

Theology in dialogue and dialogue in theology: Destroying the walls of hostility

**Author:**Kelebogile T. Resane¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Historical and Constructive Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Kelebogile Resane,
resanekt@ufs.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 30 Apr. 2022

Accepted: 08 July 2022

Published: 23 Aug. 2022

How to cite this article:

Resane, K.T., 2022, 'Theology in dialogue and dialogue in theology: Destroying the walls of hostility', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1), a2580.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2580>

Copyright:

© 2022. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Dialogue has the power to calm the conflicts, misunderstandings and prejudices among people of different cultures, religions, theologies and worldviews. This article points out that theology and dialogue are inseparable. It endeavours to find a definition of dialogue and its role in theology and how theology expresses itself through dialogue. The church speaks through dialogue, and theology's voice is heard mostly from and through the church. It is a dialogue that spearheads the shape and formation of theology. All the biblical dialogues are theological in content. The role played by the biblical text during the dialogical processes is very important. A theologian affirms and embraces the text through communicating with it. He or she must always attempt to engage the movements and the thoughts of the text. Texts are primarily powerful instruments of groups and only second-line power tools of individuals. The principles of comparative theology are ideal in any dialogue. Dialogues are the meeting points of theology and dialogist as the confessors express themselves to God through dialogue. The dialogical spaces become sacred spaces because it is where dialogue partners encounter a common commitment to justice. Dialogues are not necessarily theological because non-Christian religions and natural sciences are encountered in and through dialogues.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article acknowledges the realities of civil strife in the communities and that this strife creates walls between the people. A solution to this tension is that theology through dialogue should engage all sciences, natural or social, for harmonious co-existence within humanity.

Keywords: dialogue; comparative theology; role of biblical texts; civil strife; walls of hostility; theology-church-sciences engagement.

Introduction

A well-connected society is composed of men and women who discuss and debate ideas and issues among themselves to test the validity of the information and impressions they receive from one another – as well as the ones they receive from their civil structures.

Civil strife, in all forms of communities – political or ecclesial – must be countered with reasonable and equitable dialogue. Dialogue has the power to calm the outraged and erratic outbursts that are the results of ignorance and misunderstanding of the conflicting parties. This agrees with Hugo from the University of South Africa that 'the use of Dialogue Inquiry for conflict resolution introduces new possibilities for creative and focused solutions' (Hugo 2010:624). In referring to Ferrer, Hugo further asserted that in dialogue, participants are encouraged to suspend their assumptions and explore them together in nonconfrontational ways. People learn to detach themselves from their assumptions, and this enables them to receive criticism and, if necessary, change their views. It teaches people to listen deeply to each other and to participate in the collective creation of meaning (Ferrer 2003:1; Hugo 2010:623).

Dialogue is a focused and intentional conversation, a space of civility and equality in which those who differ may listen and speak together. On the other side, dialogue is a way of being – mindful and creative in relating. In dialogue, we seek to set aside fears, preconceptions and the need to win; we take time to hear other voices and possibilities. Dialogue can encompass tensions and paradoxes, and in so doing, new ideas – collective wisdom – may arise.

The word, 'dialogue' comes from the Greek word *dialogos*, where *logos* means the word, and *dia* means through. When two words are combined, they give the connotation of a stream of meaning flowing among and through and between us. In reality, a dialogue is a flow of meaning. It is an opportunity that opens the possibility of a flow of meaning in the entire group, out of which may

emerge some new understanding. The word 'dialogue' in its ancient form means gathering together, suggesting an intimate awareness of the relationships among things in the natural world. Dialogue, either political or theological, is a conversation in which people think together in a relationship. This implies no more taking one's position as final. In a process, there is a discovery of something new, something creative. The resultant shared meaning is the glue or cement that holds people or societies together. Dialogical partners relax their personal grips on certainties and opt to listen to possibilities that result simply from being in relationship with others' possibilities that have been muted.

Dialogue entails a pilgrimage on a common journey, marking a moment between the 'already' of our past histories and the 'not yet' of our future (World Council of Churches 1967):

It images the disciples' conversation on the road to Emmaus, recounting the wonders the Lord has worked during a journey culminating in the recognition of the Lord in the breaking of bread at a common table.

