Freed by trust, to believe together: Pursuing global ecumenism with Küng and Tracy

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In the past decades it has emerged more clearly than before that Christian religion, which has so often contributed to human oppression, has rich theological resources that can be used to restore and perfect human freedom. These resources have been reflected upon not only by liberation theologians, but also within the ecumenically oriented theology of religions which targets what Hans Küng calls global responsibility based on global ethics. World religions have an essential role to play in rendering that global humanity more *humane* and free. The only way to accomplish this task leads through ongoing dialogue, directed both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, in the pursuit of a 'global ecumenism' which the present suggests and the future demands. For those liberating and unitive resources inherent in religious theory and praxis to be activated, fundamental trust in the reality of the world and of one's own self appears indispensable. By deepening the theological insights of Hans Küng and David Tracy, the article seeks to explore the mutual correlation between such fundamental trust in reality and religious faith in God, interpreted from a Christian perspective. Firstly, I probe the notion of fundamental trust from the existentialist and specifically Christian (theological) standpoints. Secondly, I examine both the positive and the negative consequences that fundamental (mis) trust may have for religiosity. Finally, the Christian interpretation of fundamental trust as correlated to faith in God is reflected upon in terms of global ecumenism and its response to the needs of our radically pluralistic moment.

You dare your Yes – and experience a meaning.
You repeat your Yes – and all things acquire a meaning.
When everything has a meaning, how can you live anything but a Yes? (Hammarskjöld 1964:110)

Introduction

In the past decades it has emerged more clearly than before that the Christian religion, which has so often contributed to human oppression, has rich theological resources that can be used to restore and perfect human freedom. These resources have been reflected upon not only by liberation theologians, but also within the ecumenically oriented theology of religions which targets what Hans Küng calls a global responsibility based on global ethics. World religions have an essential role to play in rendering a global humanity more *humane* and free. The only way to accomplish this task is through ongoing dialogue, directed both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, in the pursuit of what some authors label 'global ecumenism'.

For those liberating and unitive resources inherent in religious theory and praxis to be activated, a fundamental trust in the reality of the world and of one's own self appears indispensable. This article seeks to explore the mutual correlation between such fundamental trust in reality and religious faith in God, interpreted from a Christian perspective. Following David Tracy's use of the term, the 'mutual correlation' in question ought to be understood in the sense that fundamental trust constitutes both a prerequisite for and a realisation of a genuine religiosity and vice versa.

My investigation oscillates between the two pivotal sets of questions: those regarding the 'limit' meaning[1] and existential meaningfulness of a religious dimension (at large) to human life, and those regarding the meaning and meaningfulness of explicitly Christian language which, more or less successfully, embraces the former set of questions and reinterprets them in light of the Christ-event conceived as the primary analogue for the interpretation of the whole of reality. In writing this article I am also driven by the attempt to render explicit the religious and ecumenical potential (hitherto unrealised and unappropriated) of earlier, yet definitely not dated, theological

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1.For Tracy (1975) 'limit meaning' has to do with the 'limit-questions', that is, the questions provoked by 'limit-experiences' (or 'limit-situations'). Such 'limit-experiences' may basically take the form of either the 'boundary-situations' of guilt, anxiety, suffering, and the recognition of death as one's own destiny, or 'ecstatic experiences' of intense joy, love, gratitude, et cetera (Jaspers 1967). Generally speaking, Christian theology interprets the former as the existential manifestations of the universal need of redemption and the latter as encounters with the final dimension of human existence, as glimpses of grace (Tracy 1975:105–106). The limit meaning thus comprehended discloses to us our basic existential trust or mistrust in life's very meaningfulness.

considerations of Hans Küng and David Tracy, who are my guides on that journey.[2]

Firstly, I probe the notion of fundamental trust from the existentialist and specifically Christian (theological) standpoints. Secondly, I examine both the positive and the negative consequences that fundamental (mis)trust may have for religiosity. Finally, the Christian interpretation of fundamental trust as correlated to faith in God is reflected upon in terms of global ecumenism and its response to the needs of our radically pluralistic moment.

Fundamental trust: *Freedom from and freedom for*

According to Küng, fundamental trust means that I, in principle, say 'Yes' to the uncertain reality of my own existence and of the world: I believe that reality sustains me, as long as I let myself be sustained, and thereby I commit myself to it and rely on it, allowing it to gradually unfold its meaning. Fundamental trust thus comprehended is opposed to the nihilistic 'No' *vis-à-vis* reality as a whole, a basic mistrust which makes life grow stale. In light of that alternative, the liberating force of trust is fully exposed. It delivers a person from the threat of non-being, from the fear that chaos, absurdity, illusion, sickness, evil and death will prevail in the end, from lapsing into despair and isolation. Freedom brought about by trust can be also described in positive terms, as freedom *for*. The liberating act of trusting in reality enables one to discover identity, meaningfulness, order and unity where otherwise chaos, absurdity, randomness and disunion would pose a threat. Unlike mistrust, fundamental trust is rationally justifiable. However, analogically to other basic experiences such as love and hope, the justification of one's 'Yes' to reality is not supported by any external rationality; it becomes apparent only in its realisation, through practice of fundamental trust to which there is always the alternative of fundamental mistrust. Whether we repeat after Sartre that we are 'condemned' to freedom (Sartre 1948:34) or follow Christian existentialists who prefer to see the human person as being 'called' to freedom, the fact remains that we are not free just for the sake of being free. It is impossible to remain undecided in regard to reality, to hover between nihilism and non-nihilism. In this 'vote of confidence', lack of choice is itself a choice: abstention means refusal of trust.

