

Chapter Seven

Is Religious Diversity a Problem to be Solved? Not Particularly

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*True universalism requires fidelity to
the particularities of Christian revelation and existence.*

– J. A. DiNoia, O.P.

The models for understanding religious diversity tend to approach it as either problem or promise for the Christian community. Inclusivisms and pluralism are inclined to view religious diversity as a problem to be resolved by theological constructs. Many Christian theologians, authorities, and believers find these theological efforts confused or misleading. As well intentioned as inclusivists and pluralists may be, the answers they provide do not resolve problems of religious diversity, but intensify them.

The particularist model was born partly in response to perceived inadequacies in the thought of inclusivism and pluralism (Knitter 2002, 173).¹ Whereas inclusivism and pluralism are responses to the reality of religious diversity, particularism is both a reply to this reality and a retort to other models of Christian theology of religions. Particularists hail religious differences as deeply significant to individuals and communities, shaping and forming their lives in patterns to achieve their unique and ultimate end.

Christian particularists do not regard religious diversity as a challenge to their essential beliefs. Diversity rather promises an opportunity for dialogue and witness to the unique beliefs and values of Christianity. Particularists are interested in constructive conversation with peoples of other faiths, as well as corrective conversation with members of the Christian tradition. Their focus is not so much on the issues surrounding the salvation of non-Christians, but those

involved with the questions of religious truth. In going beyond inclusivism and pluralism, they share some characteristics with Paul Knitter's mutualism. They do, however, have some problems with Knitter's view, as we shall see more explicitly in chapter eight where we discuss a particular form of particularism.

Particularists can be found throughout the Christian spectrum. We focus on two Roman Catholic scholars: J. A. DiNoia and Paul J. Griffiths. Joseph Augustine DiNoia, O.P., currently works in the Vatican as undersecretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Prior to his appointment to this position by Pope John Paul II, DiNoia served as the director of the Intercultural Forum for Studies in Faith and Culture at the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington DC. He earned a doctorate from Yale University. Paul J. Griffiths is the Schmitt Professor of Catholic Studies in the University of Illinois, Chicago. Griffiths was educated at Oxford prior to receiving a doctoral degree in Buddhist Studies from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Formerly Anglican, Griffiths and his immediate family were received into the Catholic Church in 1996.

Four common themes link particularist positions. First, though steeped in classic Catholic philosophy and theology, they are also influenced by Anglo-American forms of analytical philosophy far more than other scholars who work on religious diversity (the exception here is D'Costa, and his affinities with particularism were noted in chapter six). Second, religious differences are fundamentally important and should be taken seriously. Third, the reality of religious diversity does not require the abandonment of essential Christian beliefs. Fourth, interreligious dialogue provides opportunity for intellectual growth and the defense of Christian religious claims. Like mutualism, particularism is a "second generation" theory, developed in

response to perceived inadequacies in earlier theories and focused on a different aspect of the problem of religious diversity – for mutualism, justice; for particularism, truth.

Religious Differences Are Serious

On the surface the claim that religious differences are to be taken seriously seems almost trite. In the course of interreligious dialogue, even without theological impetus, common courtesy alone should command that participants take their differences seriously. Yet particularists argue that inclusivism and pluralism denigrate religious differences, and reduce their importance in the daily lives of individuals. In this section we will examine the primacy of religious practice and the way it shapes the lives of its participants. A basic claim of particularism is that the theories discussed so far in this book underestimate religious difference.

In *Problems of Religious Diversity*, Paul Griffiths developed a functional definition of religion in an effort to provide philosophical groundwork for his work on religious diversity (Griffiths 2001b, 7). Religion is “a form of life is that which seems to those who inhabit it to be comprehensive, incapable of abandonment and of central importance” (Griffiths 2001b, 7). A “form of life” is “a pattern of activity that seems to those who belong to it to have boundaries and particular actions proper or intrinsic to it” (Griffiths 2001b, 7). Particular activities give an identity to a form of life. Some acts are clearly central to the form of life, and others are identified as outside the form of life (Griffiths 2001b, 8).² One can imagine a Buddhist meditator, but not a Buddhist butcher. One can imagine a Baptist street preacher, but not a Baptist bootlegger. Some practices are central to a form of life, some are outside the camp.

