

Educating Toward a “Spirituality of Dialogue”

Theological Foundations, Hermeneutical Invitations, Pedagogical Directions

Abstract: To be truly effective, dialogue in communities of faith must be more than tactics or strategies for community management. Fostering a “spirituality of dialogue” is a unique contribution that religious education can offer faith communities, providing a concrete locus for the interplay and mutual enrichment of theological inquiry and religious education. This paper explores Trinitarian and hermeneutical aspects of dialogue as it looks to the question, “How might we educate toward a spirituality of dialogue” that will support effective conversation within faith communities...and beyond?

The annual Catholic Common Ground Lecture, given at Catholic University of America, Washington DC, by journalist and author John L. Allen, Jr., addressed the theme of dialogue within the church.¹ Drawing on his vast experience covering international ecclesial events that represent a wide spectrum of Catholic perspectives, his talk was a fascinating look at the contemporary climate of conversation, communication and dialogue among worldwide Catholics. Allen offered a number of stories and examples during his lecture. One case involved the 1995 abuse accusations against the Archbishop of Vienna, Hans Hermann Gröer. Gröer himself first denied the charges, and then resigned without further discussion. When calls for accountability were met with hierarchical silence, many Austrians suspected a cover-up. Gröer was replaced by Cristoph Schönborn, who, along with three other bishops, eventually admitted to “moral certitude” regarding Gröer’s guilt. The outrage following this disclosure unleashed a movement among Austrian Catholics who demanded reform of various ecclesial structures that contributed to the atmosphere in which such a travesty could occur. In response, the Austrian bishops organized an unusual “Salzburg parliament” for discussion of the issues raised, promising to bring the results to Rome.

¹ For entire lecture, see John L. Allen, Jr., "Common Ground in a Global Key--International Lessons for Catholic Dialogue: Catholic Common Ground Lecture," *National Catholic Reporter* Posted June 29, 2004 (2004). http://ncronline.org/mainpage/specialdocuments/allen_common.htm.

Allen describes the parliament event as “three days of high drama,” with passionate debates among the participants: pastors, lay theologians, bishops, Catholic politicians, social activists, etc. The voting at the end of the meeting resulted in a petition for reform, including endorsements of optional clerical celibacy, local election of bishops, and a number of other proposals. The petition was viewed as a resounding victory for its advocates, one which buoyed up the supporting participants, who believed that their issues had been resolved. However, when the recommendations sent to Rome went nowhere, “which was entirely predictable” as Allen commented, feelings of betrayal and further mistrust set in. Throughout Austria’s dioceses, enthusiastic plans for future dialogue forums quietly died, and the church returned to business-as-usual. A tired resignation descended upon most Austrian Catholics.

Allen’s story, the crux of which is unfortunately all too familiar, reflects complex issues involving matters of sin, justice and restoration that reached far beyond the boundaries of the Salzburg parliament meeting itself. However, one of the lessons Allen gleaned from this particular experience is that “win-lose” approaches to conflict resolution—ecclesial or otherwise—never fully satisfy. The winners gloat victoriously, the losers retreat resentfully, and chasms between the two widen and deepen, making healing or reconciliation extremely difficult. As he describes it, the Austrian event “was good theatre but bad *koinonia*.”

Allen further observed that, to be effective, ecclesial dialogue must be more than a program or a set of strategies. Practical considerations do come into play, but are preceded by other factors. Dialogue requires openness to change, which in turn presupposes awareness that change is needed. In other words, people must *recognize the need* to learn from “otherness” and *demonstrate the desire* to learn from “otherness.” This kind of awareness becomes possible through a conversion of heart that Allen claims is the precondition for attempts to dialogue. I

would suggest, too, that dialogue not only begins with such a conversion, but that a conversion toward openness often results from the process of dialogue itself. That is, it is through fidelity to the hard work of dialogue that the fruit of open communication can occur.

The challenges of such a conversion require the support of a robust spirituality that can sustain dialogue as something more than a tactic, an act of policy or an exercise of democracy. Religious education that advances dialogue within the church (and, further, with those of other traditions) must be supported by inner convictions and shored up by spiritual practices that lend themselves to a dialogic lifestyle, a “habitus” that can uphold a life of *koinonia/communio*. Fostering a “spirituality of dialogue,” therefore, is a unique contribution that religious education can make toward this end, as well as a concrete locus for the intersection of theological inquiry and religious education.