It should also be emphasised that the fundamental decision cannot be made once and for all but must be taken up again in every new situation. Far from being equivalent to credulity or uncritical optimism, fundamental trust is being tested in the fire of one's daily experience. To paraphrase Dostoevsky (2007:721), one's confidence in reality cannot be childish but must be tried in the crucible of doubt, that is, revised, sustained, endured and consistently maintained in practice against all pressing perplexities. Sometimes it

2.In both Küng and Tracy, a subtle but visible shift has occurred from Christian systematic/ fundamental reflection to theologising about other religions and 'functionalising' them in a Christian topography of universal religious reality. Major works characteristic of that latter phase were published by both authors between the late 1970s and early 1990s. Küng took another step in that direction in his latest contributions to the concept and praxis of a global ethics.

requires heroic courage, at other times simply patience. Only through this ongoing effort, despite constantly experienced nullity, disunion, meaninglessness and worthlessness, can reality become apparent to a person as real, as one, as true and as good. Put differently, trust in the uncertain reality does not eliminate its radical uncertainty. Nihilism, though *factually* overcome by fundamental trust, is not overcome *in principle*. The basic riddle of reality: 'To be or not to be?', which entails vital questions about the whence and whither of humankind, persists. It cannot be ultimately addressed unless from a truly transcendent perspective. 'On the plane of the linear, horizontal, purely human alone' – Küng (1980:488) points out – 'no truly qualitative assent to a really different dimension seems possible: *without genuine transcendence, there is no genuine transcending.*'

Trust in reality *in need of transcendence*

Even the atheist or agnostic can have a genuine fundamental trust in reality provided he or she is not content with 'one-dimensionality', but is seeking (even if unconsciously) another dimension of life by transcending the present in the pursuit of a 'wholly other'. Existentialist thinkers – regardless of their attitude to religion – agree that the final 'horizon of our own situation is neither one of our own making nor one under our control' (Tracy 1975:107). However, this elusive dimension cannot become the actual ground for our trust unless it is named and addressed not as 'it', but as 'thou', to use Buber's (1937) famous distinction. Only when referred to as 'thou', the final dimension, the 'Ground of Being' (Tillich 1951:64), reveals itself as a personlike yet transpersonal power of unbounded love that both accepts trust and bestows it. Thus 'situations wherein a human being ineluctably finds manifest a certain ultimate limits … to his or her existence' (Tracy 1975:105) disclose not only the inevitability of a fundamental decision in regard to reality, but also the properly religious horizon to our experience, that is, the inevitability of a fundamental decision in regard to God.

What is then, the nature of the relationship between fundamental trust and trust in God?[3]

First of all, it is the uncertainty of reality itself that raises the first and last questions about the conditions of the possibility of trust in God, as it does in regard to fundamental trust (Küng 1980:574). Insofar as the fundamental trust in reality, made possible by reality itself, leads to and finds its fulfilment in trust in God, such trust can be adequately described as a 'gift'. If I commit myself trustingly to reality and to my own existence *as given to me*, I get them back filled with meaning and value (Küng 1980:451–452). The same applies to freedom: Disclosed to the self, it never reaches the heights of Romantic and existentialist self-creation, but when accepted as a fruit of one's trustful relationship with God, it appears as a gift to the self-transcending self (Tracy 1981:433). In a

3.For the sake of a clearer presentation of parallels between the two concepts in question, what is more commonly referred to as 'belief' or 'faith' in God in that section will be called 'trust in God' (cf. Küng 1980:473, 570).

sense, God is also the 'guarantor of the rationality of human reason' (Küng 1980:574), of that 'intrinsic rationality' which is in charge in all our doubting and thinking, intuitions and deductions alike. Thus, like fundamental trust, so too, trust in God is by no means irrational, but – quite the opposite – it constitutes the super rational ground for all rationality. Moreover, even though fundamental trust itself can be the basis of an autonomous morality, the objective categoricity of moral commands requires reference to the Unconditioned which alone can impose an unconditional obligation, and to the Absolute which alone can be absolutely binding.[4] As with fundamental trust, so too, with the question of God, not to choose is in fact a choice: a person who does not – at least factually – affirm God, denies him (Küng 1980:570). Like trust in reality, so too, trust in God can prove reasonable and meaningful not in advance – in virtue of a demonstration, nor yet only afterward, but by the very 'practice'. It is only in the accomplishment of boldly trusting in God's reality, despite all temptations to doubt, that one experiences the reasonableness of one's trust in both reality and God (Küng 1980:573–574). Lastly, like trust in reality, so too, trust in God cannot be grasped once and for all, but must constantly be freshly realised.

At this intersection, the mutual correlation between trust in reality and trust in God becomes apparent. Only when I confidently commit myself to reality, will reality itself lay open to me its primary ground, deepest support and ultimate goal – what believers call 'God'. Unless I commit myself trustingly to God (as the primal source, primal meaning and primal value of all that is) my trust in reality cannot be ultimately justified. On the one hand, God alone can provide the final response to the radical uncertainty of reality, but on the other hand, God's existence cannot be assumed other than in a trust rooted in reality itself.[5] Thus the affirmation of God rests, in the last resort, on a *decision* which is organically connected with the fundamental decision for reality as a whole. What is more, nothing except trust in God can evoke from universal trust its deeply liberating power, for only the bond to the 'Infinite' offers radical freedom in the face of all that is finite (Küng 2001:53). Precisely in this way the *humanum* is not negated, but definitely affirmed and transcended by being seen to be grounded in the *divinum* (Küng 2001:87). Thus, despite essential discrepancies, from the formal point of view fundamental trust and trust in God not only display an analogous structure but also supplement each other.