Individuals may participate in numerous forms of life. There may also be subsets or particular practices included in a more encompassing form of life. For example, both living faithfully with a spouse and parenting children can be considered distinct forms of life, each with

particular actions in which one participates (or avoids). Yet both of these could fall under the greater category and form of life of marriage (Griffiths, 2001b, 8).

What makes a religion unique as a form of life is the addition of the other three characteristics: it is comprehensive, incapable of abandonment, and of central importance (Griffiths, 2001b, 9). The three characteristics which create the distinctive form of life known as a religion are relatively straightforward in relation to the concept itself. If a form of life is comprehensive it is understood “to take account of and be relevant to everything” (Griffiths 2001b, 9; Griffiths 1997, 2-3). Nothing falls outside of or is irrelevant to a comprehensive form of life (Griffiths 2001b, 10). A form of life is considered incapable of abandonment when it is so definitive and constitutive that those living in it would view it as “impossible to leave without also leaving themselves” (Griffiths 2001b, 10). Finally, religious forms of life “address the questions of paramount importance” to the ordering of life (Griffiths 2001b, 11). A religious form of life provides its members a basic orientation by prescribing how we relate to other people, the nonhuman order, and ourselves (Griffiths 1997, 4). That a secular ideology such as one expressed in committed membership in the Communist Party in its heyday could be construed as a “religious” form of life on Griffiths account simply shows how powerful ideological communities and institutions are.

J. A. DiNoia is also convinced that religious differences are a serious matter. DiNoia addressed these concerns most directly in his discussion of religious aims and patterns of life. DiNoia began with the supposition that religious communities disagree as to what constitutes the true aim in life (DiNoia 1998, 58, 66; DiNoia 1992, 35). This seems obvious. Buddhists aim for nirvana, Christians for heaven. These are not the same thing. Buddhist nirvana is an emptiness, sometimes imaged as the blowing out of a candle. Christian heaven is the fullness of communion

with the Triune God, sometimes imaged as life so abundant as to be joy beyond our wildest dreams. DiNoia contended that each religious community teaches its members how to cultivate a pattern of life with its distinctive religious aim in mind (DiNoia 1992, 7; DiNoia 1990a, 122; DiNoia 1990b, 256). It follows that individual “lives come to be shaped by the ultimate aims that are sought;” what is ultimately important orients the whole of life and its direction (DiNoia 1998, 60; DiNoia 1995b, 28).

The beginning of DiNoia’s argument is his strongest point. Each community has distinctive and different ultimate aims of life and ideologies. For example, Buddhists’ ultimate aim is the attainment of nirvana. Buddha is the unique revealer of the dharma which comprises all that concerns nirvana and its attainment. By contrast, Jesus Christ is regarded by Christians as the unique mediator of salvation. Salvation brings one to heavenly bliss. Each of these ultimate religious aims requires Buddhists and Christians to walk different paths. The Christian does not wish to follow the Eighthfold Path to nirvana, nor does the Buddhist wish to be a disciple of Christ following the way(s) Jesus commanded (see DiNoia 1998, 59-60; DiNoia 1995a, 40-41; DiNoia 1995b, 25-26; DiNoia 1992, 1-8; DiNoia 1982, 365). In short, the terrestrial paths and their ultimate destinies of religious traditions are simply different.

These difference bring about doctrinal differences that shape particular patterns of life. (DiNoia 1992, 2-3). Given the fact that accomplishment of the true aim of life is of considerable importance, it is no surprise that a religious community teaches a certain course of life is necessary to attain it (DiNoia 1992, 2). Religious communities in fact “place great emphasis in their practical doctrines on the acquisition and development of appropriate dispositions for enjoying the true aim of life” (DiNoia 1990a, 123). DiNoia remarked the Torah, Gospel, and Dharma all “designate patterns of thinking and acting” that form and equip members of religious

communities for all of life's engagements, interests and occasions (DiNoia 1992, 56). Religious communities, based on their ultimate aims, formulate teachings that assist their adherents in patterning their lives after the attainment of their particular goal.

