

Reshaping Faith: By Embracing Pluralist Values in the Religious Structures of the Postmodern Era

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Abstract

In a rapidly changing world, where postmodern attitudes towards pluralism are gaining momentum, an important question emerges: Are the world religions willing to accept and integrate these evolving values? The purpose of this article to delve into the intricate relationship between religious traditions and the contemporary ideals of postmodern society, shedding light on the diverse perspectives and challenges faced by different religions. Postmodernism has contributed valuable insights, it has also been criticized for its relativistic tendencies and the potential erosion of objective truth. Religion, with its rich history and diverse traditions, offers a counterbalance to some of the assumptions of postmodernism. Religious pluralism as a distinct philosophical and theological position has emerged more recently, and in its various forms it both draws on and is critical of these earlier accounts. We emphasize the importance of ongoing dialogue, critical engagement, and open-mindedness for creating a more inclusive and

equitable world that respects both religious diversity and the ideals of pluralism.

Keywords: *Pluralism, reconciliation, open-mindedness, critical engagement, religious diversity*

1. Introduction

Defining postmodernism can be challenging, as the term is interpreted differently across various disciplines. To gain a better understanding, it's helpful to deconstruct it. In historical philosophical contexts, "modern" denoted a worldview rooted in Enlightenment principles. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Enlightenment emphasized individual autonomy, faith in the power of reason, the belief in objective human reason, and the idea that truth could be uncovered through rational thought. The "modern" perspective placed importance on scientific inquiry, the pursuit of absolute truth, logical and practical systems, and orderly environments. While variations exist, a common thread among postmodernists is their rejection of any notion that claims to have direct access to ultimate truth. Postmodernists eschew overarching, all-encompassing narratives, be they master narratives, meta-narratives, or grand narratives.¹

Postmodernism diverges from the idea of achieving universal truth through theoretical promises and instead focuses on localized narratives. This shift is akin to the way Critical Theorists introduced concepts like norms and negotiations. Postmodernism's themes are deeply rooted in art and culture

¹ Jill Steans, Lloyd Pettiford An Introduction to International Relations Theory Perspectives and Themes,

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and share similarities with post-structuralism. Notably, it also rejects the tenets of Critical Theory.

In the context of religion, Postmodernism views it as a tool of subjugation. Critical Theory, on the other hand, is influenced by neo-leftist movements. Postmodernism, emerging from the political radicalism of the 1960s, aimed to reshape societal structures, establish new value systems, and challenge the existing status quo. Regarding philosophy, Postmodernism considers it a discipline that deals with metaphysics and abstract concepts, detached from direct reality.

Postmodernism celebrates the *dissonance* and *diversity* that consistently overshadow any aspiration or program for uniformity and conformity in all aspects of human endeavors. In contrast to this, it perceives modernism, the ideology it reacts against, as a fundamental pursuit of coherence and singularity in both action and understanding, which has been a central theme guiding intellectual and socio-political activities during the recent "modern" era of Western history². In this context, David Harvey notes that postmodernist thought is characterized by "fragmentation, indeterminacy, and an intense skepticism towards all-encompassing or 'totalizing' discourses." It also involves the rejection of "meta-narratives," which are large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly applicable universally. Philosopher and theologian David Ray Griffin further elucidate that postmodernism is more of a diffuse sentiment than a shared set of doctrines a sentiment that suggests humanity's need and potential to move beyond the modern era.

² J. Milton Yinger, Pluralism, Religion, and Secularism, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Oberlin college, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1967) pp. 17-28 (12 pages)

According to Derrida, metaphysics relies on a belief system and fiction, which are used to establish a hierarchical structure of meaning. In this hierarchy, the first term is often privileged, such as the notion of God being superior to humans. This hierarchy is constructed through what he calls the "Transcendental signifier," which is the initial term in a binary opposition that shapes the hierarchy of meanings.

In the context of Postmodernism, grand narratives like liberalism's focus on cooperation, freedom, and liberty, or the narratives of realists, are seen as mere justifications for existing structures and systems. This questioning extends to long-standing institutions deeply ingrained in society, such as religion and government. Instead, there is a growing emphasis on humanity's capacity to reform the world through its own intellectual efforts, scientific inquiry, and a healthy dose of skepticism.

Logically, most people can understand the principle that all human reasoning is not necessarily good. Hitler, with his reason, believed the Jewish people were an inferior race that needed to be exterminated. While the modernism of the Enlightenment period encouraged people to look to reason and science as a source of authority, if man's mind is fallen, if man's mind is by nature rebellious as the Bible reveals Romans 3:10–12, then the conclusions one may make from science and reason alone will at times be faulty.