Dialogue is a process through which, together, the dialogists seek to transcend divisions by clarification, past misunderstandings through historical studies or by bypassing walls of divisions, in order to discover new language or categories commonly understood by all dialoguing partners. It involves being receptive to the ethos of the other, and those aspects of doctrinal dictates are preserved in the religiocultural heritage of the other. Thus, constructive dialogue can become an instrument of reconciliation, justice and peace (Lyimo 2017:208).

The intention of a dialogue is not to analyse issues, win an argument or exchange opinions. It is instead to suspend one's opinions and listen to others' opinions with resultant appreciation for the other side of one's thoughts. It is to listen respectfully to others, to cultivate and speak your own voice, to reserve your opinions about others. When this is adequately accomplished, the results will be the intelligence of gaining new insight about others. Johnson (2018) captured this correctly that through dialogue one is able to:

[B]ring persons together – as individuals, or as social identity groups – in structured settings to engage in facilitated dialogue aimed to help heal enmity, reduce prejudice, foster mutual understanding, and cultivate a more civil society. (p. 280)

Theology in dialogue

Theology is a speaking science. It is proclamational in action, declarative in nature and vocal in communication. The intention of dialogue taking place is basically to understand. Theology determines, directs and undergirds the manner and the direction the dialogue should take. Theology is and speaks from the heart of God. The heart of God is overflowing with love, kindness, mercy, righteousness and justice. These attributes make up the character of theological dialogue. It is a dialogue that spearheads the shape and formation of theology. All the biblical dialogues are theological in content.

From the time of creation when the trinitarian dialogue of 'Let us' to the eschatological fulfilment when God and creation commune together in harmony, there are some theological insights and content. From this 'Let us' one can deduce that the exchange between the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit establishes and affirms the mutual interdependence of the three persons of the Triune God. The Joint Working Group of Interconfessional Dialogue, in paragraph 26 (World Council of Churches 1967), states:

In God's self – communication to God's people, God invites us to receive His Word and respond in love. Thus, we enter through a participation in God's gracious activity and the imperative of Christian obedience into communion with God who is communion – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In emulating this dialogical pattern of speaking and listening, of revealing ourselves and receiving the other, we leave our illusion of self-sufficiency and isolation and enter a relationship of communion.

Therefore, dialogue with a secular world is theologically based on the God-human relationship. God operates and reaches out to the world through humans – secular or religious. People who are carers of *imago Dei* are instruments in the hands of God – instruments through which he accomplishes his purposes here on earth. The symbiotic and synergistic relationship between God and people and people allowing themselves to be used by God for the good of humanity and creation in general, is theology in progressive dialogue. God speaks and people make some choices that sometimes involve dialogue with God. Biblical examples here include the likes of Moses, Jeremiah, Gideon, Habakkuk, etc. All their dialogues depict some type of theology whereby God engages people in order to give them theological opportunities to make theological choices. Theology dialogues with itself before it does so with nontheological disciplines. Kärkkäinen (2013:24) rightly stresses that 'systematic theology by its very nature builds on and engages critically contributions from several theological disciplines'.

The church as the dialogical voice of theology

The church is the platform on which theology speaks, and theology formulates the syntax and semantics of this language. Speaking about theology is verbalising 'words about God' or 'God-talk'. Talking about God is doing theology, and theology is a multifaceted discipline that describes who God is and what he does, including his relationship with the universe that he created.

Theology is the audibility of Christianity; hence theologians are consistent, contagious God-talkers. That audibility comes through the church. Theology is never alien to the nature and works of God. Loving God isn't about a set of doctrines. It's about a *relationship* – a normal relationship where talking or dialogue is a norm. Theology is the language of Christianity. A theology-less Christianity is a mute, lifeless religion. Faith communities partner in initiating or helping to facilitate difficult dialogue, in order

to contribute towards the formation of more civil and inclusive society (Johnson 2018:280).

When theology engages through dialogue, there is a higher element of the gospel, which means 'good news', and it's often described as an announcement or a message. The gospel announces the good news that Jesus is on the throne and that salvation is found in no other name (Ac 4:12). The gospel is bound up in the Trinitarian God's rescue mission to redeem all things. The Father sent the Son to defeat sin and death, and the Son saves humanity from sin and condemnation. The Holy Spirit empowers humans to live in the light.