The point of such practical doctrines is a comprehensive shaping of participants' life as a whole (DiNoia 1990a, 256). Religious people perceive themselves in possession of what is "ultimately important in life." This knowledge results in an orientation and a direction to their life (DiNoia 1998, 66; DiNoia 1995b, 28). "What is ultimate, whether it be a transcendent agent or an as-yet unrealized state of being, invades life at every moment and summons the community's members to order in shape their lives in view of the aim" (DiNoia 1998, 60). The echoes here of Griffiths' "centrality of importance" are clear.

DiNoia developed his argument in contrast with classic inclusivism and pluralism. Neither takes religious differences seriously enough. He summarized the positions of the two broadly saying, "inclusivists are those who espouse some version of the view that all religious communities implicitly aim at the salvation which the Christian community most adequately commends, while pluralists contend that all religious communities aim at salvation under the variety of descriptions enshrined by their traditions" (DiNoia 1990b, 250). DiNoia's principal disagreement with both these models is that they fail to give enough weight to the specificity and distinctiveness of religious aims (DiNoia 1995b, 25).

Inclusivists fail to notice the distinctiveness of other faiths because they tend to reinterpret non-Christian patterns and aims in Christian terms (DiNoia 1998, 59). Inclusivist theologians are assessed as claiming that non-Christian persons attain "salvation" in the Christian understanding of it, that is eternal fellowship with the Divine Trinity, established uniquely through Jesus Christ (DiNoia 1990b, 250). Theological inclusivism in effect erases the

particularities of other traditions by viewing them in the Christian scheme (DiNoia 1993, 83).

The concept of non-Christian “anonymity” of religious experience does not take the unique and distinct differences of that experience seriously. Christian reinterpretation of the ultimate aims of non-Christian religions overtly belittles those aims and subsequently devalues their distinct differences.

Pluralism “does not so much explain the differences and disagreements between religious beliefs as to explain them away” (DiNoia 1998, 66). Rather than trying to incorporate religious differences within the Christian scheme, as inclusivism does, pluralism in effect modifies their “existing particularities” (DiNoia 1992, 53). DiNoia contended that pluralism modifies the particularities of various religious traditions by claiming in one way or another that all religions aim at “salvation.” In place of their particular aims, pluralism introduces a “higher synthesis” that transcends distinctive religious aims; for example John Hick’s notion of “Reality-centeredness” (DiNoia 1995b, 24; DiNoia 1990a, 128). Given DiNoia’s argument regarding the variety of religious aims, it comes as no surprise that he would interpret pluralism as depreciating the importance of religious differences.

Religious Diversity and Essential Christian Beliefs

Both DiNoia and Griffiths affirmed the the universal salvific will of God and the unique mediatorship of Jesus Christ inside that will.

For Paul Griffiths the position of Jesus Christ as the unique mediator of salvation is “non-negotiable” (Griffiths 1997, 9). Griffiths took this essential feature of the Christian form of life as the claim that salvation is available only through Christ – the “only” in this claim being in contrast to contemporary inclusivists and mutualists. It is “entirely correct that Christian orthodoxy, which is constitutively trinitarian, requires as a fundamental grammatical principle

the claim that God is fully present in Jesus, present in Jesus, therefore, in a unique and unparalleled way” (Griffiths 2003, 23). Christians cannot claim that other traditions are on a par with or complementary to Christianity. He affirmed the axiom “outside the Church there is no salvation.” For Christians, the “discussion of salvation cannot be separated from either christology or ecclesiology” (Griffiths 1997, 9). Griffiths acknowledged these orthodox declarations about Jesus Christ as central to salvation require that we think hard about the salvation of religious aliens, that is, those who live in and live out other faith traditions (Griffiths 1998, 157), but he did not cite Sullivan’s magisterial work on this topic.

Griffiths does not find that these principles entail the denial of salvation to non-Christians. He does not claim that everyone must have, in the short period of one’s life “explicit knowledge of and assent to teachings of Jesus of Nazareth” (Griffiths 1997, 10). Knowledge and assent to Jesus of Nazareth is of “inestimable advantage for humans.” The point is not to judge people. Even if we can say in a formal way what is necessary and sufficient for salvation, “these conditions include facts about the hearts of people that in principle we cannot know” (Griffiths 1997, 10). The knowledge available to make such judgments resides only with God. We do not know whether any person or group is saved. Griffiths does not rule out the possibility of anyone’s salvation; however he explicitly indicates salvation is not guaranteed for all and that eternal separation from God, known as damnation, is possible (Griffiths 1997, 10).

