# INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

## A Near Century of Dialogue
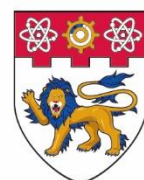
LEONARD SWIDLER

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**Occasional Papers of
The Studies in Interreligious Relations
in Plural Societies Programme**

**A Near-Century of Dialogue**

Leonard Swidler

# Abstract

This paper employs a reflection on the author's life journey being involved in inter-religious dialogue and its academic study to contemplate on the field. Reflecting on his personal endeavour in initiating dialogue efforts, and the psychological human make-up which naturally seeks to love and to be loved, the author argues for dialogue as an essential element of human life. Through dialogue, one is exposed to multiple views of the world; in turn transforming one's own "home" view from a rigid and self-contented one to a view that is all-embracing and expansive. The author argues that a dialogical imperative is rooted within human nature and the nurture that we have from birth, to seek a robust grounding for understanding the practice and nature of dialogue, especially between and within religious communities.

## Personal Setting

Change is fundamental to life. We humans are born, live, and die. We strive to make the changes over which we have some control be positive. We have some not-insignificant, but inevitably limited, control over our physical change. However, it is in the psychological/sociological areas (the "interior" and "inter" areas) – where we are most characteristically human – that we have the greatest control. As we become increasingly aware of our changing lives, we also increasingly perceive that we go through successive phases, stages, and ages. We use differing terms to describe this vital flow.

One general set of descriptive terms is: "childhood, adolescence, youth, middle-age, old age." Some Christian writers have written about three stages of the Interior, the Spiritual Life: "Purgative, Illuminative, Unitive."[1] Lawrence Kohlberg has described the stages of "moral" development,[2] and following him James Fowler researched parallel stages of faith development.[3] My colleague Ashok Gangadean and I in 1995 spelled out his initial articulation of "Seven Stages of Dialogue." Most famously, Confucius laid out his experience of movement through the phases of life:

> At fifteen my heart was set on learning; at thirty I stood firm; at forty I had no more doubts; at fifty I knew the mandate of heaven; at sixty my ear was obedient; at seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing the norm. (Analects 2.4)

I now have the (sole) advantage over Confucius of longevity – I am 90; though he was long-lived for his time: 72. I too have experienced succeeding "phases" of change in life. As I now am making the final decennial approach toward the "Great One Hundred," I feel the desire/responsibility to share my life experiences with whomever – hopefully, partly for "*You*," but surely for *Me* – reflecting a Western medieval proverb: *Bonum sui diffusivum est*, "Goodness is diffusive of itself." I feel drawn to share whatever "goodness/wisdom" I have accrued over my ninety years with whomever wishes to receive it.

The term "wisdom" is an interesting word, related to the German *wissen*, "to know," and the English "vision," "to see." The Latin term for "wisdom" is *sapiens*, "tasting," as in *homo sapiens*. Hence, the "wise" person is not the one with a plethora of abstract knowledge, but s/he who has "tasted" or experienced life. This is why the "Village Elders" traditionally are looked to – they have long "tasted" life. There is also the fascinating choice of St. Jerome in his Vulgate Latin translation describing the "Forbidden Fruit," which "was good for *wisdom*" [s*apientiae*] (Gen 3.6).

Most of my adult life has been devoted to learning about and promoting an ever-expanding understanding of "Dialogue" – more of that expansion/deepening below. First, a brief recollection of the autobiographical basis of "Dialogue" in my life. I am the offspring of an Irish Catholic mother and a Russian Jewish father. Thus, in a profound way, Dialogue is in my very DNA.[4] This imbedded interreligious dialogue began to become explicit in 1957, when, at the age of 28, I went to Germany to research a Dialogue that had begun in the "Land of the Reformation." I had married Arlene (Andie) Anderson just before I went to Germany – where our first child, Carmel, was born – and for the next three years immersed myself in the "Una Sancta Movement,"[5] a "breakthrough" Protestant-Catholic Dialogue, which started in the wake of World War I and subsequently had a profound influence on the transformative "Dialogical" Catholic Vatican Council II (1962-1965).