David Lyon explains the postmodern view of religion in his book *Jesus in Disneyland* (2000). In it, Lyon describes how religion has become disembedded in postmodern society: it is no longer embedded in religious organizations or in a particular country or culture and beliefs are not embedded in their original contexts. This allows people to pick and mix lots of bits of lots of belief systems: take what they like and reject what they don't. And it finds religion appearing in unexpected places, for example, as in the title, in Disneyland. In this way religion becomes a matter of choice

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and therefore should be viewed not in terms of obligation (as much traditional religion was viewed) but of consumption.

This fits in with the idea of the growth of the holistic milieu and the nature of New Age religious movements: these are increasingly like companies selling spirituality as a commodity. One major factor in all this is technology: television and now the internet has taken religion out of church buildings and onto television channels and websites. This also allows religion to become more privatized. This can be related to Grace Davie's ideas about people **"believing without belonging"**.³

These ideas about changes to religion have massive consequences for whether religion has any of the functions that Durkheim, Parsons or Marx or De Beauvoir claimed for it. If religion is not about a shared set of beliefs but instead a private individualized belief, then it cannot lead to a collective conscience. If religion is about meeting the individual's needs and wants as a product to be consumed, rather than placing any obligations on the part of believers, then it will not ensure self-discipline and control. People worshipping an entirely individualized, privatized religion are not worshipping society itself (some might argue they are worshipping themselves).

While the growth of fundamentalism might see like the absolute opposite of a pick and mix, mix and match approach to religion, there is one way in which they are related: the way religion is a source of identity. In a society where other sources of identity are breaking down nationality, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality are all fluid and fragmented identities according to

³ Marinus C. Iwuckukwu Interreligious Dialogue in a Postmodern Culture - The Challenges and Development of Inclusive Religious Pluralism Vis-À-Vis Levinas' Philosophy of Being, *Spiritan Horizon*, Volume 13, Issue 13, Fall 2018,

postmodernists religion can be an attractive source of identity and indeed that can become its primary function.

A source of identity was never considered as a function for religion by Emile Durkheim or Marx, because societies were assumed where most people were religious and most people believed in the same religion. In a diverse, pluralistic and globalized society, that is of course no longer the case and therefore religions new role is as a source of identity, sometimes furiously held and defended against perceived attack from other faiths or secularization.

Secularization theory is Eurocentric and religion is growing in other parts of the world. What many postmodernist sociologists neglect, however, is that for the vast majority of those religious people, religion is still largely traditional and carrying out its traditional functions. For Muslims across the Islamic world, for instance, Islam has not been disembedded from the mosque or from its traditional context. The same is true for many Christians in Africa and Latin America. Some argue that secularization theory is wrong not because religion has changed, but actually that in large parts of the world it has stayed largely the same.⁴

2. Literature Review

"*Coping with Religious Diversity in the Postmodern Age*" by "John Hick". In this article, Hick explores the complex dynamics of religious pluralism in the contemporary postmodern landscape. He contends that religious pluralism has the potential to foster positive transformations both in society

⁴ Levinas (1998b) extensively discusses the value of the other and the indispensability of critically appreciating the other in his work: *On Thinking-of-the-Other, Entre Nous*

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and on a spiritual level, but achieving this requires a genuine commitment to open dialogue and mutual respect among different faiths. "*The Postmodern Revolution in the Study of Religion*" by "Paul Heelas". This article delves into the profound influence of postmodernism on the field of religious studies. It argues that postmodern approaches have the potential to advance religious pluralism by challenging traditional assumptions and categorical frameworks that have limited our understanding of diverse religious phenomena.

"*Religious Pluralism and the Postmodern Shift*" by "Richard Kearney". This book explores the intricate relationship between religious pluralism and the postmodern paradigm. Kearney contends that postmodern perspectives can contribute to the promotion of a more inclusive and diverse interpretation of religion, emphasizing the importance of embracing differences. "*Navigating Faith in a Postmodern World*" by "Harvey Cox". This book critically examines the opportunities and challenges faced by faith traditions in the contemporary postmodern era. It asserts that religious institutions must actively embrace pluralism and diversity to maintain their relevance and effectiveness in this evolving landscape.