Negatively speaking, fundamental trust, in principle, does not have to lead to trust in God. But if it factually and stubbornly refuses to open itself to the possibility of addressing the final dimension of reality as 'thou', it condemns itself ipso facto to superficiality. Even if it does not lack all rationality,

4. Thus ethics based solely on trust in reality, though possible, cannot offer unconditionally binding, universal norms (cf. Küng 2001:87, 1980:468–472).

5. Küng makes it clear that the existence of God can be assumed 'not strictly in virtue of a proof or indication of pure reason (natural theology), not unconditionally in virtue of the moral postulate of practical reason (Kant), not exclusively in virtue of the biblical testimony (dialectical theology), but only in *a trust rooted in reality itself*' (Küng 1980:569–570).

it certainly lacks a 'radical rationality', which tends to be disguised by a rationalistic but essentially irrational trust in human reason (Küng 1980:571). The denial of God implies either a nihilistic fundamental mistrust in regard to reality or an ultimately *unjustified* fundamental trust in reality. What is meant by the latter case is that a person who ultimately denies God does not know *why* he or she ultimately trusts in reality. In other words, 'atheism cannot suggest any condition for the possibility of uncertain reality' (Küng 1980:571).

Finally, one cannot forget that from the material point of view there is a major difference between trust in reality and trust in God. Whilst fundamental trust is related to the world and to one's own existence, trust in God is related to the primal ground, primal support and primal goal of reality as such. Put simply, uncertain reality is itself not God. For that very reason the grounding reality of the world and human person appear itself to be ultimately groundless, its unity is repeatedly threatened by disunion, its meaningfulness by meaninglessness, and its value by worthlessness. That is also why, in the last analysis, the question of God involves a decision that must be faced on a deeper level than the decision for or against reality as such (Küng 1980:570). The theological ramifications of both the essential complementarity and equally essential disproportion between these two decisions are highly significant. It is to this question that I now turn.

Fundamental trust reinterpreted theologically

It has been admitted above that belief in God is, in a sense, identical to the ultimately justified fundamental trust in reality as a whole. However, before exploring the positive implications of that claim with regard to religious faith as such and global ecumenism in particular, a theologically critical caveat should be taken into account.

With Bonhoeffer and liberation theologians, we must be ready to unmask the ever-present temptation to replace the spiritual fruits of God's kenosis in the Christ-event with a 'cheap grace', that is, 'all too easy continuities and relaxed similarities between Christianity and culture, between God and the human, God and world' (Tracy 1981:417). If we want to protect both fundamental trust and religious faith from all-too-canny univocity and an unreal coalescence, which are likely to lend themselves too easily to liberal (a-traditional) and reductionist (horizontal) theologies, then we have to allow ourselves to be transformed and, if necessary, corrected by the defamiliarising force of the judging and liberating word from God (Tracy 1981:433). Only by fixing our eyes on the always-already, not-yet event of Jesus Christ, considered as the 'water-mark' of creation and the centre of human history (Von Balthasar 1997:108), we can prevent fundamental trust from deteriorating into a manifestation of a 'cheap grace' and reality itself from deteriorating into an 'idol'. What follows is that any theologically valid interpretation of the correlation between fundamental trust and faith in God must be, in essence, Christological.

Tracy interprets the task of theology in terms of mutually critical correlations between the Christ-event and our own situation, neither of which can be 'accessed' otherwise than through interpretation (Tracy 1981:406). Apart from historically and culturally changeable circumstances, our 'situation' includes existential constants inherent in the human condition. Amongst them is the experience of one's own contingency and impermanence in the face of uncertain reality; this experience can be transcended, though never definitively (once and for all) overcome, by fundamental trust. Analogically, as far as the 'event' is concerned, in the new reality initiated by Christ's Passover the human person is redeemed – though never *automatically*, that is, against her will – by trust in God: first Christ's trust and then ours (or rather ours *as possible only* because of and through his). Thus whilst fundamental trust *rescues* humanity from the threat of nothingness and chaos, trust in God – as exemplified and ultimately realised in the Christ-event – rescues it from entanglement in its own sinfulness and deadly isolation. Both kinds of trust bring meaning where otherwise absurdity would thrive. And yet a transition between the existential and the religious dimensions is anything but obvious.

From the Christian perspective, a possible bridge is provided by the reality of grace. For myself – Tracy (1981) says:

> the overwhelming reality disclosed in the originating event of Jesus Christ is none other than grace itself. From the first glimmers of that graciousness in the uncanny limit-questions of our situation through the amazing grace disclosed in all explicitly religious experiences to that decisive representation of the pervasive always-already, not-yet graciousness disclosed in the event of Jesus Christ, grace prevails for the Christian as the central clue to the nature of all reality. (p. 430)

Thus both fundamental trust and religious faith are accounted for by the all-pervasive grace of the constitutive event, which persists in spite of the ever-present experience of meaninglessness and suffering endured by human beings from the beginning of history until our day, with its own demonic outbursts of anti-Spirit and the realities of alienation and oppression (Tracy 1981:430). Faith disclosed in the fundamental trust that we live in the everyday by going on at all is thereby organically connected with 'that trust disclosed decisively in the revelation of the graciousness of God and the graced reality of self and world in the event of Jesus Christ' (Tracy 1981:430). This correlation is expressed by the reciprocally liberating relation between trust and faith. On the one hand, the experience of grace as giftedness liberates the self to appropriate as one's own the fundamental trust, which is the first experience of that gift, and which – when thus liberated – turns out to be a trust in the radical immanence of God in all reality (Tracy 1981:432). On the other hand, the gift of trust in reality as a whole illuminates one's faith in God as revealed in the Christ-event and frees it to be shared with others whose faiths – as different (and sometimes, indeed, opposed to one's own faith) as they are – appear to be rooted in the same fundamental trust.