Theology in dialogue is also demonstrated by the fact that the church is a theological mouthpiece. When Jesus told his disciples that the church would overrun the gates of hell (Mt 16:18), he was telling them a theological truth. The church, God's people, is armed with theology the Devil cannot touch. Satan knows theology well: 'Even the demons believe, and tremble' (Ja 2:19). Satan is a mouthpiece for hatred of theology. The church is a mouthpiece for the love of theology. The difference between a right and wrong gospel is a difference between the theologies proclaimed. The church's intention is not to form one megadenomination, but to work together towards unity in Christ through manifested diversity. The church's dialogical endeavours seek understanding and safety with each other. Dialogical partners:

Seek to create inclusive, safe, and brave space so that everyone who shows up can tell their story and share their identity, perspectives, and values, and be heard and understood, even if not agreed with. The shared conviction is that only by talking together differently can we live together differently or live together at all. (Johnson 2018:280)

The church is a theological voice with one goal of becoming vocal in forging communality and togetherness with those redeemed by Christ's blood, engaging even those whom Christ referred to as 'other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd' (Jn 10:16). For this to happen, there is a need for encounter-friendly theology of faith through the narrative of intercultural encounter experience, whereby dialoguing partners share their own experiences in the language they feel comfortable with. The bottom line is to understand each other. For this understanding to be realised, there is a need for participation with each other in each other's world. Divergent views should be understood, not as if they are museum pieces but rather as contexts that have to be learned, discussed and questioned, hence the need for collaborative fieldworks, connections and participatory observations (Selçuk 2018:238). This was passionately proposed by Pope Benedict XVI, that the principal dialoguing partners should engage in the reflecting work of faith that seeks understanding (Africae 2011:172).

The text as the basis of dialogue

As the *ecclesia*, all dialogue deliberations involve a conversation with the holy text. 'The sacred text has a voice from the past but in a pluralistic context, the text has many voices, not only from the past but also from the present' (Selçuk 2018:237). Theologians in dialogue should try to understand both voices as much as possible. The understanding of the ancient text is based on the present. A theologian affirms and embraces the text through communicating with it. He or she must always attempt to engage the movements and the thoughts of the text. Texts are primarily powerful instruments of groups, and only second-line power tools of individuals. Texts have a specific message that serves to build up collective memory and corporate identity (eds. Assman & Assman 1987). Text propagates the norms and formative values of the specific dialoguing partners and in this manner influences the thinking and acting of the individual members of the community:

That is how canonical texts create a link between individual identity and collective identity. That means that canonical texts always have a clear ethical dimension, which of course is even more true of the biblical canon which contains large parts of outspokenly normative texts. (Kügler 2013:192)

There is no dispute that Christianity has always existed in the context of a conversation with other traditions. Through comparative theology, religious texts or traditions side by side with the assumptions of other religious texts inform the text reader of her own religious tradition (Veeneman 2018:181). Reading the texts of other religions enriches the enquirer's insight into 'those of the other side'. Text is the convergence point of traditions – religious or secular where intersectionality occurs to create mutuality and proximity to insightful understanding of each other. Dialogical partners walk in the light with each other because the text informs them of their differences, agreements and departure points that should not be delved into as they widen the gaps of division. Through understanding mutual hurts and expressing and receiving forgiveness, dialoguing partners resume a journey from fear of one another to bearing one another's burdens to being called to suffer together. The crucial matter is understanding each other, and this can happen in a major part through dialogues. Dialogue assumes equality of the participants and exhibits reciprocity, so that partners are not expected to adopt 'our' structures for dialogue (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, §27).¹

The focus of text engagement is beyond epistemology, but the relation of text knowledge is with the real world. Human experiences and social interactions should all direct the theologian's reading. This is how the text becomes relevant or contextual in essence and interpretation. The process of knowing must be marked by dialogue and partnership between the text and the dialoguing partners. Moore (2003:191) pointed to the fact that: 'The *ecclesiocentrism* is

1. Interconfessional Dialogues Web Page, viewed 03 February 2020, from <http://dialogues.prounione.it>. Source Current Document. www.prounione.it/dialogues/jwg.

refreshing but more theological dialogue is sorely needed – dialogue that is rooted in biblical texts...’ Whenever dialogue partners encounter in dialogue, theological biases and stereotypes should be laid aside, as the text dictates. As an example, in this case the text that should be the premise is Jesus’s appeal that all may be one (Jn 17:21). The textual concern should be *homothumadon* (togetherness). When the people of God confer with one another they experience the fullness of life (*anastrophe*) that pertains to God’s character of togetherness and unity. The togetherness under the authority of the text and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is the glue that enhances ecumenical cooperation that works towards eschatological realisation of the universe where humanity can live in *shalom* with all other inhabitants of God’s creation.