"*Religion in a Postmodern Era*" by "David Lyon". This book provides an in-depth overview of the impact of postmodernism on religious phenomena. It explores how religious institutions can adapt to the unique challenges presented by the postmodern age while highlighting the need for flexibility and innovation. "*Special Report: Assessing the Effectiveness of Interfaith Dialogue Programs*" by the "United States Institute of Peace". Interfaith dialogue programs are increasingly utilized to address religious conflict and extremism. However, there is a scarcity of comprehensive evaluations assessing their impact. To bridge this gap, the Religion and Peacemaking Initiative at the U.S. Institute of Peace commissioned a study, resulting in

this publication. It focuses on the evaluation of interfaith dialogue initiatives, which aim to enhance religious tolerance and facilitate peaceful coexistence. "An assessment of the Theology of Religions" by "Johannes Janse van Rensburg" aims to explore the interplay between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam through the lens of intergroup threat theory. While the study primarily hinges on this theory, it also delves into various facets related to interfaith dialogue. The exposition of the threat theory itself serves as a rationale for advocating dialogue. In a world marked by diverse social dynamics and religious beliefs, it becomes imperative to transcend the specter of intergroup threats. Sustainable peace and harmony can only be attained when different groups discard mutual suspicion and engage in meaningful dialogue.

2.1. Objectives of the Study

Although many authors have discussed several interesting ideas about religious pluralism. The purpose study having the novelty from the following perspective:

- We highlighted the postmodern standpoint in moral and religious values education is its tendency towards relativism which disdains the harmonies.
- It is tried to dig out the need for optimistic alternatives to modern world through constructive postmodernism.
- We tried to write novel suggestions pertinent to the evaluation of interfaith dialogues, to harmonize with diversity and exclusivism

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed for this study will be qualitative research methodology, characterized by its focus on gathering

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comprehensive and detailed information within a specific time frame. Qualitative research primarily centers on linguistic data and delves into the nuances of human behavior, knowledge, practical applications, and seeks to answer questions related to "how" and "why." It is fundamentally distinct from quantitative research, which relies on quantifiable data, factual evidence, and statistical analysis. In this study, the emphasis will be on thorough data analysis and the logical interpretation of qualitative data, which is not achievable through quantitative research methods.

3.1. Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis is an integral component of qualitative research methodology and proves to be a highly effective approach for data examination and comprehension. To complement the qualitative research process, we will employ the documentary analysis technique. Within this technique, data preparation can involve accessing publicly available sources such as annual reports and reputable international journals. The subsequent steps encompass data analysis, followed by the interpretation of data through the meticulous filtering of multiple assumptions and hypotheses, ultimately leading to result deduction. Essentially, it constitutes a set of methods employed by researchers to conduct a profound analysis of data sourced from a variety of outlets, including biographies, charts, credible historical records, reputable literature, articles, maps, media documentaries, and films. Through documentary analysis, the credibility, representativeness, and authenticity of sources such as journals, official documents, and records can be readily ascertained⁵.

⁵ Scott John. (2006) Documentary Research. Sage Publications Ltd., London.

4. Results and Discussion

The anticipated outcomes of this study encompass not only facilitating the engagement of the exclusivistic model in interreligious dialogue but also establishing clear protocols for conducting such dialogues. Additionally, the research aims to present alternative approaches to interacting with other religions, exploring avenues for collaboration despite varying religious beliefs and conflicting faith convictions. Furthermore, it intends to articulate the potential for adopting a theocentric perspective on religions, which could pave the way for interreligious ecumenism. In the complex tapestry of the postmodern era, religious structures find themselves entangled in a puzzle of diverging beliefs, traditions, and values.

The challenge lies in reshaping faith to accommodate pluralist values without compromising the core tenets of each religion. How can religious institutions maintain their authenticity while fostering inclusivity? How can individuals navigate the labyrinth of diverse spiritual paths in a rapidly changing world? This enigma demands innovative solutions to harmonize faith and pluralism in the evolving religious landscape of the postmodern era.

Moreover, this research will shed light on strategies that allow religious organizations to preserve their unique identities and core teachings while remaining relevant in an ever-changing world. Ultimately, the findings from this study could inform efforts to promote tolerance, cooperation, and coexistence among different faith communities, contributing to a more harmonious and inclusive global society.

4.1. Limitations of Postmodern Perspective in Moral and Religious Values Education

Despite their merits, Postmodern viewpoints in values education are not without their drawbacks, and the most significant among them include:

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4.2. Relativism

A central issue with postmodern thinking lies in its rejection of objective and absolute truths, evident and inherent knowledge, and universal values. The presence of certain objective truths, the certainty of some knowledge, and the rational and innate nature of particular values cannot be disputed by any discerning and just individual.⁶

4.3. Self-Destruction

Postmodernists emphasize the embrace of relative perspectives regarding the universe, knowledge, and the absence of absolute truths and values. This stance might appear paradoxical, as they have essentially transformed postmodernism into an ideology and, in practice, are ensnared by dogmatism and a form of totalitarianism. Interestingly, the language employed by postmodernists in defending their theories often revolves around notions of totality and absoluteness, attempting to persuade others that their theory is both correct and rational. This raises a fundamental question: If there is no universal principle or meta-narrative, how can this very principle itself be upheld? Is this assertion absolute and universal or conditional and relative? It seems that postmodernists sometimes do not rigorously follow the logical implications of their own ideas.