When we – Andie, Carmel, and I – returned to the United States, we started to teach at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh – Andie in English and I in History. Shortly after our return, Andie one day said to me: "There is no scholarly journal in America dedicated to ecumenical, interreligious dialogue; maybe we should begin one" – and so we did. The *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* first appeared in 1964, and is still published at Temple University more than a half-century later. Shortly after we moved to Philadelphia, Andie started a

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[1] Reginald Garrigou Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Prelude of Eternal Life, Vols. One and Two*, St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1947.

[2] Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Education in the Schools:  A Developmental View," *The School Review* 74 (1966): 1-30.

[3] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1981.

[4] See River Adams (Maria Kaplun), *There Must Be You. Leonard Swidler's Journey to Faith and Dialogue,* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014.

[5] Leonard Swidler, *The Ecumenical Vanguard,* Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1965.

Women's Jewish-Christian Study/Activist Group, and I an ecumenical theological dialogue group of Presbyterian theologians from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and local Catholic theologians from Duquesne University and the Pittsburgh Catholic Oratory – all massively energised by the then ongoing revolutionary Vatican Council II.

It is against this background and, out of it, that I slowly began to experience, and then increasingly, reflect on the different "ages" of Dialogue as my life unfolded. It is that ongoing series of "Ages" that I want to consciously explain, reflect on, for myself and for you – and hopefully continue to build on further into the future. However, I first need to explore in some depth what was happening in the world of psychology in the middle and latter part of the twentieth century (as I was growing to maturity), especially in the areas of psychology.

## Psychological Setting

The sharpening focus on mutuality, relationality, and dialogue in the science of the human psyche provided a new foundation stone for interreligious, interideological dialogue. Hence, it is important to reflect on what has been learned about the structure and growth of the human self, particularly through the work of developmental and relational psychology. The pioneers of the former were Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson. Their work was applied to the area of the development of the moral self, and the believing self; the former especially by Lawrence Kohlberg, and the latter by James Fowler. Key philosophical and theological thinkers in this field include Bernard Lonergan and H. Richard Niebuhr.

The reality of mutuality, of relationality, of dialogue, is at the very foundation of our human self. The self does not come into existence complete at birth. None of us mere mortals were born like the goddess Athena, full grown from the forehead of Zeus. We are all born from our mothers' wombs as tiny animals with the *potential* of developing into conscious selves. If left to ourselves, we would soon physically perish. If simply fed automatically – say, intravenously – without human contact, we would not physically perish, but we would also never become human.

In the beginning there is no distinction between "me and what is not me"; there is just a continuum of various sensations, good and bad. Only gradually does the new potential human being learn to distinguish between its own body and the world around it. This we all know simply from observing the growth of our own infants. However, what is not so immediately obvious, but nevertheless equally true, is that the human, conscious selves of children come into existence and develop only in relationship to other selves. H. Richard Niebuhr put the matter succinctly when he wrote: "To be a self in the presence of other selves is not a derivative experience but primordial. To be able to say that I am I is not an inference from the statement that I think thoughts [here Niebuhr is obviously rejecting Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum*] nor from the statement that I have a law-acknowledging conscience [here he is rejecting Kant's starting points of the starry skies above and the inner law of conscience]. It is, rather, the acknowledgment of my existence as the counterpart of another self."[6] We should also add here the pioneering dialogical work of Martin Buber with his pioneering book *I and Thou* (*Ich und Du*) in 1923.

