

Response to Darren Dias, “Trinitarian Theology and Religious Diversity”

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Several years ago, Stanley Hauerwas spoke at Boston College, and during that talk, he presented an interesting and – not shockingly – funny story that pertains to the interreligious subject matter of this Colloquium. He had given a lecture in Conway, Arkansas, about Christian particularity, after which a professor at a local university came up to him and noted that his comments about Christian particularity offered up no theory by which the professor could talk to the local Buddhists. Hauerwas apologized for being so deficient, but he asked the professor how many Buddhists there actually were in Conway, Arkansas. Moreover, if the professor wanted to talk to them, however many there were, Hauerwas wanted to know what good a theory would do him. Wouldn't he just walk up to them and begin talking? The real question, Hauerwas suggested, was this: are the Christians in Conway, Arkansas, interesting enough that the Buddhists in Conway, Arkansas, would want to talk with them? I submit that, at his best, Hauerwas was right, but his relevance to this weekend will have to wait until the end of my response.

1. Hesitations

When reading any Christian work on interreligious topics, I tend to have two concerns: one, do not make the Christian view the be-all end-all of religion, of which all other faiths are then pale imitations; and two, do not remove the distinctiveness of Christianity and dissolve it into a mass of generalized religiosity that, in trying to celebrate diversity, actually destroys it. The first of these concerns did not become an issue in my reading of Dias' paper. It was clear from the outset that here was an effort to articulate something definitely *Christian*, yes, but precisely a Christian way of *not* making Christianity the sole rod by which all else is religiously measured.

With respect to my second concern, however, I did notice it flitting around the back of my mind. Lonergan's work on the inner and outer word in religious dialogue can be taken as license to relegate the outer to a lack of emphasis bordering on exile from the conversation. While Dias' paper

does not do this, it took some work for me to see in just what *way* it did not, and if I have a major constructive suggestion it is that this needs to be brought out more clearly. If what I am about to say is accurate as a restatement of Dias' position on the inner and outer and their relation to interreligious dialogue, then I propose that it needs to be made more explicit and more attention needs to be drawn to it, both because of the concern I noted above and because of the (currently) hidden significance of the point Dias is making.

He rightly points out that for Lonergan it is the distinction between faith and beliefs that provides the basis for interreligious dialogue (19). This is followed by the comment that “There is a shared common origin in religious experience which makes the recognition of God's self-disclosures in history possible” and “Differences in the objectification of religious experience expressed in religious beliefs are neither insignificant nor something to be overcome...” (19). These are among the most important statements in the presentation. If I am understanding Dias' move correctly, dialogue and movement toward a certain level of community based on inner commonality will foster growth in the common recognition of God's own entry into the world of meaning in the outer word carriers of meaning such as “intersubjectivity, art, symbols, deeds, and word[s]” (19). The distinctiveness of Christianity lies in its central affirmation of God's entry into the world of meaning through such carriers, principally in terms of the incarnate carrier of meaning who was Jesus of Nazareth; to the extent that this affirmation is a genuine result of God's entry into the world of meaning, then the common inner word allows the recognition of the validity of this outer word insofar as it resonates with that inner word.

At this point, the uniqueness of Christianity is secured – it is not reduced to part of a mass of meaningless religious differentiation. It is also at this point, if one is uncritical, that one could slip back toward the declaration of non-Christian faiths as “anonymously Christian” – their inner word could be seen as only an anticipation of the Christian outer word. But if I understand Dias correctly, it is not merely for the sake of that outer word or for the sake of Christianity that non-Christians could see the

resonance of the Christian outer word with the common inner word. Rather, as Dias has I think rightly reconstrued the relation between the Christological and Pneumatological missions, the outer word and Christianity are for the sake of the common Pneumatological inner work, confirming it and providing it with the constitutive element that brings it to full flower (MiT 112-3). Christians are not here to show non-Christians who they really are – namely, pale imitations of us – instead, we are to be at their service as witnesses to the outer word that confirms the inner word already within them.