4.4. Indiscriminate Attention to Politics and Power

While it is essential for educational systems, schools, teachers, and students to be mindful of political and social issues, the excessive politicization of educational institutions poses significant risks. Firstly, it can result in the

⁶ Nooshin Forghani, Narges Keshtiaray, Alireza Yousefy a Critical Examination of Postmodernism Based on Religious and Moral Values Education, International Education Studies; Vol. 8, No. 9; 2015, Canadian Center of Science and Education.

transformation of schools, teachers, and students into politically charged entities, diverting their focus away from the primary educational objectives. Secondly, the over-politicization of these institutions often leads to inappropriate interference of political and social issues in educational and scientific matters, creating substantial barriers to progress in both fields. Thirdly, contrary to the postmodernist perspective, this can potentially promote the indoctrination and imposition of values favored by the governing group within educational systems and among learners.

4.5. Excessive focus on distinctions while disregarding commonalities

While it's crucial to acknowledge subcultures, individualities, genders, and other distinctions, an excessive fixation on these differences within individuals, cultures, and values can hinder an educational institution from recognizing the many shared aspects among human societies. In essence, postmodernism can inadvertently promote the neglect of historical continuity and contribute to generational divides, which can be detrimental to societies.⁷

4.6. Failure and Incoherence

Postmodernists exhibit a wide range of highly diverse and occasionally conflicting ideas and theories. In practice, it can be challenging to categorize them all neatly under the label of "postmodernists." At times, their differences are so pronounced that they outright reject one another. While they may view this diversity as a strength due to their commitment to

⁷ Karl Thompson Postmodernism and Education, published by Revised Sociology September 25,2019.

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pluralism, the lack of coherence within this pluralistic approach can lead to confusion and surprise, which might not be entirely satisfying for them.

5. Constructive Postmodernism

Certainly, postmodernism exerts a significant influence on contemporary thought, whether we embrace it or not. However, it's important to acknowledge that postmodernism is not a singular, homogenous entity. Scholars, especially those in the field of religion like Griffin, have not only attempted to categorize different forms of postmodernism but have also advocated for the recognition of potential positive aspects within at least one of these forms. To be more specific, Griffin identifies two fundamental positions within postmodernism, both of which aim to move beyond both the modernist worldview that emerged from the scientific developments of the 17th century (such as Galilean-Cartesian-Baconian-Newtonian science) and the modernity that both shaped and was shaped by this worldview.

On one side, Griffin refers to what he terms as deconstructive or eliminative postmodernism “it transcends the modern perspective by adopting an anti-worldview approach: it breaks down or eradicates the fundamental elements required for a worldview, including concepts like God, self, purpose, meaning, an objective reality, and truth based on correspondence. This form of postmodern thought often leads to relativism, and in some cases, nihilism. It could also be referred to as ultramodernism because its eliminations stem from following modern principles to their logical endpoints”.⁸

On the flip side, Griffin's constructive or revisionary postmodernism takes a different approach. It aims to move beyond the modern worldview not by discarding the idea of worldviews altogether but by constructing a

⁸ Dick Hebdige, *Postmodernism and the other side*, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A reader* edited by John Storey, London, Pearson Education, 2006.

postmodern worldview through a reevaluation of modern principles and traditional concepts. Griffin observes that, from the deconstructive standpoint, the constructive perspective is criticized for clinging to outdated concepts. This criticism arises because it seeks to preserve a positive significance not only for concepts such as the human self, historical meaning, and truth as correspondence, which were central to modernity, but also for premodern notions like a divine reality, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature.