Against Barthian theology, Küng seems to go even farther by asserting that faith in God is not exclusively possible because of the revelatory testimony of the Bible, but also on the strength of a fundamental trust in reality which – through God's revelation and grace – may be elevated and transformed into a belief in God (Küng 1988:203). Grounded in reality itself and responsible in the eyes of reason, such a trust can be thus interpreted as a key factor in both theology of religions and interfaith dialogue. It seems reasonable to assume that for Küng, whilst the internal dynamics of a 'nameless' fundamental trust potentially opens a person to transcendence which can be addressed as 'thou', it does not determine the 'name' of God who is encountered on that journey.[6] *Then what does?* – we might ask. Perhaps the mere 'situation', the cultural context in which the believer-in-making appropriates fundamental trust as his or her own, that is, begins to experience it in terms of a personal relationship.[7] Perhaps also the way in which he or she responds to these first glimmers of grace being at work 'in the uncanny limit-questions of our situation' (Tracy 1981:430). Anyone who responsibly labels himself or herself a 'Christian theologian' does so because they have acknowledged the decisive manifestation of that universal grace in the name and the face of Jesus. As for Küng, ecumenically minded as he is, he does not explicitly compromise the uniqueness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ; instead, he qualifies it *relationally* by suggesting that however numerous the paths of salvation are and however much truth can be seen in detail in the world religions, *for Christians* the Christ-event – known and accepted in faith – constitutes *the way* to truth about God and communion with him (Küng 1980:627).[8]

Can we then, as Christians, *put our trust in fundamental trust*, as a correlate of all genuine religiosity, regardless of its particular religious correlate? To answer that question credibly let's now examine the aspects of religiosity born from fundamental trust as opposed to that born from fundamental mistrust.

Religiosity born from (mis)trust

To talk about religiosity, that is, the quality of being religious, one must first realise that it is only *in the religions* that we really find 'religion'; thus we cannot speak about religiosity in isolation from the actual world religions, as diverse as they are (Küng 2008:96). At the same time, however – in spite of all the striking discrepancies we find at every step whilst comparing the understandings of self, salvation-enlightenment and Ultimate Reality in different religious traditions as well as their manifold religious praxes – there is something about all of them that allows us to label each

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6. Küng certainly does not succumb to the temptations of a 'lazy pluralism' à *la* John Hick, which simply reduces the Gods of different religions to the 'Ultimate Reality'. He makes it clear, instead, that the understanding of God on the part of the religions as a whole is definite but not coherent (*it is impossible to believe in all gods at the same time*) (cf. Küng 1980:626).

7. In this regard, Buddhism as well as certain monistic traditions of Hinduism, with their impersonal and often purely negative understanding of the Absolute, do not yield to that generalised description and thus would require a more nuanced approach.

8. 'If as a Christian (and as a theologian) I look upon Christianity *from within* – as every non-Christian does with his or her own religion ... what is at stake here for me is *the truth, my faith*, not a general, but an existential truth ... In this sense, there is for me – as for all other believers – only *one true religion*' (Küng 1988:249). One may wonder if the somewhat artificial distinction between the 'outside' and the 'inside' perspectives (Küng 2001:99) offers anything more than a 'conceptual getaway'. In any case, it is precisely this distinction that helps Küng to preserve, the dialectical tension between his Christian universalism and a postulated global ecumenism.

'religion'. As a 'fundamental pattern', a transcendentally grounded and immanently operative system of coordinates, by which one orients oneself intellectually, emotionally and existentially, each religion promises to lead the person beyond the limits of human subjectivity and the relativity of human history into *true reality* (the Absolute, God, nirvāna). It does so by establishing a social and individual relationship, vitally realised in a tradition and community, with that utterly final reality which always transcends or encompasses all that is human and earthly (Küng 1980:609).

I suggest that a religion cannot perform its function properly, that is, it cannot communicate a 'specific depth-dimension, and all-embracing horizon of meaning, even in the face of suffering, injustice, guilt and meaninglessness, and also a last meaning of life even in the face of death' (Küng 2001:54) unless it is rooted in fundamental trust in reality. In other words, I am not capable of fully entering this particular social realisation of a relationship to an absolute ground of meaning without welcoming reality as a whole, which – unless trustingly accepted – cannot 'refer' me to its primal ground, primal support and primal goal. The uncertain reality to which I completely close my mind, rather than allowing it to reveal its final horizon to me, shows me only that which is chaotic, absurd and illusive. To reality thus perceived I will surely say 'No'; and even if I say 'Yes', I cannot ultimately justify why I do so. None of these two attitudes enables me to become a truly religious person. However, as Küng holds, by our very nature we are inclined not to the 'No' but to the 'Yes', since reality itself – its identity, orderliness, meaningfulness and value – is thrust on each of us (Küng 1980:445–446). If that is the case, then it can be maintained that the human person as such is *by nature* a *homo religiosus*. The other side of the correlation in question becomes visible in the very structure of religious language as disclosive of the reassurance that the final reality of our lives is in fact trustworthy. Religious language in general re-presents that basic confidence in existence as our utterly authentic mode of being in the world (Tracy 1975:134). A reasonable trust in reality appears thereby as the central content of religion: both as fundamental trust with regard to uncertain reality and as a personal trust in God understood as the all-embracing, all-penetrating last and first Reality (Küng 2001:45).