With this in mind, what might be the theological warrants for a spirituality of dialogue, and what might be some resulting pedagogical practices to be resourced by religious educators? Although the breadth and depth of the topic suggest a more comprehensive work, my focus in this essay is on intra-ecclesial dialogue within the Catholic community, acknowledging that the discussion can also converse with the areas of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. I begin surveying some core theological and hermeneutical issues by centering on specific works of two theologians, Bradford Hinze and David Tracy, with an eye to future explorations regarding a pedagogical approach toward a spirituality of dialogue.

The Trinitarian Mystery: A Theological Foundation

A number of perspectives on dialogue from the worlds of linguistic studies, business management, communication studies, etc., have offered valuable insights that could be brought to the table for a rich conversation regarding dialogue’s place and value in ecclesial life today.

However, Bradford Hinze offers a theological approach, one that moves into the heart of the Christian tradition itself, into the mystery of God as communicating communion. By proposing the Trinitarian Mystery as the primary source of communication, Hinze provides an entry point for viewing this mystery in a way that can offer insights for describing a spirituality of dialogue.

Beginning on the human experiential level, Hinze asserts that the human person's "act of becoming" takes place in a dialogic fashion, through the back-and-forthness of intentional relationality. Discovering the truth of what it means to be human and what it means to be in human community means having an understanding of "the self" and "the other." This occurs through dialogue: "Ultimately, there is no other pathway into genuine self and communal identity and mission than through the process of differentiation (individuation) that takes place through dialogue.... The goal [of dialogue] is the true self and the true community."² In seeking to define oneself *as self* and one's community *as community*, and therefore one's reality as *self-in-community*, communication and dialogue play an integral role, because it is in the act of dialogue with other individuals—family, friends and wider communities, whether communities of other faiths or diverse interests—that we most fully come to understand ourselves, others, and ourselves-with-others.

Likewise, the human journey toward a deeper understanding of God takes place through dialogue. Dialogue is the place of connection for the human and the Divine: the world of dialogue that creates and sustains human existence has its origin in a God who *is* communication and dialogue itself. That is, there is a dialogical dynamism within God and God's ways of communicating; this divine dialogical reality is the source and sustenance of human be-ing. God

² Bradford E. Hinze, "Dialogical Traditions and a Trinitarian Hermeneutic," in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, ed. Jacques Haers and P. De Mey, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 316.

exists as an act of Self-communication, a divine “Self-gift to Godself” that therefore prompts the loving communication of Godself in creation. This reveals God, the dynamic source, instrument and content of creation, as an act of divine dialogue: Godself is given in hopes of receiving in return the gift that creation makes of itself in mutual love. Thus, a theological stance toward dialogue and communication requires an understanding of God *as* communication, both in the “outer gift” of the work of salvific relationality (economy) that enfolds all of creation into God’s reality, and within Godself as “inner gift”(perichoresis).

Appreciating the way a dialogical God works in relation to the world begins by “exploring the dialogical and communicative implications of the works of the Creator, the Word/Wisdom made flesh, and Spirit of life and holiness as a communion of persons.”³ This calls for an appreciation of God as Source: the source of all that is created and is being created even now; it also requires a posture of reverence toward all that comes forth from that Source, the given-ness of all that is. Appreciation of God as Creator and Source means granting that all of creation, in its vast variety, is “redeemed, purified and sanctified through a process of differentiation and reintegration”⁴ within a broader Trinitarian vision. Creation occurs in a communicative act of differentiation—individuation—from the Source and from each other. This requires that we, as participants in this act of communication, “reverence the particulars”⁵ as they are communicated in otherness by God the Creator. Otherness has its source in the Source.

Similarly, the Word that comes forth from the Creator is dialogic in nature and in mission. Made flesh in history in Jesus of Nazareth, the life-giving Word spoken by God in turn speaks the word of life to us. In his teaching, his healing and preaching, his passion, death and

³ Ibid., 315.

⁴ Ibid., 317.

⁵ Ibid.

resurrection, kept in memory in the scriptures and in the living memory of the church, Jesus the Word communicates the presence of God to us. Jesus continues to do so through the interpreting communities of the church, and is able, through both “scripture and communal interpretation together [to] offer the possibility of healing”⁶ the divisions present in Christian communities. The Word, and our words, are means for approaching otherness.

The Spirit of God, so often described as the one who speaks to prophets, is also the “presence and agency of God speaking in the new and in the future.”⁷ The Spirit is present in inspiration both given and received, in the word spoken and the word heard, in the movements of history...and in the interaction between those who engage in the dialogic and communicative relationality of human personhood. “To honor the Spirit means to be receptive to voices speaking in unusual places and events beyond the borders of our communities,”⁸ thus calling for a particular attentiveness to the perceptions of “otherness” that we encounter in daily life.