2. Resonances

I cannot resist noting that much of Dias' work in this presentation fits well with and is supported by Lonergan's move toward affirming a distinct fifth level of interpersonal love in his later years. As indicated by archival question and answer sessions at several of the Lonergan Workshops at Boston College, notably in 1977 and 1980, Lonergan saw the operation of gifting oneself over to the Other as sublating fourth-level operations of deliberation.

This sublating level of interpersonal love opens up to the interpersonal missions of the Son and the Spirit as Lonergan and Doran construe them. To the extent that our participation in the inner life of God, our deification, is the indwelling of the divine persons through sanctifying grace and the habit of charity, then that participation and deification is interpersonal.

In a similar and, I think, connected vein, this also opens onto an idea brought out by John Dadosky in his paper at the 2008 Lonergan Workshop at Boston College. That paper, “Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?”, suggested that in addition to the common sense, theoretic, and interiority stages of meaning outlined by Lonergan, we could posit an additional stage characterized by a concern with alterity – the Other. It is worth simply mentioning the resonance between this point and Lonergan's possible affirmation of a fifth level of interpersonal love and self-gift to the Other, while Dadosky himself noted that “such a stage will bring with it a heightened emphasis on dialogue, mutuality and the need for Ignatian discernment” (from the abstract), elements which are most certainly at the forefront in Dias' construal of a Trinitarian theology of religions.

3. The Key

But there is even more going on here than that, I think. I would actually quibble with the use of the phrase “Keplerian Revolution,” (7ff) because I don't think it goes far enough. To the extent that the phrase captures the paradigm-shift element in the recontextualization of Christological, soteriological, and ecclesiological questions, it is adequate. However, I would suggest that something far more significant is happening in that recontextualization: namely, we are really dealing with an *Einsteinian* Revolution.

Lonergan's work in cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics did for those fields what Einstein's work did for physics. Prior to Einstein, physicists conceived of space as a large area imaginable on a fixed three-dimensional grid that was “out there” and freestanding over-against observers, but Einstein showed that both space and time are relative to observers. Lonergan accomplished the same thing in terms of cognitional theory and epistemology. The real is commonly conceived of as simply a mass of objects standing “out there” over-against knowers, and the question “Is it real?” means, “does it really stand 'out there' over-against the knower?” Contrary to this, Lonergan showed that knowns are *relative* to knowers, and that the question “Is it real?” if it is to be answered in properly human explanatory terms, must mean “is it verified?” *not* “Is it 'out there' over-against me?”

The shift from out-there-over-against-ness to the relativisation accomplished by Einstein and Lonergan in their respective realms is, I think, parallel to what's at hand in Dias' Trinitarian theological framework. Just as space and time are relative to the spatio-temporality of the subject, and the intellectual meaning of the known is relative to the intellect of the subject, so too is the religious meaning of a religion relative to the religiosity of the subject. Other religions are not simply “out there” over-against Christian faith, freestandingly awaiting our encounter with them; their meaning is tied up with us, and our meaning is tied up with them, and that meaning awaits less a discovery than a construction.

This radical reorientation is supported by the reordering of the Christological and Pneumatological missions. If the key move is the Einsteinian shift, then religious outer words are not freestanding things already out there now over-against one another. Instead, religious outer words are in relation to the Pneumatological inner word, they are in relation to one another *through* that inner word, and finally and most importantly, the Christological outer word mission is to be situated *in relation to* the Pneumatological inner word mission. The religious meaning of different religions' outer words is thus to be arrived at not in virtue of some static and religious-dogmatic Newtonianism, but in virtue of religiously converted subjectivity caught up in the ongoing and dynamic historical field of the Pneumatological inner word.

Finally, I would submit that such subjectivity is inherently interpersonal, self-gifting, fifth-level, and fourth-stage operation. It is at the summit of the possibilities of human subjectivity and, especially, co-subjectivity.

I think this paper was very good and it brings the latest developments in understanding human religious subjectivity into the realm of interreligious dialogue. I also think that, were this view of the relation between the Pneumatological and the Christological implemented, it would have a significant effect on intra-Christian views of Christianity in addition to its effects on Christian efforts at interreligious dialogue. It would, in all probability, make Christians more interesting, and perhaps in that backhanded sort of sense, it would be a different kind of aid to the interreligious situation.