However, proponents of a revisionist postmodern perspective consider it a more suitable approach to human experience and a more genuinely postmodern stance. They particularly appreciate that it acknowledges and values the fact that "the modern world has achieved unprecedented advancements that should not be discarded in a wholesale rejection of its negative aspects." Instead of merely following modernity's premises to their logical conclusions, revisionist postmodernism critically assesses and revises those premises. It remains open to the rediscovery of truths and values from various forms of premodern thought and practices that were rigidly rejected by modernity. In essence, constructive, revisionary postmodernism involves a creative synthesis of modern and premodern truths and values.⁹

Postmodernism, as an interpretive perspective, stands in opposition to the modernist paradigm and addresses various aspects of what is commonly known as Western modern culture. While modernism seeks to unify, consolidate, and harmonize data and details, postmodernism argues that there can be no single comprehensive representation of the world. According

⁹ Peter McLaren, *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture, Oppositional Politics in a Postmodern Era*, 1994, Routledge, London

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to postmodernism, the world lacks a totality filled with interconnectedness and differentiation; instead, it embraces radical diversity in every aspect and at all levels. Reality, in the postmodern view, is perceived as a collection of ever-shifting fragments, and attempts to construct coherent representations and actions are seen as either repressive or illusory.¹⁰

Crucially, postmodernism contends that the religious notion of a naturally unified order of reality is a mere illusion, akin to the Eastern religious-metaphysical concept of "maya." Any religious endeavor to summon, endorse, or enact unity is considered inherently oppressive, a point illustrated by the histories of religions like Christianity and Islam. To a large extent, the traditions of major world religions have adhered to the modernist project, even preceding the modern era. However, postmodernism issues a challenge: it calls for a profound reconsideration and reorientation if there is to be any substantial alteration in the historical paths of world religions, and consequently, any chance of meaningful and enduring interreligious dialogue.

5.1. Facing Theological Dilemmas in a Postmodern Era

In exploring postmodernism as the prevailing contemporary backdrop for interreligious dialogue and its theological implications, I now turn to a brief discussion of specific issues that come under scrutiny and present fresh interpretive opportunities within this context. These issues pertain to the concepts of unity, truth, and the very essence of theology, all of which have a direct bearing on the feasibility of establishing a theology geared towards interreligious dialogue.

¹⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke UP, 1991.

Postmodernism challenges the notion of 'unity' itself, prompting a reevaluation. Particularly within the context of interreligious dialogue, this challenge encourages a more realistic understanding of diversity. It acknowledges that no religion is a monolithic entity, despite any claims to the contrary. As mentioned earlier, the lived experiences of religious individuals are often shaped by intra-plural identities, such as different Christian denominations, religious orders, various branches of Buddhism, divisions within the Islamic world, and diverse Hindu affiliations, among others. These intra-religious distinctions are just as significant as the assertion of a unifying identity in the face of evident religious diversity.¹¹

While religions frequently emphasize unity as a central theme, the nature of 'unity' may not necessarily be an exclusive and isolating singularity but rather a cohesive dynamic that encompasses plurality. Postmodern criticism of the concept of unity as an absolute can prompt a reevaluation of this understanding, suggesting the need for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to unity in the context of interreligious dialogue.

The postmodern critique of the concept of 'truth,' with its promotion of multiple perspectives over a single absolute truth, presents both a challenge and an encouraging opportunity for religions involved in dialogue for embracing pluralist values. This critique challenges established religious traditions but also holds the promise of enhancing dialogue. By setting aside the paradigm of absolute singularity, the usual context of competitive or even confrontational interreligious engagement can potentially give way to a collaborative pursuit. This pursuit involves a shared journey towards

¹¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *He is There, He is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), 54.

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deeper self-awareness, mutual understanding, and the realization of the other.

The concept of theology itself undergoes profound implications and consequences in light of postmodern thought. Postmodernism departs from the modernist viewpoint, which posits that human reason can comprehend the true order of the universe and questions the very notion of such an order. Postmodernism portrays the cosmos as inherently chaotic and random, devoid of any discernible teleological direction. It rejects the idea of coherent, comprehensible wholes as mere illusions.¹²

However, there is a risk that postmodern ideals might be imposed upon genuine dialogical endeavors. Some, like Huston Smith, go to the extent of accusing theologians of conforming to this situation, diluting their theological stances to align with a secular mindset. They argue that philosophers and theologians, at most, can advise individuals to make their own decisions, but in doing so, they imply that everything lacks meaning, rendering the decision itself meaningless.

Smith views postmodern relativism as a fleeting or transitional phase and contends that the human spirit inherently yearns for order. He asserts that a comprehensive vision that provides meaning and orientation is a fundamental human need. Smith attempts to counter the negative consequences of postmodernism by critiquing the modernism that gave rise to it and advocating for the recovery of what he calls "primordial Truth."¹³

¹² Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 171.

¹³ Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 78.

On the other hand, Griffin, a theologian striving to articulate a positive or constructive form of postmodernism, criticizes Smith for proposing a simplistic and non-dialectical return to premodernist concepts. Griffin himself promotes a form of postmodernism, as discussed earlier, that engages in dialectical interactions, seeking to creatively synthesize modern and premodern truths and values.