And yet even an individual or group that fail to root their religiosity in fundamental trust may continue to function *religiously* in a social framework, preserving the appearances of 'religiosity' in the proper sense of the term. In such a context, religious perversions present in all spiritual traditions without exception can and should be distinguished from a 'principled religiosity', a 'genuine religiosity' which – far from being an elusive ideal – is also instantiated in all the world religions without exception.

How to distinguish a 'true' religiosity from a 'false' one, a 'wholesome' religiosity from an 'unwholesome' one? The clearest criterion we have at our disposal is that of its social and cultural implications. A genuine religiosity born from liberating trust finds its fulfilment in prophetic action aimed at social and political liberation of human realities. Religious

belief and practice that stem from fundamental mistrust in reality, on the other hand, are likely to lapse into either indifferentism or fundamentalism – the first of which has nothing to contribute to human culture, the second of which leads to an exclusivist ghetto mentality and the isolation of a religious group from the wider society.

Even though it cannot account for all the highs and lows of religious theory and praxis, based on the criterion of fundamental (mis)trust as both a foundation and fruit of religiosity, it is nonetheless possible to distinguish between what is basically good and bad, true and false, in particular religious beliefs and attitudes (Küng 2001:90). Küng offers the following three characteristics of a 'true religiosity', which seem needed in our day more than ever before (Küng 1996:283).

Religiosity with a foundation, but without fundamentalism

In the Christian perspective, a 'foundation' means first and foremost the all-pervading trust in and faithfulness to that oldest and briefest confession of faith in the New Testament: *Iesous Kyrios*. Jesus alone is the Christ of God and thus the normative and definitive revelation of God's salvific will in regard to humankind (Küng 2001:99). As emphasised by Tracy, this foundation has two sides. On the one hand, without a focus upon the person of Jesus, the Christ-event can lose its decisiveness by quietly disowning its distinctively Christian identity.[9] On the other hand, without the paradigmatic focus upon the present, mediated experience of the Christ-event as decisive manifestation, proclamation and action, 'every christology is in danger of becoming either a Jesusology or a supernaturalist mythology' (Tracy 1981:428). Christian fundamentalism, in turn, stems from the basic mistrust with regard to the world and thus from the essential misunderstanding (or ignorance) of the fact that the entire creation has been redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ's Passover.[10] Those who are driven by such mistrust retreat into the righteous purity of a siege mentality. The truth on which they claim to have a monopoly, sets them free from the world but never for its sake. Religious fundamentalists, traditionalists and dogmatists need not trouble with a 'messy pluralism' as they build their righteous worlds unsullied by the 'invincible ignorance' of the alien others (Tracy 1981:451). Needless to say the collapse of such a religious fundamentalism is not the end of religion, but rather (at least potentially) the condition for its proper beginning.

Religiosity with certainty of truth, but without fanaticism

In his quest for a theologically responsible way which would allow Christians to accept the truth of other religions without giving up their own identity, Küng rejects three

9. That is precisely what happened in the case of John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, where the Christ-event became purely metaphorical (Hick 1995:58).

10. From the Johannine perspective, trust in reality ('the world') and trust in God may seem to be at odds, if not simply contradictory. However, one must remember that John's condemnation of 'the world' is not a value judgement upon it. It is rather a theological statement reflexive of Johannine cosmology which identifies 'the world' with that sphere of reality which rejects Jesus and is essentially hostile to his followers.

common strategies which can be adopted towards the question of truth, namely the 'fortress strategy' which leads to exclusivism, the strategy of 'playing down differences' which results in relativistic pluralism, and a kind of 'conquest through embrace' which finds its expression in inclusivism (Küng 2001:78–81). The only space for the growth of a sane religiosity, capable of respecting the truth of others and yet faithful to its own, lies between fanaticism for truth and forgetfulness of truth. Küng (2001) says that:

> Blind fanaticism for the truth has at all times and in all … religions brought unbridled violation and murder. Conversely, forgetfulness of the truth, lack of orientation, and loss of norms have meant that many people no longer believe in anything. (p. 78)

Fanaticism for a particular religious truth usually stems from, or at least coincides with, a deep mistrust in regard to all other truths. In contrast, the certainty of truth, built upon trust in the divine revealer of that truth, frees the believer from suspicion and fear of the 'other'. In addition, for Christians, the nature of the revealed truth – the one God disclosed fully in Jesus Christ – is such that it de facto excludes any claims to 'possessing the whole truth'. Inherent in Christian revelation is the belief that only God alone has the whole truth for only God himself *is* the truth (Küng 1988:255).[11] In this sense, Christians do not believe in Christianity but in God who emptied himself for the sake of all in Jesus' cross. Whilst from the objective standpoint no religion has the whole truth,[12] for the believer who has affirmed a particular religious truth *from within*, with ultimate existential seriousness, there is only one true religion.[13] Lastly, if trust in one's religious truth is not to deteriorate into naïve credulity, it must be kept in mind that boundaries between truth and untruth pass also *through* one's own religion (Küng 1988:238).[14]

Religiosity with religious identity, but without exclusivity

In the same vein, Küng discards both arrogant absolutism, not accepting any other claim, and a weak eclecticism accepting a little of everything, for the sake of an 'inclusive Christian universalism claiming for Christianity, not exclusiveness, but certainly uniqueness' (Küng 2008:112). The difficult *via media* leads then between the extreme of a narrow-minded, conceited dogmatism, which sees its own truth as detached from the truth of the others, and that of an arbitrary and irresponsible syncretism which relativises all truth and nonchalantly equates all values and standards. Again, what underlies the absolutist aspirations of a religion which claims an exclusive mission and despises the freedom of the others, is not only a lack of trust in the genuineness of the religious attitudes represented by people of other faiths, but ultimately

also a lack of trust in regard to one's own faith. A narrow-minded particularism which condemns the other religions in toto, often followed by a proselytism, which carries on unfair competition and takes too restricted a view not only of the religions but also of the gospel, can be thus seen as an 'argument of force' on the part of those whose faith is, in fact, weak and superficial (Küng 2008:111).