Just how fundamental mutuality, relationality and dialogue are to developing human beings is illustrated very clearly by some comments of James W. Fowler. Fowler divided human faith development into six stages, plus what he calls a pre-stage, infancy and early childhood. Speaking of the origin of the images of God being formed in this initial period, he wrote: "Particularly they are composed from our first experiences of *mutuality*, in which we form the rudimentary awareness of self as separate from and dependent upon the immensely powerful others, who were present at our first consciousness and who 'knew us.'" He then went on to say of this pre-stage of faith:

> The quality of *mutuality* and the strength of trust, autonomy, hope and courage (or their opposites) developed in this phase underlie (or threaten to undermine) all that comes later in faith development. The emergent strength in this stage is the fund of basic trust and the *relational* experience of *mutuality*

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[6] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963, 65.

with the one(s) providing primary love and care. The danger or deficiency in this stage is a failure of *mutuality.*[7]

Although it would not be appropriate here to diverge to describe and analyse the various stages of psychological development as presented by Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, and others, there are several points that will be helpful to note. First, as the cognitive faculties develop – as, for example, the individual learns to distinguish the self from what is not the self, to discern discrete objects, to relate them, to make formal generalisations – the capacity for affectivity, that is, the search for values, develops in parallel fashion, as does the capacity for moral judgment. Becoming more intelligent does not automatically mean a person will become proportionately more loving, more moral. But if the cognitive self does not develop adequately, the affective and moral self also cannot develop adequately. Kohlberg summed up the point:

> Cognitive maturity is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for moral judgment maturity. While formal operations [the ability to make cognitive generalisations] may be necessary for principled morality, one may be a theoretical physicist and yet not be able to make moral judgments at the principled level."[8]

Thus, it became apparent that although not all humans continue to grow into fully mature persons, there clearly are ages of development in both the cognitive and affective-moral judgment areas and that the two areas are intimately related, with the cognitive, up to a point, being a prerequisite, but not automatic cause, of the affective-moral – the former is a necessary, but not sufficient, cause. It became further clear that, as in the cognitive area the child comes to distinguish its own self from the world and other selves around it, so in the moral area the child moves from *external* moral direction to *internal* principles.

According to Kohlberg, this more advanced moral stage is followed by an "orientation not only to actually ordained social rules but to principles of choice involving appeal to logical universality and consistency."[9] He also noted that, "the general direction of maturity of moral judgment is a direction of greater morality,"[10] of greater inclusivity: loving your neighbour means loving first yourself and those closest to you, then all your relatives, members of your "tribe," your nation, the whole human race, all living things, the cosmos, all reality, and finally the Source of reality, however understood.

It is possible, of course, to have a very restricted scope of who to love, and then immediately include the Source; one can love immediate friends and "God," but no one in between. It is revealing to note, especially for Christians, however, what the New Testament notes pertinently that: "Whoever says he loves God whom he cannot see, but does not love their brother/sister whom he does see is a liar" (John 4.20). Such persons can be called liars in that their restrictive actions, at least unconsciously, belie the ontological, and hence moral, implications embedded in the very notion of the Source (again, however understood) of *all* reality.

The motor which moves the human person through these several stages of development, cognitive and affective-moral, is the drive for self-transcendence, the desire to go beyond oneself. (It is worth noting here that initially Abraham Maslow stated in his famous "Pyramid of Needs" that the ultimate goal of humans is "self-fulfilment," but later he went on to say that even beyond that is the goal of "self-transcendence." We are commonly aware of this by our everyday experience of always wanting to know more – why else read this essay, for example – of always wanting to do better. But, of course, at the very heart of the notion of self-transcendence is mutuality, relationality, and dialogue, for we transcend ourselves by seeking the other. Walter Conn noted that "it is clear that Erikson is telling us that one becomes one's truly and fully human self only insofar as, and to the extent that, one reaches out beyond oneself to others, that, in short, *self-realisation is self-transcendence.*"[11]

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[7] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 121. Emphases added.

[8] Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher: The Discovery of the Self in a Postconventional World," *Daedalus* 100 (Fall 1971): 1051-86, 1071.

[9] Lawrence Kohlberg, "Education for Justice: A Modern Statement of the Platonic View," in *Moral Education*, eds Nancy F. Sizer and Theodore R. Sizer, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970, 72.

[10] Kohlberg, "Moral Education in the Schools," 21.