Within the realm of theology, particularly in the context of interreligious engagement to cuddle the pluralists' values, postmodernism introduces inherent skepticism unless we adequately consider the cosmological, ontological, and existential analyses intrinsic to the postmodern mindset. The task of postmodern theology is not to articulate a singular account of Reality or to assert a sole explanation for the order, purpose, and ultimate meaning of human existence and the universe. Such frameworks are fundamentally flawed as they cannot encompass the diverse perceptions, experiences, and interpretations that make up the various religious narratives about the nature of Reality.

From a postmodern perspective, any theology, religious ideology, or philosophy that insists on its own frame of reference as the exclusive and legitimate one is rightfully questioned. Instead, it is now imperative for religious intellectual endeavors to acknowledge and incorporate diverse religious "truths" into their own frameworks, without diminishing or attempting to explain away these differing perspectives. This diversity must be taken seriously. For instance, if a theological principle asserts that the One God is the Creator and Lord of All, then the multiplicity of what

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constitutes the "All," including religious pluralism, must be treated with genuine consideration and integrity.¹⁴

Failing to do so, which unfortunately occurs too often, implies that theology cannot adequately address this diversity, thus implicitly undermining its own central tenet and diminishing its validity as a coherent intellectual pursuit and a legitimate perspective. In one way or another, postmodernism emerges as a pressing philosophical and theological concern within the context of interreligious dialogue. Its manifestation in pluralism is just one facet, albeit a prominent one, particularly relevant to the dialogue, which we will now explore.

5.2. Way Forwards for Religious Pluralism in the Postmodern Era

5.2.1. Need to Evaluate Interfaith Dialogue

At its fundamental core, interfaith dialogue entails individuals from diverse religious backgrounds coming together for meaningful discourse. In this context, "conversation" is not confined to verbal communication exclusively. Renowned sociologist Robert Bellah, in his influential work "Habits of the Heart," underscored the significance of conversation in the fabric of civilization, characterizing cultures as dynamic exchanges concerning topics of significance to those involved.

Interfaith dialogue offers an avenue for each faith community to contribute uniquely to the shared goal of peaceful coexistence. However, implementing effective interfaith dialogue initiatives is a complex endeavor, requiring

¹⁴ Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, Holman, 1997), 92–95.

thorough evaluation to extract valuable insights and learn from both successful and unsuccessful experiences for future endeavors.

Interfaith groups have actively engaged in formal interventions to address conflicts since at least 1965 when the Appeal to Conscience Foundation was established by Arthur Schneider and a coalition of prominent clergy from various religious backgrounds, including Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths. These formal interventions differ from informal ones, which may arise organically through friendships between individuals of different faiths. The Foundation's central strategy involves acting as an impartial intermediary, reaching out to religious leaders in conflict-ridden areas, and facilitating communication and dialogue among different faith communities.¹⁵

In the introduction of "Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding," David Smock outlines various approaches to organizing and directing interfaith dialogue.¹⁶

One of these approaches involves:

- Bringing together influential religious leaders at the highest levels to collectively advocate for peace.
- Interfaith organizations comprised of influential members have taken on the role of mediators in conflicts between warring parties.
- Grassroots individuals from various religious backgrounds have united to foster cross-community engagement, aiming to empower participants as catalysts for reconciliation.

¹⁵ Allen D. Hertzke Religious Agency and the Integration of Marginalized People, Forthcoming in *Towards a Participatory Society: New Roads to Social and Cultural Integration*, edited by Pierpaolo Donati, Proceedings of the 2017 Plenary Session, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Vatican Press, Vatican City, 2018.

¹⁶ "Renee Garfinke" Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, "What works? Interfaith Dialogue Program"

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- The highlighting of theological and scriptural commonalities among conflicting religious groups has been used as a means to reduce hostility stemming from theological differences.
- Dialogue initiatives have been structured to facilitate conflict resolution, either as a means to halt ongoing conflicts or as a step towards reconciliation in post-conflict settings.
- Interfaith dialogue has been integrated into conflict resolution training, serving as a platform for diverse religious groups to engage constructively.

5.2.2. Embracing Diversity

Religious institutions can foster pluralism by wholeheartedly embracing the diversity within their own congregations. This entails warmly welcoming individuals from various backgrounds and acknowledging and appreciating the distinct contributions that each individual brings to the community. Establishing connections with individuals hailing from diverse cultures and viewpoints plays a pivotal role in wholeheartedly embracing diversity.