Religiosity with unity-in-difference, but without univocity

A closer look at trends prevailing in the Christian theology of religions makes one realise that what poses perhaps the most urgent challenge today is the problem of 'religiosity *without religious identity*'. Hence my fourth proposal aimed at complementing Küng's perspective. An agnostic-relativistic pluralism, often lapsing into a sort of indifferentism, approves and confirms all the religions indiscriminately and exempts them from criticism, without calling attention to the presence (in all of them) of the untruth despite all the truth. However liberating and creative of happiness it seems at first, the syncretist mingling of traditions and creeds that has abandoned all firm standards and norms sooner or later becomes painfully monotonous (Küng 2008:112). It seems that a 'lazy pluralism', so persistent in our day, finds a fertile ground in the experience of an *ultimately unjustified fundamental trust in reality*, a kind of 'nameless trust' which either refrains from addressing the transcendent-immanent horizon of human existence as 'thou' or addresses it univocally rather than analogically. Only 'transcendence with a name' (YHWH for Jews, Jesus Christ for Christians, Allah for Muslims, etc.), insofar as it is accepted trustingly in faith, 'equips' the religious believer with a profound sense of identity which opposes a 'cheap tolerance'. Similarly, only a theology of religions based on an analogical imagination (and thereby capable of identifying inter-religious similarities-in-difference) can effectively face a degenerated liberalism that feeds on a deceptively univocal, instead of analogical, interpretation of all the religions.[15] Without affirming God one does not know *why* one can trust reality. Unlike atheism, be it open or 'in disguise' (i.e. agnosticism), belief in God is nourished by an ultimately justified fundamental trust and thus displays a radical rationality, which should never be confused with rationalism (Küng 1980:572). Perhaps this profoundly rational aspect of Christian religion – so prominent in the Catholic intellectual tradition and in the work of the great apologists of the last century, G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis – is precisely what must be restored to the awareness of Christian theologians in order to resist a 'relaxed pluralism of privacies' (Tracy 1981:451) that approves and endorses without differentiation both one's own and the other religions and thus leads to what Marcuse (1969) called a 'repressive tolerance'.[16]

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11. 'The only absolute in world history is the Absolute itself' (Küng 1988:251).

12. 'Whoever thinks he can float above everything and judge it, will easily melt his waxen wings, as Icarus once did, in the sun of truth' (Küng 1988:249–250).

13. Cf. footnote 7.

14. For Küng's proposal on a 'general ethical criterion', a 'general religious criterion', and a 'specifically Christian criterion' of religion's truthfulness and goodness (cf. Küng 2001:81–105, 1988:247–250).

15. For example, John Hick (1989:240) argues that all great traditions seem to occasion a radical turn from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. Whilst this 'turn' in itself can be indeed considered as a uniting principle or common denominator of all great religions, Hick seems to ignore the fact that the differences present at every step, in these different 'turns', make any attempt at univocity unreasonable (cf. Tracy 1991:100).

16. That is a kind of tolerance wherein anyone can say anything because no one, finally, is taken seriously.

Erikson (1980:64–65) describes three distinct possible relationships between fundamental trust and faith: (1) a fundamental trust that comes from religious faith; (2) a fundamental trust without religious faith; and (3) a religious faith without fundamental trust. There is no reason why we should not reverse the first proposition: (4) a religious faith that comes from fundamental trust. Possibilities (1) and (4) constitute a positive expression of the mutual correlation between fundamental trust and religious faith, whereas possibilities (2) and (3) witness to the shortcomings of both trust, which remains closed to a 'transcendence with a name' and thereby essentially deficient, and faith which, built upon fundamental mistrust (or ultimately unjustified trust) in reality, likely lapses into some sort of religious fundamentalism or relativism.[17]

There are millions who profess faith, but in practice mistrust both the world and humanity. In the face of religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, exclusivity and (apparently the most innocent) univocity – all still too persistent in our day – we might repeat the call phrased by Küng (1991:24) at a UNESCO[18] conference held in Paris in 1991: 'Our religions must put a stop to these perversions of Religion!' A religiosity stemming from and resulting in the fundamental trust in reality – also the reality of one's fellow-believers belonging to other religious traditions – promises, restores and liberates a 'dimension to our lives which we can destroy only at the unwelcome price of self-deception and human impoverishment' (Tracy 1975:135).

