–32) related to this dialogue. This model maintains that dialogue is of no use, and this respondent seemed to shy away from dialogue with the religious Other. However, his approach to dialogue can also be brought into relation with both the mutuality model (Knitter 2012:109–157) and the acceptance model (Knitter 2012:173–247). The mutuality model refers to the ethical responsibility of all religions, and to this shared responsibility as a bridge that connects the various religions. Respondent F stated that from an ethical stance, religions can enter dialogue.

A certain part of the acceptance model is also involved in Respondent F's views, because this model attempts to avoid trying to find similarities between religions.

38. There were seven new commandments given to Adam these include: the prohibition of theft, idolatry, murder, sexual immorality, blasphemy, eating flesh from an animal who is still alive and lastly maintaining courts to provide legal recourse.

Respondent F echoed this by saying that it would be of no use for religious people to enter a dialogue with the need to find similarities between the different faiths. He maintained that in dialogue the differences between religions must also be avoided, to prevent attempts by the dialogue partners to convert one another to their own way of thinking and believing. This relates to the acceptance model. This model celebrates the diversity in religions and does not provide a believer with a way to convert the religious Other, but instead provides theories for the religious Others to accept one another's views. Respondent F's views on other religions cannot be seen in the light of the replacement model, because he does not think that his religion should replace all other religions.

Respondent F mentioned that he does not spend time with people from different faiths. His lack of exposure to the religious Other inevitably has an impact on the way he views the religious Others and their salvation. His views on salvation are similar to those shared in the fulfilment model (Knitter 2012:63–98). This model maintains that God wishes to save all humanity, but that Jesus is the fulfilment of all religions. Although Respondent F is a Jew and does not see Christ as the fulfilment of his religion, he did state that all people are created in God's image and salvation can be found outside of Judaism. However, the laws given to Jews and non-Jews need to be adhered to for salvation to take place, therefore the Torah is the fulfilment of all religions.

It is interesting to note what an important role a relationship or friendship played in this dialogue. This respondent, being a family member of mine, felt comfortable with a dialogue partner with whom he shares a relationship, and stated that he would not have felt comfortable speaking about his religious views with someone he is not acquainted with. This relates to what comparative theology refers to in the acceptance model: Friendship is important for dialogue³⁹ to be able to take place (see Knitter 2012:223).

■ Conclusion

Although the census data were helpful to some extent, it was through the conversations with people from the different faiths in South Africa that the theories discussed came to life. It was interesting to note how open the respondents were to interreligious dialogue. It was also interesting that even though the census data showed that Christianity is the largest religious group in South Africa, all of the respondents have had experiences pertaining to more than just Christianity. Simply the fact that it was not challenging to find dialogue partners from the different religions brings forth the possibility that religious people can embrace one another, despite the differences they might have.

39. It was clear that Respondent F would not have been comfortable to enter into dialogue if there had not been a pre-existing relationship between himself and his dialogue partner.

These dialogues were positive experiences which not only shed light on the various religions, but also on the way some followers of these religions might react towards interreligious dialogue. However, the views of these individuals do not reflect the position of others belonging to the same religion. The openness of these respondents made for an unforgettable experience of the religious Other, and made it easy to celebrate diversity, uniqueness and camaraderie. These respondents have fostered the hope that mutual respect and friendship across religious boundaries are possible in South Africa.

In the next section the focus is on why mutual respect, dialogue and camaraderie can be conducive to relations in South Africa. An approach for dialogue will be provided.

■ If dialogue is possible ... why not use it?

Earlier in this chapter Knitter's different approaches to theology of religions were discussed. All but one (the total replacement model, see Knitter 2012:19–32) of these models, in some way or another, suggest that dialogue is possible. Some of these models (the acceptance model and the mutuality model, see Knitter 2012:109–157, 173–247) not only recognise the possibility of dialogue, but maintain that dialogue amongst various religious people is important. In the previous section actual dialogues were incorporated into the study and these seemed to further the idea that dialogue can be enriching.

The focus of this last section will be on why dialogue is important by viewing the benefits of interreligious dialogue. Knitter's (1995) approach to interreligious dialogue will be discussed as a possible approach to dialogue for the South African context. Secondly, the South African concept of ubuntu will be described, to examine whether this can be conducive to interreligious dialogue. The concept of ubuntu was incorporated as it seemed important to add a section which focused on a South African perspective.