Different church traditions have often given preference to certain biblical texts and traditions over others. In the process of dialogue, we are invited to reappropriate these and thus witness to the richness of the gospel in its integrity. When dialogue is guided by the text, it addresses the divisions and hostilities of the past, refocusing the dialogue partners towards synergy in faith in the contemporary world. Descriptive character of dialogue reinforces the evangelical character of the contemporary faith, life and worldview of participating partners.

Christian confessions are dialogical

Confessions are in majority carried out audibly and orally. Confessions are a dialogue between a confessor and God. It is a meeting point between the holy and the fallen, the sacred and the secular. The coming of a sinner to a holy God is a *symbolum*, that is, the coming together, where the profession of faith in God and the expression of love by God unite to offer forgiveness (Ratzinger 2004). Confessions are realistically historical and of course ‘theology is confessional by nature, on all sides’ (Kärkkäinen 2014:364). It is openly known that ‘in theology all words are engaged in history. They are not timeless, but timeful, as it were’ (Koyama 2000:148). Dialogue is a means of getting across the divide, and in God–human–human interactions, it is confessional; hence, Clooney (2011:7) pointed out that ‘theology as an interreligious, comparative, dialogical and confessional enterprise’. Through confessions, a Christian is in dialogue with God, as confessions may be interspersed with silence, the time of meditation when a confessor listens to the inner voice of God.

Dialogical space a sacred space?

Through ecumenical initiatives, Christians come together for a common purpose. Ecumenism is an opportunity that provides transformation. Through ecumenical dialogues, Christians figure out how to engage and dismantle injustice directed towards the marginalised people. It also leads to transformation of the dominant structures of oppression in societies. Dialogical space creates sacred space in which dialogue partners converge around a common commitment to justice. Transformation and reconciliation become a

desirable goal of dialogue. Dialoguing with others creates sacred space where the platform becomes available to declare the extension of the kingdom of God. On this platform, human powers that are not consonant and consistent with natural and social justice are challenged. This ecumenical dialogue should not be taken for granted:

When we gather together, bound by our common commitment to Christ, we have the possibility of entering a liminal space, a space outside the traditional divisions of politics and ideology that mark the secular arena. (Peters 2010:62)

This sacred space in which dialogue occurs calls for dialoguing partners to act towards one another with openness, love, honesty and willingness to be transformed. Transparency must be the rule of the game. Therefore, an important focus of dialogue involves mutual exploration of the meaning of the Christian faith. At the same time dialogues are conducted within the contextual space, time and experience.

Dialogue in theology

Theology is a speaking science. It is verbal in nature. It communicates itself vocally. Although it may still be audible in silence, it is most of the time vocal. It is *kerygmatic* in nature and essence. Dialogue is a hallmark of theology. ‘Dialogue is theology in action. Theology is not supposed to be the obscured voice, but a vociferous echo in the dark’ (Resane 2019:303). The same notion is expressed by Lyimo that ‘theology is a conversation, a discourse, a dialogue and a communication in matters of daily life experience and faith’ (in Lyimo 2017:208).

Theology that does not dialogue disqualifies itself from identity as theology. Dialogue should be open-ended and carried out in transparency. Theological desire in dialogue is not to convert or to coerce but to understand and to draw some synergy. Dialogical and relational approach with those of other faiths is a theological soundness that promotes humanness. Christians should express some desire to listen to those of other communities. Dialogue does not create or leave a space for win–lose situation. Each dialogue partner remains within his or her metanarratives and hold on to their canonical obligations.

It is therefore important, as Kärkkäinen (2015) agrees, that:

[I]n theology one cannot do any meaningful investigation without some deep, underlying commitments and beliefs. Those beliefs do not have to be dogmatic, nor immutable – but they must be there. (p. 31)

These obligations are always not in collision with each other, but synergy can be identified within the dialoguing traditions. In this regard, Christians continue to embrace their undeniable Christological and Trinitarian uniqueness to their Christian faith that nevertheless has universal significance (Yong & Anderson 2014:308). Theology cannot be contextual without dialogue. Dialogue is a means towards theology in context. Theology is a dialoguing discipline characterised by

dialogue. In the same sentiment, Yong and Anderson (2014:309) in reference to D'Costa (2000) alluded to this:

The promise of a pneumatologically vigorous and hence trinitarianly robust theology of religions is still on the horizon, inviting consideration of how Christian doctrines about religious others intersect with Christian practices in relationship to and even with those in other faiths.