Towards a global ecumenism, *trustingly*

As early as in the 1980s, Küng heralded the slow awakening of global ecumenical consciousness and welcomed the beginning of a serious religious dialogue (Küng *et al.* 1986:xv). In his more recent reflection this appears as a *sine qua non* condition of the future 'universal civilization' (Küng 2000:229–230). The post-modern paradigm embodies what Schillebeeckx (1989:318) called 'the cry for the humane'. To respond to it adequately, spiritual *interpenetration* aimed at mutual enrichment and transformation of all the religious believers is required (Küng 1989:452). If a global humanity is to emerge from our pluralistic present, the 'kairotic event of an ecumenical spirit' (Tracy 1981:425) must take hold in all religious theory and praxis. Both our present situation and Christian faith demand it: *condemned to dialogue* as humans living in the 21st century, we also find ourselves *called to dialogue* as Christians. By now it is evident to every responsibly thinking theologian that Christian theology can no longer confine its attention to Christianity alone. As Tracy (1981) puts it:

> theology of the future cannot afford the traditional luxury of first interpreting Christianity and then quickly noticing and even more rapidly interpreting, via principles of Christian self-understanding, the 'other religions'. (p. 449)

In positive terms, it means that by analogically reaching out to the hard concreteness of the other religious believers – and not otherwise – we, as Christians, will find that we arrive where we began 'only to know the place for the first time' (Eliot 1942:IV.5.28–29). Though no religious tradition must abandon its particular *genius* whilst engaging in inter-religious dialogue, each religion must recognise that the reality of self-exposure to the other is a condition for the possibility of authentic conversation in our day (Tracy 1981:446–448). To give this claim a more concrete shape, one must ask what kind of Christian theology will serve the purpose of a global ecumenism.

Tracy insists that, first of all, we must reflect upon pluralism within the Christian tradition in order to reflect upon pluralism amongst the religious traditions. The fact that the history of Christianity discloses the reality of pluralism in the situational analyses of theology bears its own clues for our radically pluralistic present. If those clues are kept in view, the 'possibilities of approaching the conversation among the religious traditions through the use of an analogical imagination may prove real' (Tracy 1981:448–449). In the same vein, Küng (1988:227) reminds that the church's *ecumene* proves an integral part of the world *ecumene*.[19] A truly ecumenical theology must lay aside the still widespread denominational ghetto mentality for the sake of being capable of reaching out to those outside the church and 'blending' what is universally religious and what is simply human, with the task of elaborating what is specifically Christian (Küng 1988:200).[20] Theology able to answer to the needs of our radically pluralistic moment must, therefore, stem from an analogical – not univocal – imagination, wherein the dissimilarities are as important as the similarities-in-difference (Tracy 1981:447). Küng (1988) thus recapitulates what is required of Christian theology in terms of its attitude toward the world religions:

> Instead of indifferentism, for which everything is all the same, somewhat more *indifference* towards supposed orthodoxy, which makes itself the measure of the salvation or perdition of mankind [*sic*], and wants to enforce its claim to truth with the tools of power and compulsion; instead of relativism, for which there is no absolute, more sense of *relativity* toward all human establishing of absolutes, which hinder productive co-existence between the different religions, and more sense of *relationship*, which lets every religion appear in the fabric of its interconnections; instead of syncretism, where everything possible and impossible is mixed and fused together, more will to achieve a *synthesis* in the face of all denominational and religious antagonisms, which are still exacting a daily price in blood and tears, so that *peace* may reign between religions, instead of war, hatred, and strife. (pp. 236–237)

What is beyond doubt is that only a *theologia semper reformanda*, a theology that recognises the need for an ongoing self-reform, can meet the requirements of a global ecumenism emerging from those considerations (Küng 1988:182). Such a theology

17.Whilst the former perverts and trivialises the question of truth, the latter no longer even dares to ask that question.

18.United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

19.'Ecumenism *ad intra*, concentrated on Christendom, and ecumenism *ad extra*, oriented to the whole inhabited earth, are interdependent' (Küng 1988:227–228).

20.In this context, Tracy stresses the necessity for corroborative practices amongst theologians themselves and for new interdisciplinary methods in theology (Tracy 1981:448).

demands a continuous rethinking of the representative character of christological language aimed at assuring both its fidelity to our common experience and to the primary Christian scriptural meanings (Tracy 1975:218–219). Such theology is also impossible without conceptually coherent and existentially meaningful *new* theological interpretations of God.

As insisted on by Nathan Crawford (2010:309), in our postmodern context theology, instead of attempting to put God within totalities or systematisations, must focus on the 'fragment' through which God reveals himself 'as infinite within the world through the breaking of the whole'.[21] God's reality thus disclosed in the always-already, not-yet event of Jesus Christ undoes at the core any:

> claims to gnosis, any temptations to triumphalism, any refusals of self-exposure, any complacency in ourselves as graced … any flight into sentimental notions of love untouched by the passion for justice. (Tracy 1981:430)

Perhaps the strongest impulse to move into that direction is provided today by the realisation of the *fragmentary* character of the Christian formulations regarding God, as seen against the background of God's infinitely richer, multifaceted self-revelation in all the world religions. Only when considered in such a way – that is, as a 'fragment' of the infinite and ungraspable totality of God's self-disclosure to the world, the specifically Christian *reading* of revelation can claim its due significance and uniqueness. Only then the autonomy of each religion will be respected because each religion will be expected to continue, indeed, to intensify a journey into its own particularity. Only then will the search for real similarities-in-difference and genuine dissimilarities, the search for correlates, contraries, and contradictions amongst the focal meanings of diverse religious traditions occur (Tracy 1981:449).