[11] Walter E. Conn, *Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence,* Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1981, 71.

Piaget made a converse point when he wrote: "Through an apparently paradoxical mechanism... it is precisely when the subject is most self-centred that he knows himself the least, and it is to the extent that he discovers himself in the universe and constructs it by virtue of that fact...."[12] that he knows himself most. If the drive toward reaching out is blocked, even the possibility to be one's own self is blocked: the only way to self-realisation is through self-transcendence, through knowing and loving the Other. The Catholic philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan arrived at the same conclusion: "Just as it is one's own self-transcendence that enables one to know others accurately and to judge them fairly, so inversely it is through knowledge and appreciation of others that we come to know ourselves and to fill out and refine our apprehension of values."[13]

If self-realisation comes through the self-transcendence of knowing and loving the other, it reaches a high point in knowing and loving another self, another person. Erikson wrote, *"We are what we love"*;[14] Conn further stated: "In the love of intimacy, then, self-transcendence is radically 'personified' insofar as the very meaning of identity is transformed to include in it the other to whom one reaches out."[15]

Growth, then, is a series of interconnected levels of development in self-realisation/self-transcendence. The critical move of self-transcendence on each level so radically alters our horizon of reality that everything within it has to be re-ordered, turned around into a new constellation. Hence it is rightly called a "conversion," a "turning of things around" toward a new centre. Lonergan spoke of an intellectual conversion as a new perception of "truth attained by cognitional self-transcendence," and of moral conversion "to values apprehended, affirmed and realised by real self-transcendence,"[16] where actions are decided on the basis of internalised principles. But an even more radical and comprehensive self-transcending conversion is that of "falling in love." This phrase is very interesting, and enlightening. I do not *decide* to love someone. Rather, love *happens to* me – I *fall* in love. That is why we speak of love as a "passion." I am "passive." Love happens *to* me. In English, we also say, "I fall asleep," meaning that sleep normally is not an action that we *decide* to do, but is something that happens to us – *passive*.

As Lonergan noted, when one falls in love, "one's being becomes being-in-love," for the mere "capacity for self-transcendence [becomes] achievement when one falls in love."[17] "Such a being-in-love brings about a transformation of one's horizon, one's world, one's very being, and so a transformation of the source of all one's discoveries, decisions and deeds. Such being-in-love, then, is a real and basic conversion."[18] (It should be parenthetically noted that with each new stage arrived at, with each conversion experienced, whether cognitively, morally or affectively, the attainments of the previous stages are not rejected but subsumed in the new stage.)

The final conversion that Kohlberg, Fowler, and Lonergan spoke about is called religious conversion. This does not refer to becoming a Christian, a Muslim, a Hindu or the like, although, to be sure, Christians, Muslims and Hindus can experience the religious conversion they speak of. Rather, as Conn puts it, it is

> The radical reorientation of one's entire life that occurs when God is allowed to move from the periphery to the center of one's being... (which) is possible only for the person who has totally fallen in love with a mysterious, uncomprehended God, for the person who has been grasped by an other-worldly love and completely transformed into a being-in-love... such radical transformation might be best understood as a conversion from religion to God.[19]

I am persuaded by what Walter Conn so perceptively stated here, especially when one bears in mind that each new stage or conversion does not mean the rejection but rather the taking up and radically intensifying of what was attained in the previous stages. However, we run a grave risk of confusing ourselves when we use

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[12] Jean Piaget, *The Construction of Reality in the Child*, trans. by Margaret Cook, New York, NY: Ballentine, 1971; original French, 1937, xii.

[13] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1972, 253.

[14] Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York, NY: Norton, 1968, 138.

[15] Conn, *Conscience*, 79.

[16] Lonergan, *Method*, 241.

[17] Bernard Lonergan, "Faith and Beliefs", mimeographed paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Newton, MA (October 1969), 9, as quoted in Conn, *Conscience*, 186.

[18] Conn, *Conscience*, 187.