Religious congregations can actively promote this by engaging in deliberate outreach initiatives, which may encompass hosting cultural events, initiating multicultural ministries, or partnering with local organizations dedicated to marginalized communities. Participation in such activities enables us to engage in mutual learning about one another as individuals and nurtures a deeper understanding and respect for the rich tapestry of diversity within our community.¹⁷

¹⁷ “Melanie Young” Five ways School Can Embrace Religious Diversity in The Class Room. (**Melanie Young** co-leads the primary and secondary Interfaith Education Cohort with Matthew Segil. Melanie, a Philadelphia-based educator, founded Infinite Mind Tutors and Math Girl Movement. Before launching Infinite Mind Tutors, Melanie was a teacher and tutor in Philadelphia’s public schools for over nine years. During this time, she

Achieving this goal involves proactively searching for and appointing leaders who hail from various backgrounds, offering platforms for marginalized group members to express their viewpoints and experiences, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and fairness within the religious institutions. Make certain that the educational curriculum echoes the diversity present within the student population, encompassing various religions, cultures, and worldviews. This entails educating students about different religious practices, commemorating cultural festivities, and delving into a wide array of perspectives regarding significant societal matters.

In order to wholeheartedly embrace diversity, religious institutions must exert every effort to provide substantial support and resources to communities that have been marginalized. This encompasses the provision of counseling and support groups to individuals and families facing marginalization, extending financial aid to those who require it, and actively addressing systemic challenges such as poverty, discrimination, and disparities in access to education and healthcare.

5.2.3. Challenging Exclusivism

Exclusivism entails the conviction that only one's own religion leads to salvation, often posing a challenge to pluralism. Religious institutions can foster pluralism by actively questioning exclusivist beliefs and advocating for a more inclusive perspective. Pluralist viewpoints propose that multiple sets of beliefs or practices can coexist as valid, either in part or entirely, or alternatively, they contend that all beliefs, approached from a realist perspective, are inaccurate. Inclusivist stances occupy an intermediary

coached two NBA Math Hoops National Championship participants. She was awarded the Sixers Youth Foundation Game Changer Award in 2018 and the University of Pennsylvania Woman of Color Award in 2014.)

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position between exclusivism and pluralism, acknowledging the potential for multiple religious' traditions to possess truthful or effective aspects while maintaining that one particular tradition represents the most comprehensive expression of ultimate religious truth.

Inclusivists acknowledge that numerous religious traditions may excel in aspects of truth or salvation, but they maintain that one particular tradition surpasses others in accurately describing the objects of belief or the mechanisms of salvation. For instance, a Christian inclusivist might suggest that individuals who lead virtuous lives but are not Christians can still attain salvation, albeit they believe that such salvation ultimately derives from Jesus Christ.¹⁸

In essence, inclusivism can be seen as a more benevolent variation of exclusivism, although some exclusivists may consider it a form of pluralism in different clothing. Additionally, it's important to note that arguments related to beliefs (doctrinal matters) can be distinct from those regarding practices related to achieving salvation, and thus, one's stance on diversity of belief does not necessarily imply the same stance on diversity of religious practices, and vice versa.

Beyond exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, there are a couple of less frequently discussed positions on religious diversity that are worth mentioning briefly, even though two of them are not typically considered sophisticated options in philosophical dialogues about religious diversity. The first of these less common positions is relativism, which asserts that the validity of beliefs or the effectiveness of practices depends entirely on an

¹⁸ President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. For permissions please contact the Pluralism Project at (617) 496-2481 or staff@pluralism.org. For more resources and essays, please visit www.pluralism.org.

individual's religious perspective and the cultural environment they belong to.

Unlike the pluralist stance, relativism appears to inherently endorse an anti-realist perspective on religious truth. This would diminish the significance of religious pluralism as a subject in philosophical and theological discourse because religious truth claims would only hold sway or be disproven within the confines of their respective traditions.

5.3. Historical Influences

As religions began to be recognized alongside each other, the emergence of perspectives aligning with pluralism became apparent. In twelfth century Islamic In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, thinkers like Spinoza, Locke, Hume, and Voltaire introduced rational and naturalistic interpretations of religion while advocating for religious tolerance. Although these interpretations primarily focused on Christianity (and to a lesser extent, Judaism), they laid the groundwork for future pluralistic approaches to religion.¹⁹

While not the sole influential forerunners of post-Enlightenment pluralism, four notable approaches that deserve attention are those of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher. In each of these approaches, the diversity of religious traditions is perceived as not merely coincidental but, in some

¹⁹ Alston, William. "Religious Diversity and the Perceptual Knowledge of God." *Faith and Philosophy* 5.4 (1988): 433-448. Offers an exclusivist argument that it is not irrational to continue to form and hold socially established religious beliefs (that is, those belonging to this or that religious tradition), even though the fact of religious diversity (particularly epistemic conflict) may decrease confidence in one's beliefs.