In Knitter's models (2012) great emphasis was placed on mutual respect, kindness, openness, trust and patience when entering dialogue. Knitter (1995:136) declares that he is an advocate for dialogue concentrated on concern for and shared commitment to removing eco-human suffering and promoting eco-human justice. This is a possible starting point for interreligious dialogue. This approach can be conducive for peace in the South African context due to the fact that South Africa is a country which has been plagued by injustice, crime and poverty.

Knitter (1995) explains his approach:

[T]his method urges that all our efforts at dialoguing or understanding each other be preceded or accompanied or pervaded by some form of shared practical efforts to remove eco-human suffering. (p. 138)

This further means that dialogue partners would not need to approach a conversation with the religious Other by beginning to speak about rituals or doctrines '[r]ather, the encounter begins on the level of some form of liberative, engaged praxis' (Knitter 1995:138). This allows dialogue partners to have a choice of which particular social or national context and human or ecological suffering the focus must be on (see Knitter 1995:138).

Knitter (1995) gives a compelling reason why this approach to dialogue can be fruitful:

From this effort, even though it will be complex and perhaps unsuccessful, even though the effort will admit of different analyses and remedies, there will result a context, or an atmosphere, or a new sensitivity, on the basis of which the participants in the dialogue will be able to understand themselves and each other in new ways. (p. 138)

With this approach one can see how diversity is being respected and togetherness is being developed (see Knitter 1995:139). Knitter's (1995:139) approach creates the awareness that in a multireligious society (like South Africa, for instance) the various religions play an important role.

Raimon Panikkar's views relate to Knitter's (1995:136–139) approach, as he also speaks of the benefits of dialogue by saying that in dialogue religions can learn, grow and expand their identities. This is beneficial for all participants in the dialogue. Pannikar further maintains that it is through dialogue that religions can deepen both their differences and their togetherness (see Knitter 2012:130). Therefore, what dialogue leads to is unity in diversity, or as Lalonde (1994) stated, 'unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation.' Consequently interreligious dialogue in a South African context will not have to compromise the diversity which is characteristic of this country, but it will also allow unity amongst the different faiths to be deepened. Dialogue is seen as an opportunity to enrich diversity. The question is: Why is it important to enrich diversity? According to Tutu (2013):

We should celebrate our diversity; we should exult in our differences as making not for separation and alienation and hostility but for their glorious opposites. The law of our being is to live in solidarity, friendship, helpfulness, unselfishness, interdependence, complementarity, as sisters and brothers in one family. (p. 50)

In his approach, Knitter (1995) explains where this type of dialogue will have to take place:

The venue of such globally responsible dialogue will have to move out and beyond what are the general meeting places for professional religious dialoguers. The locus of dialogue – the physical, socio-economic setting – and the social class of the participants assume crucial importance for both the process and the hoped for success of dialogue. (p. 139)

Interreligious dialogue must descend from a level where only experts are involved to where ordinary people – ordinary South Africans who experience suffering and injustice – take part in dialogue. Knitter (1995:139) is adamant that, '[t]o begin with praxis, the dialogue has to locate itself where the praxis is taking place.'

Furthermore, when religious people share a common agenda and goal they are able to speak of the same quest for justice. Eventually this will come to a point where religion is spoken of, '[t]hey will have to share what it is that animates and guides them in their determination to heal the suffering of others and of the Earth' (Knitter 1995:139). Knitter (1995) speaks about the effect this will have upon religious people:

The sharing ... of differing faith perspectives will, of course, not only bring a deeper religious cordiality, but will also call the participants to continue the struggle with greater resolve and bondedness. (p. 139)

Earlier other theologians' views about the benefits of dialogue amongst religious people were mentioned. Netland (1991:297–300), for instance, referred to how dialogue amongst people from different religions can be conducive to correcting the prejudices, mistrust and conflict between religions (see Knitter 2012:41). He echoed Knitter's (1995:136–139) approach to dialogue by mentioning how social, environmental and political concerns can be shared amongst religious people, in an attempt to create cooperation amongst different religions to resolve some of the issues concerning these topics. Netland (1991:297–300) and Knitter's (1995:13–139) views echo what is referred to in the ethical-practical bridge of the mutuality model (see Knitter 2012:109–157). This bridge maintains that the ethical responsibility shared by all religions can be a pillar on which an interfaith relationship rests. Ethical responsibility is a topic that can be discussed between the different faiths, which can hopefully lead to action. Dialogue can be beneficial for a country like South Africa if leading religious people take action against injustice, whether it be in the social, political, environmental or economic sphere.