Theories about who can be saved and how God saves them have, at best, a very low probability of being true. We should not “waste much time on them” as they do not form part of “the essential structure of Christian belief” (Griffiths 1997, 10). They “are of interest principally as a defense against the charge that Christians cannot coherently assert the kind of christocentrism about salvation that we must assert” (Griffiths 1997, 10).

J.A. DiNoia seems considerably less bleak than Griffiths about the universal availability of salvation. DiNoia explicitly stated, “the Christian scheme is ordinarily understood to include doctrines about the universality of salvation” (DiNoia 1992, 70). In addition, DiNoia found no theology of religions fully consistent with central Christian doctrines that do not strongly affirm the universality of salvation, at least as a possibility (DiNoia 1992, 70). Like Griffiths, DiNoia warned about the implausibility of overly detailed accounts in explaining how God’s universal salvific will is actuated (DiNoia 1982, 108). DiNoia regarded his view as “compatible with a strong Christian affirmation of the universality of salvation” utilizing the concept of the providential diversity of religious aims (DiNoia 1992, 72).

The concept of the providential diversity of religions is built upon his cornerstone principle of the diversity of ultimate religious aims. In light of the serious differences among religious traditions, the problem is to see how their different aims foster development in their members of dispositions toward what Christians believe is the true aim in life, fellowship with the Blessed Trinity (DiNoia 1992, 67). DiNoia’s premise is that in spite of the fact we can not state other religious communities aim at salvation as we see it, we can affirm that their members are not excluded from sharing fully in salvation (DiNoia 1992, 67). He seeks to balance the distinctive aims of life of other religious communities with the unique valuation the Christian community as vehicle of universal salvation by ascribing an “indirect or providential value to other religious communities” (DiNoia 1992, 67).

Providentially, other religions that could play a real although unspecified role in the divine plan of salvation, a plan to which Christianity bears a unique and specific witness (DiNoia 1992, 67). We are to value these other religions not because they are “channels of grace or means of salvation” but rather because they play a role in God’s divine plan, a plan beyond

human comprehension (DiNoia 1992, 91; DiNoia 1982, 387). Other religions can “foster social climates supportive of Christian values” and assist their members in developing dispositions in the direction of “the attainment and enjoyment of salvation” (DiNoia 1982, 387; DiNoia 1992, 69). “God wills that other religions perform functions in his plan for humankind which is now only dimly perceived and which will be fully disclosed only at the end of time” (DiNoia 1982, 387). DiNoia’s view is that God can (and will) somehow reshape others who aim at other ultimate destinies into creatures fit for communion with the Trinity.

The eschatological aspect of DiNoia’s providential diversity of religions is crucial to his argument on behalf of the hope for universal salvation. DiNoia leaned heavily on what he terms “prospective salvation” (DiNoia 1992, 94). The providential role of non-Christian religions is uncertain for now and will be revealed at the end of time. We cannot see now how others are saved, but may be understood when we are finally saved. Hence, we can have confidence in affirming “the possibility of salvation for non-Christians [I]t by no means follows from the particular and unique role ascribed to Jesus Christ in central Christian doctrines that those who do not now acknowledge him will be permanently excluded from sharing in the salvation he both signifies and effects” (DiNoia 1992, 104, 107).

One advantage of this understanding is that Christians can avoid “implausible descriptions” of the present state of the members of other communities. It frees Christians from speculating about how those communities have or do not have salvific value or how the dispositions and conduct they cultivate contribute to God’s plan (DiNoia 1992, 103). In effect, DiNoia advocates a confident faith in God with a healthy agnosticism about just how God provides for all the creatures of the world.