Kierkegaard (1967:450) points out that it is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But philosophers tend to forget the other proposition, namely that it must be lived forwards. To paraphrase his dictum in our own context we might say that, as Christian theologians, we are meant to continuously deepen the understanding of our particularities, to understand them, as it were, *backwards*. At the same time, however, we must allow ourselves to be informed and transformed through dialogue with the representatives of other religious traditions, that is, pursue the unity-in-difference, and live our common experience, as 'people of faith', *forwards.* That is precisely what Tracy (1981:451) means by saying that the route to the future concreteness of the whole – a truly global humanity – lies through the concreteness of each particularity.

To think through the implications of a fragmentary Christian theology that uses the notion of the Infinite when referring

to God (and thus confirms the fragmentariness of its own *logos* for *theos*) Crawford proposes to conceive of theology as improvisation. A model of a formless form that he finds in improvisational music results in the series of insightful parallels between the musician and the theologian, both of whom negotiate the apparent impossibility due to their finite attempts aimed at dealing with the infinite, and both of whom translate their respective 'traditions' into a new idiom, thus opening them to an endless process of interpretation. What I am suggesting here is that improvisation, as a form that opens into the formless, not only allows theology to be true to the form of God as infinite, but also enables the theologian to rethink and rediscover his or her own tradition in new ways outside of the static possibilities inherent in that tradition, namely, by means of 'improvising' upon it, using possibilities inherent in other religious traditions. In other words, theology as improvisation should be able to open up the Christian *reading* of revelation to its inherent possibilities and bring out those possibilities anew in our pluralistic context by 'grooving' with the other, by finding a rhythm with the other in genuine dia-logue.[22]

Needless to say in our day inter-religious dialogue must be taken for granted as a necessary religious and intellectual praxis for all Christian theologians who aspire to address not only the *ecclesia* and the *academia*, but also the world (Tilley 2013:22). To build upon Crawford's musical metaphors, we might say that whilst inter-religious dialogue constitutes one of the quintessential themes in Christian theology today, fundamental trust can be considered a 'key' in which the symphony of all the religions is to be performed.

As a vital act of existence and freedom, the fundamental decision in regard to the world and one's own self makes its mark on all particular acts and attitudes of a person and gives them meaning. In the context of religious faith, the liberating and unitive potential that fundamental trust in reality may evoke from all the world religions, gives meaning not only to each of them in their own right, but can also be considered a significant stimulus to the interfaith dialogue that serves to deepen mutual understanding between all 'believers in God'. One may wonder whether describing the members of different religious traditions as 'believers in God' does not compromise the uniqueness of particular theologies. According to Küng, it does not, provided the mystery of God is conceived of in terms of universal trust in reality tantamount to a trusting commitment to an ultimate ground, support and meaning of that reality. Insofar as it is open to the possibility of naming the ultimate dimension of existence and addressing it as 'thou', a certain basic horizon of our common experience can justly be described as religious (Tracy 1975:93). Although for Christians it will always have the name of YHWH and the face of Jesus, such a commitment must not necessarily be prompted by the Christian proclamation but is possible also for Jews, Muslims, Hindus and so on. As Küng (1980:570) asserts, '[p]eople who profess such a belief – whether Christians or non-Christians – are rightly described as "believers in God".' So to use the

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21.In such a context, as exemplified by Tracy's discussion on the mystical and the prophetic as the fragmentary discourses within theology (Tracy 1991:116ff.), the 'fragment' can become a theological *form par excellence*. Such form opens into the formless and thus allows the infinite God to be God, whilst disseminating him through the use of analogy.

22.For the whole section cf. Crawford (2010).

Wittgensteinian expression, within 'family resemblances' amongst the religious perspectives, a transcendentally oriented fundamental trust occupies a prominent place.

We are living at a time that is largely characterised by a loss of trust. As can be seen in connection with Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, the modern 'Masters of Suspicion' (Ricoeur 1970:33), mistrust prevails in the field of human relationships, not only in regard to others but also in regard to oneself (with one's disguised will to power, sublimated sex drive, etc.) and in the end also in regard to the existing social authorities and structures, including religious institutions. If religion is supposed to continue to:

> operate in our common secular lives as an authentic disclosure which both bespeaks certain inevitable limits-to our lives and manifests some final reality which functions as a trustworthy limit-of life itself (Tracy 1975:109),

the question of fundamental confidence must be addressed both *theologically* and *ecumenically*. Unless trust in life and the world, now largely lost, is restored to the modern *homo religiosus*, religion as such is in danger of compromising or, even worse, betraying its inherent existential mission of providing a basic orientation to human life in the midst of uncertain reality. This cultural context renders even more urgent the need for rediscovering trust as a pivotal correlate of religiosity. A trustful attitude toward the world and humanity – seen also as an alternative to or even a sign of protest against the Western hermeneutics of suspicion – should become a distinguishing mark of all religious people eager to pursue global ecumenism, which the present suggests and the future demands.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind that, as believers representing different religious traditions, we understand each other *through analogies to our own experience or not at all*, in this study I have ventured the thesis that *each* religious faith is essentially correlated to a universal confidence in reality. Through the theological appropriation of the philosophical concept of fundamental trust,[23] I attempted to emphasise the liberating and unitive force of such a trust and its consequent ecumenical potential. For that project to actually contribute to global ecumenism, reflection on the mutual correlation between trust in reality and faith in God must be taken further, that is, reinterpreted theologically in different religious contexts and extended to include the practical aspects of religiosity based on fundamental trust.[24]

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

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23.As proven by my analysis, the experience of fundamental trust can be considered, not dogmatically, but certainly theologically.

24.My two other papers raising those issues are, at present, under review: 'Liberation as a correlate of religiosity: A Christian-Muslim perspective on fundamental Trust' (*Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*) and 'Religions as a source of (dis)order' (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*).