Finally, what must be noted is that Knitter (1995:140–141) bases his entire approach to interreligious dialogue on four important factors, namely, (1) compassion, (2) conversion, (3) collaboration and (4) comprehension.⁴⁰ He declares that compassion is the first important characteristic that must be involved in dialogue, because (Knitter 1995):

[U]nless they all [*religious people*], from their varied perspectives and for their varied reasons, *feel compassion* for those who are suffering or for the Earth, the kind of dialogue I am talking about will not take place. (p. 140)

Knitter's (1995) emphasis on compassion leads him to the second important factor, conversion, which he explains as follows:

40.Note that all four factors start with the Latin prefix or preposition 'cum' (meaning 'with'), as Knitter (1995:140) declares that '[T]he act of understanding is always an act that involves other.'

[T]o feel with and for others who are suffering is to be claimed by them. They not only touch our sensibilities, they call forth our response. Truly to feel compassion is to be *converted*; our life is turned around, changed. (p. 140)

Knitter (1995:141) maintains that it is compassion that converts a person to be one who feels with and for others, that consequently leads to action, which he refers to as *collaboration*. This action is in the form of but one collaboration of all religions acting together, which then leads to comprehension (Knitter 1995):

Having suffered (compassion) with the suffering and come together in response (conversion) to their plight, having laboured with and for them, religious persons can begin – will feel called to begin – the task of comprehending or understanding one another. (p. 143)

In the first section part of the problem was stated as being reluctance amongst Christians to approach the religious Other. Knitter's (1995:136–141) approach attempts to deal with this reluctance by emphasising the importance of shared responsibility. In his later work Knitter (2012:173–247) maintains that the benefit of dialogue is that it can lead to knowledge about other religions, but it can also bring forth change in oneself and enhance self-understanding (Knitter 2012:199, 222). Interreligious dialogue can allow a person to come to a point of accepting differences, celebrating uniqueness and creating an atmosphere of tolerance. These benefits of dialogue can be conducive to resolving some of the problems and challenges (violence, intolerance and uncertainty) referred to earlier.

Listening to a South African perspective

Desmond Tutu (2013:21) uses the concept of ubuntu to speak about the nature of human community. This South African term can be helpful when one tries to encourage South Africans to take part in interreligious dialogue, and it can also be a guiding thought in how to engage in dialogue. Tutu (2013:21) writes about how the concept of ubuntu is defined in Xhosa tradition, 'in Xhosa we say, "*Umntu ngumtu ngabantu*". This expression is very difficult to render in English, but we could translate it by saying, "a person is a person through other persons".' He further speaks about the role one human plays in relation to another, as one human being teaches another how to be human, 'none of us comes fully formed into the world' (Tutu 2013:21).

As human beings we are taught by others what it entails to be human. It is due to other people that a person knows how to be human, '[w]e would not know how to talk, how to walk, to think, to eat as human beings unless we learned how to do these things from other human beings' (Tutu 2013:21–22). The opinion that a human being can live or learn on their own is, according to ubuntu, is a contradiction to what it means to be human (see Tutu 2013:22). This is why he states that 'the completely self-sufficient human being is subhuman.' The way in which the South African concept of ubuntu

describes what it means to be human can be helpful when speaking of interreligious dialogue (or any form of dialogue for that matter), because ubuntu says that (Tutu 2013):

I can be me only if you are fully you. I am because we are, for we are made for togetherness, for family. We are made for complementarity. We are created for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence with our fellow human beings, with the rest of creation. I have gifts that you don't have, and you have gifts that I don't have. We are different to know our need of each other. (p. 22)

Ubuntu therefore celebrates diversity, based on the fact that no human being is exactly like another. However, these differences do not weaken the interdependence of human beings.

Tutu (2013:22) maintains that ubuntu speaks of spiritual attributes, '[s]uch as generosity, hospitality, compassion, caring, sharing.' He further mentions that ubuntu is seen as that which distinguishes people from animals, '[t]he quality of being human and so also humane' (Tutu 2013:22).

It is important to know what effect ubuntu can have on a person, so that these attributes can be helpful to someone trying to engage the religious Other. The question is: What are the attributes of a person who has ubuntu? Tutu explains that:

[T]hose who had *Ubuntu* were compassionate and gentle, they used their strength on behalf of the weak, and they did not take advantage of others – in short, they *cared*, treating others as they were: human beings. (pp. 22–23)

What would then be the result of lacking ubuntu? Tutu (2013:23) says that, 'if you lacked ubuntu, in a sense you lacked an indispensable ingredient of being human ... if you had no ubuntu, you did not amount to much.' This leads to the thought that ubuntu can be conducive to dialogue, because what it entails is an ethos which is important for a person's relation to the rest of humanity.