Theology of religions attempts to account theologically for the meaning and value of other religions. It attempts to think theologically about the meaning for Christians to co-exist with people of other faiths and how to relate Christianity to those other faiths. It should be observed that there is a shift of theologians from theology of religions to comparative theology. 'Comparative theology is robustly Christian theology; it is committed to its traditions and contemporary expressions' (Kärkkäinen 2013:26). It is under this comparative theology that theologians engage in mutual dialogue with religious traditions (Kärkkäinen 2013:25) with the aim of seeking to compare theologies from different religious traditions, and as a theological enterprise that studies two or more religious traditions on certain specific topics (Tracy 1987:446). Comparative theology accomplishes its task by dialoguing with the resources (human and otherwise) not only from Christian theology but also from other theological scientific disciplines to enhance their arguments. According to Clooney (2010):

It is a practical response to religious diversity read with our eyes open, interpreting the world in light of our faith and with a willingness to see newly the truths of our own religion in light of another. (p. 69)

Dialogue is interdisciplinary in content

The mutual dialogue faces significant challenges (Kärkkäinen 2017:233). The popular statement: 'The Spirit unites, doctrine divides' is the mark of historical interconfessional dialogues. There are streams of doctrines that put theologians at loggerheads and those that make the same Christians walk together in the light. Inevitably, theologians must dialogue with each other on national and environmental issues. South Africa has a long history of series of dialogues attempting to address and respond to the unjust ideology of apartheid. One can think of South African Christian Leadership Assembly in 1979 and 2002, respectively, in Pretoria, the Kairos Document (1985), Evangelical Witness in South Africa (1986) and many others. There have been theological dialogues on poverty, HIV and AIDS, same-sex marital relationships and many others. Theologians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and information technologists meet to see how to address the social issues. In these dialogues, theological inputs are not side-lined but listened to and in many instances incorporated into resolutions. The outcomes of these dialogues show clearly that even the church benefits a lot from them for, 'through their intensive discussions, the interconfessional dialogues have affected the ecumenical atmosphere and the interchurch relationships positively' (Tsfai 1996:66). In scrutinising the current comparative theologians such as Ward, Tracy, Clooney and others, one

discovers that coming closer to each other within the various Christian traditions requires humility and one's self-immersion into other traditions in order to gain some form of understanding for better good:

If theology is interreligiously dialogical, theologians must work with an awareness that others' positions are already multi-dimensional, reflective, and theological in ways analogous to those held by the Christian theologian. It will no longer be acceptable to survey other traditions as if from a higher position or as if other traditions are simply raw materials for interpretation (Clooney 2007:661)

It is indisputable that *adoctrinal* factors contribute towards understanding doctrinal divisions that entered dialogical space influenced by political, cultural, social, economic, racial or even doctrinal processes. The ultimate goal through dialogue is to attain some form of reconciliation and the healing of memories. So dialogues must go beyond Christian theologians' and religious confines. 'Christ cannot be trapped inside the walls of the Church. Images of Jesus are part of global culture, Christian and non-Christian' (Leirvik 2010:3). There should be some intentional steps taken, as Moses did at the burning bush when he said: 'I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up' (Ex 3:3). Coming together to dialogue with those of other faiths and of different professional disciplines creates what sociologists call social conditions, which unite a community's social and moral identity. Although the population is made up of people subscribing to different religions, worldviews and professions, they are overall the citizens of the state and the members of society at large. They form a unique component of God's creation. The moral capacity for making choices and development is possible in cultural settings that enable growth. That cultural setting is enabled when realisation is clear that 'man's conversation with God and men's conversation with one another are mutually necessary and interdependent' (Ratzinger 2004:95). Sociologists call this the social thesis, which describes self-understanding of a community (God and humans, and humans and humans) and points to the social meaning of a communitarian belief systems. When Christian theologians enter any dialogue beyond Christian tethers, they embark on a journey towards common good. 'This pursuit of common good is the primary goal of the political community and always takes precedence over the pursuit of individually chosen ends' (Coetzee 2000:278). Dialogical partners communicate with each other about their common history, belief systems and moral obligations. They all use the language that they all understand in order to forge and enhance mutuality. This leads to self-understanding of all groups involved in a dialogue. This dialogical process is inevitable as we live in pluralistic, secular and multifaceted society where 'proliferation of approaches, perspectives and procedures is the order of the day' (Kärkkäinen 2013:35).