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sense, inevitable, either due to inherent human limitations or the course of historical development.²⁰

5.3.1. Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant's philosophy of religion holds a crucial place in the evolution of religious pluralism, primarily due to its profound influence on John Hick, a prominent figure in contemporary responses to religious diversity (see below for Hick's position). Kant's philosophy does not explicitly advocate for religious pluralism, but it indirectly leads to such a position through his examination of rational religion and the distinction he draws between it and specific religious traditions. In his work "Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason" (1793), Kant contends that authentic religion is fundamentally rational, rooted in an individual's moral capacity.

Kant asserts that humans are fundamentally incapable of comprehending God's nature or even definitively determining God's existence, as he argues in the "Critique of Pure Reason." Nonetheless, Kant posits that the concept of God can and should serve as a morally guiding ideal. Similarly, Kant suggests that while existing religions, with their distinct sets of beliefs and practices, can be beneficial for the moral development of their respective communities, the rational ideal lies in an "invisible church" comprising individuals capable of leading autonomously moral lives. Thus, Kant's proposition is that there exists only one true religion, but there can be numerous forms of faith.

²⁰ Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Ed. Richard Crouter. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996. The influential account of religion that distinguishes it from both metaphysics and morality, and grounds it in an individual intuition of the absolute. The fifth and last speech concerns religious diversity; Schleiermacher argues that such diversity is necessary.

5.3.2. Friedrich Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher aligns with Kant in their shared belief that the essence of religion transcends the myriad forms of belief and practices found in different religious traditions. Both philosophers reject the notion that religion primarily involves adherence to specific dogmatic doctrines, and they do not assert that religion inherently makes metaphysical claims. However, Schleiermacher goes further by asserting that morality is not an inherent part of religion any more than metaphysics.

In his "Speeches on Religion," he asserts that religion primarily consists of intuition or sentiment, encompassing the entire universe as its object. In his later systematic theological work, he famously identifies this feeling as one of "absolute dependence," signifying that one's existence relies on something transcendent in some way.²¹

For Schleiermacher, religion is fundamentally an individual matter, and he acknowledges the possibility of living a deeply religious life without adhering to a specific religious tradition. Nevertheless, he recognizes that a strong consciousness of religious sentiment is often cultivated within a community, and within these communities, religious intuition is typically accompanied by metaphysical beliefs, moral guidelines, rituals, and more. These outward expressions of religion help individuals articulate and understand their own religious feelings.

Since historical religious forms stem from individuals' subjective experiences and Schleiermacher regards the object of these experiences as

²¹ Tracy, David. *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991. A hermeneutical approach to religious pluralism primarily from a Christian point of view, though it incorporates perspectives from other traditions.

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all-encompassing and infinite, he argues that a diverse array of religious traditions is inevitable. He even contends that this diversity is necessary to represent the infinite within the confines of human comprehensible forms. While he accords a special place to Christianity, Schleiermacher provides a framework for a kind of pluralism rooted in the concept of a universal form of intuition, minimizing the significance of metaphysical and moral claims in the foundation of religion.

6. Conclusion

Religious pluralism, as a comprehensive category encompassing philosophical and theological responses to the diversity of religious beliefs and practices, seeks to provide a framework for understanding and appreciating this diversity as a positive phenomenon. It aims to articulate ways in which differences in religious perspectives can be embraced and conflicts either resolved, explained, or constructively discussed.

The specific stances within pluralism can vary, depending on how one conceptualizes religion (whether as a set of beliefs, culturally constructed practices, or salvation-focused behavior) and the ultimate objectives of articulating such a position (such as refining philosophical definitions of religion or promoting social and political change as seen in liberation theology). Although differences exist in pluralist approaches within analytic and continental philosophy, there is also substantial common ground in the arguments put forth in these traditions. This article aimed to explore the intricate relationship between religious traditions and the contemporary ideals of postmodern society, shedding light on the diverse viewpoints and challenges encountered by different religions.

While postmodernism has contributed valuable insights, it has also faced criticism for its relativistic tendencies and the potential erosion of objective truth. Limitations and consequences related to this research are

postmodernism's denial of absolute truth can lead to a loss of distinctions in matters of religion and faith, culminating in a philosophy of religious pluralism that says no faith or religion is objectively true. Preaching the word of faith in the prescribed sense is required more than ever before due to the changes caused by revisiting and challenging the traditional concepts through the postmodern lens.