Tutu (2013) notes that ubuntu is to a certain extent in contrast with the importance Westerners attach to individualism:

Westerners have made spectacular advances largely because of their personal individual initiative. They have made remarkable technological advances, for example. And yet that progress has come at a huge cost. The West's emphasis on individualism has often meant that people are lonely in a crowd, shattered by their anonymity ... Ubuntu reminds us that we belong in one family – God's family, the human family. In our African worldview, the greatest good is communal harmony. Anything that subverts or undermines this greatest good is *ipso facto* wrong, evil. (pp. 23–24)

In the concept of ubuntu the South African voice is heard, and it speaks of unity in diversity and views human beings as being of crucial importance to one another. This can be the foundation of a new model for interreligious dialogue in South Africa. Knitter's

(2012) models can be used in relation to concepts like ubuntu to find a way in which an approach for dialogue can be created specifically for the South African context.

At the beginning of this study I hoped that by researching various theologians' (but more specifically Paul Knitter's) theories about religious pluralism I would find a model or theory that would be a perfect approach to dialogue in a pluralistic religious context such as South Africa. Alas, this was a hope which was not realised: I quickly came to the conclusion that there could not be only one model or theory which the South African context would fit into perfectly. The diversity in South Africa cannot be viewed through only one lens. During this study it became evident that it is not necessary for only one approach to dialogue, one way in which religious pluralism can be theorised, or one answer or solution to all the challenges mentioned.

With this realisation came the celebration of diversity, as it also became evident that diversity does not contradict unity. Consequently the aim to find one model which could be conducive to interreligious dialogue in South Africa was transformed into a quest to honour all religions, for all people are created in God's image. This quest⁴¹ allowed me to celebrate diversity, whilst staying true to the uniqueness of Christianity.

The camaraderie amongst people of faith within their own community has always been astounding and inspirational, the hope was to experience some of this camaraderie across cultural and religious borders. I personally experienced this and it sparked a passion which I believe can and should be felt by all other religious people.

The main objective was to write something about dialogue – a specific kind of dialogue – dialogue that declares that people need one another, an approach to dialogue which celebrates mutual respect and which would show that responsible cooperation, interaction and action is possible.

I hoped to show with this study that interreligious dialogue can be a key component to resolve some of the tension and challenges created by living in a country which is characterised by so much diversity. Some past events where dialogue has been productive, open and positive were also mentioned, to show that religious diversity does not have to be that which puts a stop to multifaith interaction. There have been many occasions of cooperation between faiths – the aim was to experience this on a personal level.

The theory behind the practice of interreligious dialogue was discussed. This was necessary as interreligious dialogue is the *praxis*, which cannot be viewed without its *theoria*, which is the theology of religions. To have one without the other would have less value (Hedges 2010:13).

41. I hoped to learn more about other religions, which I certainly did, but in turn I learned a great amount about the South African context. I also gained more knowledge about Christians and their approach to other faiths.

I took part in the praxis by engaging a few respondents who are from different religions. I hoped to experience interreligious dialogue for myself, as I felt it was necessary for the praxis to be experienced along with some of the theories listed. An objective and quantitative view of the religious make-up of South Africa using the census data was introduced into this study.

In the last section the aim was to emphasise a few of the benefits of dialogue and to discuss the concept of ubuntu, as it is so inherently part of the South African context. It was also important to discuss a possible approach towards dialogue in a South African context.

This study was only the start of my quest in the study of interreligious dialogue, and therefore I cannot call this a conclusion. Rather, it is an introductory conclusion.

Summary: Chapter 6

A model for the theology of religions within the South African context is presented in this chapter. The problem which is addressed is the reluctance of Christians to engage with fellow South Africans from other traditions. South African Christians seem to be struggling to find a comfortable standpoint about religious plurality and how to engage with people from other religions. The viewpoints on how to go about living and working (co-existing) with people from different religions in South Africa seem to extend from exclusivism and particularities to inclusivism and pluralism. For this study, it is also important that a distinction be made between having *knowledge of* other religious groups, and having *exposure to* other religious groups. There is a difference between being knowledgeable about religions other than your own and having been exposed to different religions. The problem for interreligious relations and dialogue arises when one is exposed to various religions without having any knowledge of the histories, traditions and principles of these religions. It is possible that this exposure without knowledge can create a problem when people from different religions are forced to live and work together. This problem can possibly be cleared up, or at the very least be unravelled, by an openness to dialogue. This chapter argues in favour of an openness towards dialogue between religions in South Africa.

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