Dialogue with non-Christian religions and secular formations goes beyond pedagogical desires. It creates understanding, mutuality and, to a certain extent,

cooperation towards common good. It also gives dialoguing partners an opportunity to ponder and appreciate diversity, which is part of God's creation. Diversity in its varieties such as perspectives, cultures, ideas and experiences offers us an opportunity to learn from one another. It shapes our interactions towards the meaningful dialogue across social divides. When we engage in this type of dialogue, 'we do so, while listening carefully and responsively to whatever serious objections are raised by those who view things from a different standpoint' (Wolterstorff 2013:20). The church engages dialogue and works in collaboration with other similar worldviews in its task of doing contextual theology.

It is important for theology to dialogue with natural sciences. Pannenberg (1981:66) argued that theology and the natural sciences need to be in dialogue with each other. The rationale for this hypothesis is that natural sciences provide universally accessible knowledge about the surrounding world. As natural sciences teach and explain the environment in which theologians operate, it is legitimate and rational for theologians to enter their world and begin to see how to practically and responsibly apply theology. These sciences also contribute immensely to our self-awareness, self-understanding and self-identity. The concerns of the past, including reservations about other disciplines, should not become issues of today's dialogues. Many concerns were found to be baseless and meaningless. Such concerns, however, might be overcome once it is recognised that both religion and the sciences are unique in their own ways and that such uniqueness cannot be altered by comparison. The ongoing concerns that should not be invited to the dialogue tables are those concerning the truth. Are the scientific discoveries genuine and authentic enough to be trusted as truth? What about theological truth? My response to this is that truth is to be found through dialogue rather than in assertive dogmatics and theological systems. For genuine dialogue to occur, trust must be present. Do we trust the other enough to discover the truth? Are we trustworthy enough to reflect the truth? These are the ongoing questions that theologians and natural scientists are always wrangling with. However, the more the dialogue the lesser the questions.

The experience of ecumenical dialogue in the 20th century has shown how important it is to examine the historical and socio-economic factors affecting doctrinal and theological issues affecting the Christian witness in a fallen world. Situating doctrinal formulations in their historical context liberates Christians to express the same faith in new ways today. With the contribution of natural sciences, Christian dogmas are enhanced and verified.

Conclusion

Theology and dialogue are inseparable because theology expresses itself through dialogue, and dialogue is a means of expressing theology. History bears witness that the church has the capacity to foster and sustain a constructive dialogue

across cultures, religion and politics. Theological dialogues, as emphasised by Pope Benedict XVI (2011), should be centred on reconciliation, peace and justice (Africae Munus, no. 4). Dialogues contribute towards mutual understanding of societies, communities and groups that are marked by historical bigotries and hostilities towards each other. Theology must be a reverential dialogue with every possible partner but with the biblical text as a guide to set the parameters. Theological dialogues should employ the principles of comparative theology in order to abate some parochial tendencies. Ecumenical endeavours are part of constructive and instructive theological dialogues for lucidity and continuity of each dialoguing partner's worldviews.

Dialogues go beyond theological confines by engaging the non-Christian religions and secular sciences as a way of building some harmonious neighbourhoods that co-exist peacefully, understanding each other without prejudices and unjustifiable injustices that disrespect human beings who are the carers of *imago Dei*. There is theology in dialogue, and there is dialogue in theology.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contributions

K.T.R. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards of research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

- Africae Munus Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace (Pope Benedict XVI), 2011, LEV Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Assman, A. & Assman, J. (eds.), 1987, *Kanon und Zensur. Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation II*, München.