[19] Walter E. Conn, "Conversion: A Developmental Perspective," *Cross Currents* (Fall 1982): 323-38, 326ff.

the word "God." For theists, God tends to become *a* person – the source and goal of all truth and goodness, to be sure – but still the person who is this huge, unfathomable, infinite source of values. Nevertheless, a theist does not love another human person radically differently, radically more intensely, because s/he has also come to love this best person of all, God. No, the religious conversion means coming to know and love, and therefore truly becoming one with all Reality, not quantitatively, but qualitatively. That means becoming one somehow with its very Structure, its Principle. Perhaps theists should consider – at least for a period of a healthy moratorium – not calling the Source of reality "God," not out of reverence for the *name* "God" (like some devout Jews do), but out of reverence for that toward which it points (which perhaps also some devout Jews do), lest they distort "It, Her, Him…," which they try to name. They might also come to appreciate more the nonpersonal dimension of divinity.

The Japanese Seiichi Yagi made a similar point:

> God is not a being alongside of humans. The human being knows God when s/he loves. But the encounter with God also means that in the [Christian] word of the proclamation we perceive God. God on the one hand is the one who loves through me. On the other hand, God is the one whom I encounter in the word of the proclamation. God is, then, on the one hand the deepest Subject of me, and on the other is simultaneously the Over-against [*das Gegenüber*] who addresses me through humans. Transcendence is, so to speak, that Field of Force [*Wirkungsfeld*]. The human being is thus in the Field of Force of Transcendence.[20]

In any case, such a religious conversion does not in any way deflect our love of human persons. I believe that through it we come to love each person more intensely, physically, and emotionally as well as spiritually. (Persons less advanced in virtue, (w)holiness, often have to love unlikable persons by an act of the will without the support of the emotions. Holy persons – saints, arahats, bodhisattvas, etc. – are those who *see* the lovableness in every person, and therefore respond with emotional support in love.) In a fundamental way, concern for the good of persons – conscious, loving selves – cannot be surpassed, only expanded. Doubtless that is why Jesus, standing in the heart of the Jewish tradition, quoted from it, urging us not only to follow the commandment that we should love God with all our heart, but "like unto it" (*homoia aute*) (Mt 22.39), we should love our neighbor. Jesus, and the best of the world's religious wisdom, perceived that we come to the full love of all reality and its Source and Goal, however understood, through the love of human persons – and we never leave the love of them behind, if we would be fully human, truly religious – authentically Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Confucian….

A similar point is touchingly made in an Italian folk song about St. Francis of Assisi who is in love with nature and human beings:

> One day Francis crying said to Jesus:
> "I love the sun, I love the stars,
> I love Clara and the Sisters,
> I love human hearts,
> I love all the beautiful things.
> Oh, my Lord, I must excuse myself,
> For I should love you alone."
>
> Smiling, the Lord responded to him thus:
> "I love the sun, I love the stars,
> I love Clara and the Sisters,
> I love human hearts,
> I love all the beautiful things.
> Oh, my Francis, cry no more,

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[20] Seiichi Yagi, *Die Front-Struktur als Brücke vom buddhistischen zum christlichen Denken*, Munich: Kaiser, 1988, 74. English in, Seiichi Yagi and Leonard Swidler, *A Bridge to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1990, 119.

For I love what you love."

Piangendo Francesco disse un Giorno a Gesu:
"Amo il sole, amo le stelle,
amo Chiara e le sorelle,
amo il cuore degli uomini,
amo tutte le cose belle.
O mio Signore, mi devi perdonare,
perche te solo io dovrei amare."

Sorridendo il Signore gli rispose cosi:
"Amo il sole, amo le stelle,
amo Chiara e le sorelle,
amo il cuore degli uomini,
amo tutte le cose belle.
O mio Francesco, non devi piangere piu,
perche io amo quel che ami tu."[21]

## Dialogue Degrees

As this maturing dialogic balance is reached the Person begins to notice that others have also attained this balance—but on a different set of principles and assumptions! A healthy curiosity arises, and the Person wishes to know how that is possible. Then begins a new adventure in life.