While being in dialogic relationality to all creation, at the same time, God as Trinity is the “dynamic communicative relations that constitute the differentiation of identity and mission of the triune persons in communion.”⁹ Hinze offers a thought-provoking corrective to what he sees as a limiting vision of Trinitarian circumincession, specifically one that views the Father as the speaker, the Son as the Word spoken, and the Spirit as receptor of the message spoken, even as the three Persons “exist” interdependently. Instead, Hinze indicates that the central mystery of the Trinity is one of *mutual* dialogue and *reciprocal* obedience among all three persons. “Obedience” (ob-audire: to listen) implies hearing and heeding, the fruit of the dialogical relationality of the three Persons. Testified to in scripture, the Son obeys the Father: “I do exactly

⁶ Ibid., 318.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

what the Father has commanded me” (Jn 14:31). The Spirit obeys the Son: “[The Spirit] will not speak on his [sic] own, but will speak only what he [sic] hears” (Jn. 16 13). The Father heeds and obeys the Son (as Jesus attests in the raising of Lazarus, cf. Jn 11: 41–42). But also, the Father and Son together obey the Spirit on our behalf, the Spirit who “intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And the one who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:26-27).

The scriptural witness externalizes for us the inner Trinitarian mystery of mutual obedience. By viewing the inner life of the Trinity as one of reciprocal communication and dialogue, we are prompted to further reflect on what this means for us, created in *Imago Dei*. The relation of self-to-others-in-communion has its source in the inner relationality of the Trinity:

Differentiation and communion occur in the divine reality *and* in the church and the world through mutual obedience, understood as attentiveness, reception, and response. This provides a central principle in a Trinitarian ecclesiology and hermeneutics [emphasis added].¹⁰

Attentiveness, reception and response, as three hallmarks of communication and dialogue, imply the communicative nature of Godself, and provide a profound perspective on our own acts of dialogue. Dialogue and communication are not merely “strategies” for human living, but are a participation in the very life of God. Viewing the Trinitarian Mystery through this lens provides a theological warrant for developing a spirituality of dialogue. Finding ways to live into this divine life of communion calls for creativity and commitment, both personal and communal. In this, the task of religious education becomes crucial: what are the implications for such a theological vision, if it is to reach beyond academic theory to the realm of practical, pastoral

¹⁰ Ibid., 319.

theology? How might we foster new ways of seeing and celebrating the dialogic nature of God as Trinity, that can impact the dialogic spirituality of the church community? As we negotiate the human boundaries of self, other, and community within a Trinitarian framework, we look to dialogue as a hermeneutical act. Doing so provides insight for the task of religious educators, who are in the unique position of being able to both model and enact dialogue through the many ways they interact with their faith communities.

The “Hermeneutics of Dialogue”: An Invitation to Creative Commitment

Dialogue, as one of the ways we express ourselves as humans, connects us relationally to other persons. As a human act, dialogue can put us into profound communion with others, and become a way for us to discover ourselves, others, and *ourselves-with-others*. Theologian and hermeneutical theorist David Tracy sees dialogue as a hermeneutical undertaking—enacted in interpretation and then in commitment—on the part of those wanting to connect to “the other.”

According to Tracy,¹¹ all of life is a hermeneutical act; in fact, to be human is to be skilled at the art of interpretation. We are always interpreting what we experience, putting it into context with what we already know; the more complex the event, the more difficult—and yet imperative—our interpretation becomes, particularly when traditional interpretations begin to break down or become untenable. Tracy asserts that “the great creative individuals—thinkers, artists, heroes, saints—felt impelled to find new ways to interpret an experience that their culture or tradition seemed unable to interpret well or even at all.”¹² The concept of dialogue within Christian communities seems ripe for such reinterpretation; to this end, a brief look at one primary framework for interpretation is helpful.

¹¹ Cf. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

Tracy acknowledges that any act of interpretation requires three realities: an interpreter, a phenomenon to be interpreted, and some kind of interaction between the two.¹³ In this interaction—whether with text, artwork, an historical event or another person—recognizing the “otherness” encountered is inevitable, and the response that occurs regarding this reality creates the framework of the hermeneutical experience. This is particularly apparent when confronting an unexpected claim to truth in the other,¹⁴ a truth that may jar us out of our own presumed truth-claims when we recognize the difference between the other and us. Once questioned, our own presumed claims, part of our self-understanding, bring us to further question the signs, symbols and texts we have used to construct our identity thus far, and to eventually “construct a self by deconstructing all false notions of autonomous identity.”¹⁵ In other words, our self-identity is ultimately tied up with the identity of “otherness,” and we discover it through the specific ways we relate to this “other.” A primary hermeneutical act by which we relate to the other and thus come to know ourselves as *selves-in-relation* is the act of dialogue.