DiNoia affirmed a nonexclusive particularity for Jesus Christ. He argued that “true universalism requires fidelity to the particularities of Christian revelation and existence” (DiNoia 1992, 84). DiNoia poetically described God as “squeezing” into the particularity of history. Despite being infinite, God is accessible, specifiable, and identifiable personally in the finite and particular. The divine entrance into an “obscure corner of humankind” does not mean that God’s presence is limited to that particular group (DiNoia 1992, 85). Salvation in Christ is intended for all human beings. To become accessible to us required that God take the form of a particular person, “one whom we can encounter, touch, hear, and speak to” (DiNoia 1993, 54). If God is to “squeeze” into human form, God must begin his mission of salvation somewhere, as some person in some particular group of people. But such particular Incarnation is for the purpose of reaching the whole of humanity.

Particularists affirm the universal salvific will of God and the unique mediatorship of Jesus Christ inside that will. They also take religious differences very seriously. Given these claims, the next obvious issue is how are Christians to interact with members of other faith traditions.

Interreligious Dialogue: Opportunity for Intellectual Growth and Defense

In commenting on *Dominus Iesus*, Griffiths found that Catholic theology cannot take Christianity and other non-Christian religions as religiously complementary. However, epistemological complementarity is a possibility because the claim “that *the revelation of God in Christ is complete* (which must be said) is not the same as and does not imply the claim *the truth about God explicitly known and taught by the church is complete*” (Griffiths 2003, 23; italics original). The church needs to study and understand what is taught by alien religious traditions to help the church further comprehend and more definitively “understand the revelation with which

she has been entrusted” (Griffiths 2003, 23). Interreligious dialogue does not give the Church new truths about God, but can provide the Christian community with *understandings* of the truth they do not have yet.

Griffiths sees the possibility of Christian appropriation of non-Christian insights about God as important to the future work of theologians (Griffiths 2001a, 166). Citing examples such as Augustine’s use of Plato as well as Aquinas’s of Aristotle, Griffiths argued that many of “the greatest advances in Christian thinking have come when serious Christian thinkers have paid close attention to alien particularity” (Griffiths 2001a, 166). Griffiths advocated what he terms an “open inclusivism” on the question of alien truth. In so doing, he shifts the focus of “inclusivism” from soteriology to epistemology. Open inclusivism “affirms the possibility of the existence of alien truth that Christians need to learn.” Hence, studying other traditions is an imperative. (Griffiths 2001a, 168; Griffiths 2001b, 60).

Griffiths contrasted open inclusivism with closed inclusivism. Closed inclusivism allows recognizing and embracing alien truths wherever they are found, but denies that any alien truth is not already known to Christians (Griffiths 2001a, 168; Griffiths 2001b, 59). As Christians, we are challenged to understand the particulars of our own tradition. Access to the depths of religious accounts – even our own – is limited by time and intellect. Hence, modesty is appropriate in interreligious dialogue, especially when making judgments about particular non-Christian accounts (Griffiths 1997, 8). Griffiths recommended that we humbly listen for the “logos spermatikos, traces of the divine word sown in all human hearts” (Griffiths 1997, 11).

J.A. DiNoia is also concerned with humility, mutual respect, and esteem in interreligious dialogue. He recommended that the Christian community respect others as fellow seekers after religious truth. In reference to their doctrines Christians should learn from their understandings

of their own proposals, claims, aims, and arguments of religious aliens (DiNoia 1992, 31).

DiNoia may stop short of Griffiths' open inclusivism (on truth) noting in one of his more recent writings the knowledge of God and revelation as "the distinctive possession of Christianity" (DiNoia and Walls 1998, 39). Nonetheless, DiNoia found that Christians can learn from others: "Christians should be open to possible developments of their own doctrines that might be suggested in the course of their study of other religions and in dialogue with their adherents" (DiNoia 1992, 31). The key words here are "possible developments in their own doctrines." DiNoia does not indicate that truth can be appropriated from other religious traditions; rather, our truth can be further enlightened.

Griffiths has been generally frustrated with contemporary interreligious dialogue. Griffiths found that interreligious dialogue as it currently stands minimizes authentic engagements between religious communities. Typical interreligious dialogue fosters "a morally dubious kind of syncretism" where the goal is never argumentative but rather always one of understanding (Griffiths 1994, 32-33). In an effort to avoid confrontation, many topics and themes are avoided, particularly those "awkward questions about truth and about the universalistic aspirations of most religious communities" (Griffiths 1994, 33). Interreligious dialogue that does not also take religious differences seriously cannot finally be serious.