The following is a description of the Degrees of Dialogue a person will pass through on her/his way to Wholeness, Holiness. The path in each Person's life, however, will vary, will be unique.

*Degree 1: Encountering the Alien*

We constantly encounter other persons on relatively superficial levels. However, as we sort out for ourselves the meaning of life, and how to live according to that maturing understanding, we will encounter another mature person not just superficially, but in her/his *inner* reality – who, however, bases his/her understanding of life and how to live accordingly on sources and images radically different from ours. This Other might be of a different religion, a different culture…. S/he will suddenly appear to us as deeply Other, Alien. Because this is not a superficial encounter, but one which goes to the heart of another *Person*, to her/his values that determine his/her life's choices and actions, this comes to us – who have only recently worked out for our-selves our own base values and consequent rules for actions – as a profound shock! How can this be!? How can it be that this Other mature person does not understand the foundational meaning of life and its consequent rules for action the same way I have figured it out? Intriguing. Unsettling. Investigate? Turn away?

*Degree 2: Passing Over*

If each time such an opportunity presents itself in our life, we follow our Restrictive Energy and turn away from the Other, we will necessarily remain truncated, especially in the world of the Third Millennium wherein humanity has entered the *Age of Global Dialogue*. If, however, we decide to follow our inborn Expansive Energy, our life will be irrevocably changed in an increasingly open direction. John Dunne described this reaching out to the Other as "Passing Over."[22] As we come to know our new Dialogue Partner's inner spirit everything at first looks strange, different, alien – but because we see it lived with integrity, we find that it appeals to us as some-how, at first oddly, making up an integrated Whole, a strange, new-to-us Wholeness, Holiness.

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[21] Sung by Bernardino Greco, OFM, at the Institut für ökumenische Forschung, Tübingen, 22 June 1985.
[22] John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1972.

We see our Dialogue Partner being at home in his/her integrated inner/outer world, and having begun to pass over to it, we too begin to feel the strangeness slowly fall away.

### Degree 3: Encountering Similarity

In learning increasingly more about our Dialogue Partner's "Brave new world. That has such people in't"[23] we are pleased to discover old friends in many of its principles and images. But even more pleasing, and at times surprising, we come across these principles and images in totally unsuspected guises, in places we never thought to look for them before. For example, I may have learned the Golden Rule from Jesus (Rabbi Yeshua) in the Gospel, and now learn that he was anticipated by his Teacher Rabbi Hillel, and his version in turn by the ancient Torah, and that too by Confucius and Zarathustra…. At times I may even learn in the encounter with prominent traits of my Partner's tradition that those principles and practices in fact were/are also part of my tradition, but for one reason or another atrophied, or even disappeared – and maybe it will be helpful to bring them back, perhaps in a renovated form. For example, the Muslim practice of praying five times a day was/is matched by the Christian practices of Morning (*Lauds*) and Evening Prayers (*Vespers*), plus the *Angelus* at Six-Noon-Six. How best to utilise these spiritual customs developed for the fundamentally agriculture-based societies of 12,000 BCE–1850 CE awaits further contemporary experimentation and dialogue.

### Degree 4: Adopting/Adapting New Insights.

While *inhabiting* my new spiritual/cultural home I may discover new insights that I will find so valuable that I will want to bring them back with me to my community and work to make them part of my tradition in the future. For example, some Asian Buddhists have in their encounter with Christianity decided that the broad and deep efforts toward social justice, as, for example, in various Liberation Theologies, are values that they wish to bring back to their Buddhist home; some Jews have found meditation practices experienced in Buddhism of such value that they wish to bring them back into their Jewish tradition. Some "Dialogue Visitors" may speak of *adopting* such practices for their own; others will speak of *adapting* them from their new encounters to fit more suitably into their home tradition.