- Benedict XVI, 2011, *Post-synodal apostolic exhortation Africae Munus: The church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, München, Germany.
- Clooney, F.X., 2007, 'Comparative theology', in J. Webster, K. Tanner & I. Torrance (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of systematic theology*, pp. 652–669, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Clooney, F.X., 2010, *Comparative theology: Deep learning across religious borders*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden.
- Clooney, F.X., 2011, 'Trinity and Hinduism', in P.C. Phan (ed.), *Cambridge companion to the Trinity*, pp. 309–324, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Coetzee, P.H., 2000, 'Particularity in morality and its relation to community', in P.H. Coetzee & A.P.J. Roux (eds.), *Philosophy from Africa: A text with readings*, pp. 275–291, Oxford University Press Southern Africa, Cape Town.
- D'Costa, G., 2000, *The meeting of religions and the Trinity* (Faith Meets Faith Series), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.
- Ferrer, J.N., 2003, 'Dialogical inquiry as spiritual practice', *Tikkun* 18(1), 29–32.
- Hugo, C.J., 2010, 'Dialogical inquiry as an instrument of the reconciliation of conflict in the hands of Christian leaders', *Koers* 75(3), 613–630. <https://doi.org/10.4102/koers.v75i3.99>
- Johnson, S., 2018, 'Speaking together differently to live together differently: The promise of the public dialogue movement', *Religious Education* 113(3), 277–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1455568>
- Kärkkäinen, V., 2013, *Christ and reconciliation*, vol. 1, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Kärkkäinen, V., 2014, *Trinity and revelation*, vol. 2, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Kärkkäinen, V., 2015, *Creation and humanity*, vol. 3, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Kärkkäinen, V., 2017, *The Doctrine of God: A global introduction*, 2nd edn., Baker Academic Books, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Koyama, K., 2000, 'Observation and revelation in dialogue: Towards a Christian theological approach to Buddhism', in M.L. Stackhouse, T. Dearborn & S. Paeth (eds.), *The local church in a global era: Reflections for a new century*, pp. 142–154, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Kügler, J., 2013, 'In the Cobra's back: Why it would perhaps be better to read the Bible as literature', in J. Kügler, L. Togarase, M.R. Gunda, E.S. Onomo, E. Chitando & N. Taringa (eds.), *The role of the Bible in daily living of African people today*, vol. 4, 2nd edn., pp. 184–217, University of Bamberg Press, Bamberg.
- Leirvik, O., 2010, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 2nd edn., Continuum, London.
- Lyimo, D.E., 2017, 'The task of African theology for the church in Africa today: A theological discourse between the academy, narratives, and Africae Munus', in E. Wabanhu & M. Moerschbacher (eds.), *The shifting ground of doing theology: Perspectives from Africa*, pp. 208–219, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi.
- Moore, S.D., 2003, *The shepherding movement: Controversy and charismatic ecclesiology*, T & T Clark, London.
- Pannenberg, W., 1981, 'Theological questions to scientists', *Zygon* 16(1), 65–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.1981.tb00407.x>
- Peters, R.T., 2010, 'The politics of power: Negotiating north-south tensions over empire and economics', in N.D. Presa (ed.), *That they may all be one: Celebrating the world communion of reformed churches*, pp. 57–63, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.
- Ratzinger, J., 2004, *Introduction to Christianity*, transl. J.R. Foster & M.J. Miller with a New Preface, Communio Books/Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA.
- Resane, K.T., 2019, 'Theology of dialogue in peace negotiations and settlement: A South African case', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 5(1), 299–316. <https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2019.v5n1.a14>
- Selçuk, M., 2018, 'Learning in encounter: Crossroads, connections, collaborations', *Religious Education* 113(3), 233–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1450609>
- Tesfai, Y., 1996, *Liberation and orthodoxy: The promise and failures of interconfessional dialogue*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, NY.
- Tracy, D., 1987, 'Comparative theology', in M. Eliade & C.J. Adams (eds.), *The encyclopaedia of religion*, vol. 14, Macmillan, New York, NY.
- Veeneman, M.M., 2018, *Introducing theological method: A survey of contemporary theologians and approaches*, Theological Publications in India, Bengaluru.
- Wolterstorff, N.P., 2013, *Journey toward justice: Personal encounters in the global south*, Baker Academic Books, Grand Rapids, MI.
- World Council of Churches, 1967, *Ecumenical dialogue: The Joint Working Group Between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church*, WCC & RCC, Geneva.
- Yong, A. & Anderson, J.A., 2014, *Renewing Christian theology: Systematics for a global Christianity*, Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.