Hence, Griffiths proposed a reintroduction of "apologetics" to the Christian community. Apologetics is traditionally understood in the religious community as "reasoned argument in defense of what one takes to be true" (Griffiths 1994, 35). Religious communities have a "moral and intellectual duty" to engage in apologetics. When faced with religious others who do not believe what they do, they must argue for the truth that they believe to be profoundly important to all human persons (Griffiths 1994, 35). If believers are not willing to argue for their claims,

why should anyone hold them? Withholding truth of vital eternal importance or refusing to argue with others is akin to refusing to offer help or correction to a person whose beliefs and practices are leading him to “dire physical danger” (Griffiths 1994, 35). “I must, therefore, if I am to behave with moral integrity, engage my interlocutor” (Griffiths 1994, 35). If one is engaged intellectually with another thinks the other is wrong, one is obliged to show the other a better way if one can.

Besides the moral obligations Griffiths indicated, apologetics in interreligious dialogue can have other benefits as well. One might become convinced by the other. Or one might learn more about one’s own tradition from the arguments of the other. Interreligious dialogue structured as apologetics can lead to “important discoveries about the inner logic of religious belief-systems” (Griffiths 1994, 36) and even to conversion. The minimal result of apologetic engagement should be that each comes to understand the subject much better than before the meeting.

Griffiths’ introduction of apologetics into interreligious dialogue runs against the current that favors finding common ground. Not shy of controversy, Griffiths has written a recent article on the nature of proselytism and tolerance (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002). In this article Griffiths compares and contrasts the two practices, finding the grammar and syntax of proselytism to be “conceptually superior” (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 33).

Toleration is “enduring” or “bearing something unpleasant” (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 31). It means “putting up with or permitting or letting be some pattern of action or belief found by those practicing toleration to be false or improper” (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 30a). Griffiths argued that toleration is a “concept of the moral order.” Both proselytism and toleration imply judgments about the alien. Either the aliens’ beliefs are false or their practices are

improper (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 32). While proselytizers want to transform the alien, practitioners of tolerance desires to leave the alien in error (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 32).

A proselytizer acts to create proselytes; usually wanting to “turn the alien into kin” because it would be good for them (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 30). A proselyte “leaves an old community, whether of belief or practice and enters a new one” (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 30). Proselytizers find that we are morally obliged to work to bring the mistaken aliens into the fold (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 31). To tolerate those wallowing in error regarding the most important issues in life is not to respect them, but to neglect them.

Griffiths found that virtually everyone is a proselytizer on behalf of something. Proselytism is unavoidable. The question is what one proselytizes for. Griffiths in effect argued for proselytizing for rich and thick religious commitment, not for indifferent tolerance or a liberal pluralism that excludes the possibility that any tradition actually is true. He claimed that advocates of tolerance will inevitably become proselytizers for something, likely tolerance (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 33). But proselytism’s aspiration to correct error prohibits it from becoming a species of toleration of error (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 30). Thus, when religious people engage in interreligious dialogue, the point is to argue for one’s own tradition in an effort to convert the other. Tolerant understanding is not the point; finding the truth is.

DiNoia also has advocated defending primary Christian claims in the course of interreligious dialogue. DiNoia emphasizes Christian witness. Interreligious dialogue begins with “readiness to take the distinctive features of other religious traditions seriously” (DiNoia 1993, 87). Once one recognizes the diversity of religious aims, one should not be surprised at or offended by the diversity of religious claims (DiNoia 1995b, 26). Indeed,, there should be an expectation in interreligious dialogue that participants from varied religious communities each

consistently and seriously teach about the aim of life they propose and the means to reach it (DiNoia 1982, 381).

In interreligious dialogue, Christianity is expected to be serious and consistent about its message. DiNoia argues “the Christian hope for salvation, in all its aspects, rests on convictions about the reliability of the divine undertakings about which the Christian community must bear witness” (DiNoia 1982, 389). Witness does not require Christians to “remain silent about the church's doctrines in the presence of non-members.” Rather, they are to “bear witness to their convictions and hope about the salvation which God promises” (DiNoia 1993, 86). Witness in word and deed is vital to a vigorous Christian mission concerned with “the particular hope and the universal scope of the salvation to which Christians are charged to bear witness” (DiNoia 1993, 88).