### Degree 5: Discerning Differences

Though we feel increasingly more welcome in our newly found "Visitor's Home," most often we also increasingly realize that this is not our "Home." Hardly ever can we replace our "Home Town" – although a few persons may make the spiritual journey hither, never again to fully return home. Along with the exciting commonalities we find in our Visitor's Home, we also re-learn that there are in fact differences between our Home and our Visitor's Home – although almost always those differences are located at dramatically different places than we imagined beforehand. These differences might be:

a) *nominal*, that is, real *commonalities*, but hidden under different *names*;

b) *comple*mentary, that is, *comple*ting each other, as for example, the Muslim custom of looking to Mohammad as a life model, as well as those Muslim "saints" revered in Sufi Islam, could be seen as not *compe*ting with, but as "*comple*ting," that is, being further similar examples of the Catholic and Orthodox Christian custom of not only imitating Jesus, but also looking to "saints" as models;

c) *contrary*, that is, two positions can be different without being mutually exclusive, as for example, Muslim "Paradise" and Buddhist "Nirvana" as the goal of life; or

d) *contradictory*, that is, one excludes the other, as, for example, the Christian teaching of "Eternal Life," however understood, is diametrically opposed to the Atheist position that the human person ceases at the grave.

### Degree 6: Passing Back

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[23] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act V, Scene I, ll. 203–206.

It is wonderful to visit new places, but it is even more wonderful to return Home! If we have, as John Dunne urged us, "passed over" to experience from within our Dialogue Partner's home, because we are on a "deaialogic" journey, we then also need to "pass back" to our Home. But we come back profoundly transformed. We can no longer think and live as if we were the centre of the universe, as if our understanding of the meaning of life was the only and complete understanding. We now realise that ours is one view of the world and its meaning, that there are numberless views, each of them, including mine, being necessarily limited – being perceived through my, or your, or your, or your… cognitive faculties. We now realise that **Nobody** *knows* **Everything** *about* **Anything** – *therefore* **Dialogue**! From our experiencing of other worldviews and other ways of living in the world, we now find that we must also engage in intense dialogue with members of our "Home Tradition," sharing with them the fruits of our encounter with our "Dialogue Partner." We must serve as a bridge between the two, learning anew that the nature of bridges is to be stepped on.

*Degree 7: Discerning and Embracing Wholeness/Holiness*

As our dialogic experiences continue in life, we find ourselves increasingly "at home" in more and more traditions, although our "Home Town" remains our most "at ease" Home. However, our Home is utterly transformed from a rigid, self-contented, closed place to a Home for All, that is nevertheless still anchored in its Traditions – but they are growing Traditions that embrace and adapt the New, the Other into a transformed, and transforming, Integrated Whole that wondrously constantly recreates itself into a Holiness that is like the Horizon, which we constantly reach for, and in fact do move toward – but never reach!

## Proleptic Conclusion

This is where I find myself in my ninetieth year. I have gathered nine decades of information (and probably have forgotten as much, if that is possible), and, more importantly, experience (*sapientia* – "tasted"). It all has provided the setting and basis for whatever "inner" and "inter" depth I have attained over that time and life.

I am finding that most things look quite clear now, and I am frequently brought up short when I find that it does not always appear so obvious to others. This simple clarity does not seem like any great or deep wisdom on my part – just, as said, obvious and clear. I try not to fool myself into thinking that I have attained some profound wisdom. It's just that most things now seem – and should always have been, but were not – quite simple and clear:

Love my Self ever more, and constantly expand my Self endlessly to embrace endless numbers of *Alter Egos.*

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# About the Author

**Leonard Swidler** is Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue at Temple University, where he has taught since 1966. At Temple and as a visiting professor at many universities worldwide, he has mentored a generation of international scholars in the work of interreligious dialogue. In 1978, Professor Swidler founded the Dialogue Institute and has been its President since. He is the author of more than 80 books, and co-founder and editor of the quarterly Journal of Ecumenical Studies. He has proposed a 'Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic', aimed at different religious, ethnic, and ethical communities in various regions, which encourages work and generates discussion on drafting indigenous versions of a global ethic.

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