Both DiNoia and Griffiths have demarcated interreligious dialogue as an arena of praxis for their particularist approach. Both take particular differences among traditions seriously. They approach interreligious dialogue as a way to discover truths about Christianity and its dialogue partners and to defend primary Christian claims.

Can Catholics Be Particularists?

Given that both advocates of particularism are staunch Catholics, committed to the teaching of the church, this question may seem silly. Our discussion above shows that they clearly fulfill the second and third principles. The question is how, if at all, they fit the first and fourth rules. DiNoia can be passed over quickly regarding the first rule. His prolific written endorsement of the universal salvific will of God combined with his developed theories of provincial diversity and prospective salvation demonstrate his faithfulness to this rule.

Paul Griffiths' work requires a little more analysis. Griffiths makes statements about the universal salvific will of God that are not very reassuring. To say that God does not rule out the possibility of anyone's salvation is certainly not as strong as affirming God's will that all be saved. Yet he point out that while probability and possibility are two different things, it is possibility that counts here. It is possible that God can save everyone. We just cannot assert its actuality or say much, if anything, about how God might do it. Griffiths may need to be more precision on God's universal salvific will, but he does not deny it.

Specific references to the church and its position in the economy of salvation are sparse in the particularists' work. As noted above, Griffiths affirms the difficult motto "extra ecclesiam nulla salus" (though without any reference to Sullivan's work on this point). However, this ought not be surprising. Both particularists do not find speculative theories about how God saves of interest. Rather, they are concerned with issues of truth and truthfulness. Throughout their work, they simply assume the necessity of the church as witness to and proclaimer of the truth about human life, including its origin, course and destiny. The church is necessary for salvation to be effective, for who else could present the particular claims that Christians make to those who need to hear the good news? Although they do not reflect extensively on the church – which one may find a weakness in their positions – that particularists fit this rule seems obvious.

Do particularists affirm the dignity of each and all human persons? This rule quite possibly presents the greatest challenge as well as a real strength of the particularist model. The importance of religious differences discussed in the first section above attests to the dignity of each and every human person. In dubbing this approach "the acceptance model," Paul Knitter – in many ways their friendly opponent – recognized the fact that they accept religious differences because they accept the other as other-than-us, not as a pale reflection of us (Knitter 2002, 218).

Recognizing that no historical and temporal language or experience can encompass the infinite, and succeed at being totally comprehensive, Knitter asks some leading questions:

Are we at a state in the religious history of humankind in which all religions can admit this [finiteness of their perspectives]? In which all religions can make universal claims without making absolute claims? In which, yes, there will be need of *apologetics* (that is, disagreement, efforts to convince and persuade each other), but there will also be room – much greater room – for *dialogue* (that is, expanding or clarifying or correcting one’s own grasp of truth through dialogue with others? (Knitter 2002, 228-29)

For the acceptance model to be preferable to the mutuality model, the answers to these questions must be “yes.” Particularists would answer “yes.”

Nonetheless, implicit in DiNoia’s view of prospective salvation and openly on display in Griffiths’ proselytism are issues about human dignity. On the surface, DiNoia’s prospective salvation appears as a windfall for non-Christians, above all those who never have been exposed to the Gospel. It suggests that they have a place in God’s plan and can benefit from the unique mediatorship of Jesus Christ. What does “prospective salvation” say about their personal human dignity? DiNoia is very careful to say that non-Christian religious aims should be respected and esteemed. One of his chief complaints with inclusivism is that it sublates the distinctive soteriological programs of other religions into the Christians scheme of salvation (DiNoia 1992, 48). DiNoia admits that the notion of prospective salvation is “some form of inclusivism.” (DiNoia 1992, 166). Inside the theory of prospective salvation is the proclamation, in essence, “that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ as Lord.” It would seem that this assertion, applying even in the afterlife, has questionable implications for human dignity. Insofar as DiNoia’s approach is inclusivist, it runs the risk of devaluing the particularity

of each and every person in their particularity, especially if their shortcomings are moral as well as epistemic.

Griffiths' desire to defend Christianity through apologetics is not an affront to human dignity. Each and every human being, in their dignity, is entitled to argue on behalf of their unique and specific religious aims. Confrontation and perceived moral and intellectual duty, while possibly adding some unpleasantness to interreligious dialogue, do not necessarily reduce human dignity. Griffiths' advance of this argument into the area of proselytism and tolerance do however begin to signal serious alarms about human dignity.

Griffiths makes well reasoned arguments that we all proselytize on behalf of something, or someone. The act of proselytizing, as he defines it, is at times motivated by the best interests of the person being proselytized. While this understanding is somewhat acceptable when dealing with some "forms of life," such as smoking addiction; it is antithetical to Griffiths' definition of the religious form of life. Recall that one of the elements of the religious form of life was that it was "incapable of abandonment" and "impossible to leave without also leaving themselves" (Griffiths 2001b, 10). For a proselyte to "leave an old community" and enter a new one (Elshtain and Griffiths 2002, 30), the proselyte truly has to abandon his or her very self. This places quite a heavy moral demand on apologists. If one does not have sufficient reason to think that one has the one way, truth and life, then one may be inviting others to give themselves up to what one does not have sufficient reason to believe to be true. In short, if Griffiths is wrong about the religious form of life, his apology is morally repugnant.

Griffiths' attack on "tolerance" is directed at a straw figure. Certainly, the tolerance of which he speaks is "bare tolerance." No one serious about her or his religion can subscribe to it except as an excuse for inaction. The 'live option' is the sort of active engagement Robert

Wuthnow calls “reflective pluralism.” Reflective pluralists are active, not passive. They are interested in what others believe about particular issues, study others’ views and understand why they hold them, work to show the strengths of active acceptance in a diverse society, respect others by taking their views seriously, and be willing to consider compromises to live with others in peace (Wuthnow 2005, 289-92). They join in with other groups in campaigns to support specific shared particular goals. Reflective pluralism is supported by “the goodwill and shared concern for basic human dignity that can be mobilized among the various religious traditions” (Wuthnow 2005, 294). It does not preclude apologetics or witness, but it requires that one see one’s opponents, even in religious matters, as friends, not enemies. None of this is incompatible with Griffiths’ views, but it is not clear that he has considered such an approach as a live option. Griffiths’ approach intends to respect the distinctiveness of the religious alien, but developing a rationale for the “pro-proselytism” position requires further argument against the best other options, rather than straw figures representing the most vapid forms of liberal indifferentism.

Is religious diversity a problem or a promise? Unlike other models which seek to find theological solutions to the problem of religious diversity, particularism regards religious diversity as a promise. Particularists recognize and respect the real diversity in the ultimate aims of various religious traditions. They resist homogenization of the traditions, intellectual imperialism, and indifferentism. In avoiding these traps that the other models may more easily succumb to, particularists do not find religious diversity a problem to be solved, but a reality filled with promise for dialogue.

As mutualism is an offshoot of pluralism, so particularism has generated an interesting and important offshoot, an even more radical understanding of diversity. Chapter eight explores the radical particularism of S. Mark Heim.

NOTES

¹Paul Knitter has called this model the “acceptance” model (Knitter 2002, 173-237). Although it is not his own approach, he recognizes its contributions and its potential. We have dubbed it “particularism” because its proponents focus on the particularity of the traditions. Knitter traces this approach particularly to the cultural-linguistic understanding of religious traditions associated with the “New Yale School” in general and the influential work of George Lindbeck in particular. That we are sympathetic with this view, and with non-foundationalist views of theology more generally, should be clear. However, we do not sketch that approach here since Knitter has done so (2002, 173-190).

²Action and intentional activity create forms of life, a notion borrowed from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Griffiths has espoused versions of this functional definition of religion for some time. Earlier renditions are included in journal articles “One Jesus, Many Christs,” (Griffiths 1998) and “The Properly Christian Response to Religious Plurality” (Griffiths, 1997). In these articles his nomenclature was slightly different. The concept “form of life” was previously called an “account” and “incapable of abandonment” was rendered as “unsurpassability.” Despite these differences, the concepts are essentially the same.