Borrowing from Hans-Georg Gadamer, Tracy likens dialogue, conversation and communication to a “game” involving a question worth exploring, with various movements made by the “players” in relation to this question. It is not any one party’s opinion that matters in this game, but only the act of being in relation to the question at hand. “A conversation is not a confrontation. It is not a debate. It is not an exam. It is questioning itself. It is a willingness to follow the question wherever it may go. It is dia-logue.”¹⁶ In fact, true conversation only occurs when we allow the question to arise independent of our own opinion, and allow the question itself to direct the “game” of dialogue.

¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

Dialogue of this type calls for a unique stance of self-forgetfulness and detachment, in a felicitous interpretation of Aristotle's maxim that, "in the pursuit of truth, friendship must yield."¹⁷ Yet, because relationality is central to ecclesial dialogue, such an adage must be followed with conscientious reverence toward the otherness experienced, an otherness in which the Divine is encountered in the flesh, bone and blood of the other, one created in *Imago Dei*. At the same time, allowing the question itself to become central frees each dialogue partner from ego-centeredness by allowing interested inquiry to de-center any sense of competition or one-upmanship. Through the process of dialogue and conversation around the question, we begin to discover true otherness *in* the other, to discover difference, and "to understand the different *as* possible."¹⁸ But once we acknowledge that difference is actually, truly possible, our ability to recognize its very possibility signals that we are sensing something already known in this difference. Despite the difference, there is something we can recognize as familiar in otherness: a similarity-in-difference.¹⁹

Tracy maintains that this hermeneutical arc requires a movement of becoming. Although it is impossible for *otherness* to become *sameness*, it can become *genuine possibility*: "the *as* other, the *as* different, [can] become the *as* possible,"²⁰ and therefore recognizable to us even in its difference. This movement of becoming implies that dialogue's purpose is not to exercise power over or coercion, but to experience recognition. Here, hints toward a particular pedagogy begin to emerge, for such recognition comes with the interpretive act of addressing a question together, moving together—even if coming from different directions—from otherness toward possibility, toward similarity-in-difference. Understanding dialogue and conversation as the exploration of

¹⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 21.

possibility offers new horizons from the Christian perspective: It represents a human movement toward *koinonia/communio*.

In seeing dialogue between people as an act of interpretation, where the conversation partners are the interpreters, it is not necessary to assume that similarity-in-difference, the goal of hermeneutical dialogue, precludes the need for “argument.” In fact, actively disagreeing with another within the context of a larger dialogue is at times a necessary step toward clarification and thus, to the progress of the conversation as a whole. Such differing is even expected in conversations where assertions are made with integrity and uprightness by persons actively seeking truth. And yet, I would contend that for dialogue to reach its hermeneutical goal of *similarity-in-difference-as-possibility*, and its Christian, theological goal of *koinonia/communio*, such disagreement needs to be carefully enacted from the vantage point, not of a “culture of argument”²¹ but a “culture of reverence.”

Within such a culture of reverence, the creativity required to participate in truth-seeking while upholding the *Imago Dei* principle presupposes a depth-source from which to draw the commitment and perseverance to engage in life-giving dialogue. Because human knowledge is “embodied, communal, finite [and] discursive,”²² something that comes to us both individually and as community, it is valuable to consider the ambiance within which such dialogue ideally takes place, and to explore pedagogical approaches to dialogue as a resource for contemporary religious education. What might be the particular spiritual stance that lends credence and provides context for the interpretive act of dialogue, within the enfoldment of the Trinitarian

²¹ For more on this perspective, see Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1998).

²² Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 27.

Mystery? What might a hermeneutical dialogical approach to religious education—one that enacts such a stance—look like?

Dialogue as a Spiritual Stance and Pedagogical Approach

Reflecting on the dialogic dynamism of the Trinitarian mystery and the hermeneutical invitation to commit to “the other” has revealed a particular vision of *koinonia/communio* as the teleos of Christian dialogue that holds potential for pedagogical approaches to fostering such dialogue. Moving on to fully name a “spirituality of dialogue” would require undertaking the wider task of attempting to define the broad discipline of “spirituality”—needed, yet beyond the scope of this essay. However, within the framework given, we can now begin to briefly suggest some practical foundations that may speak to *koinonia/communio*, and the stance needed to cultivate this goal through religious education.

In attempting to cast light upon such a stance, we look to those elements that externally manifest the inner disposition of *koinonia/communio*, and that, over time, may provide the sustenance and nourishment for this *habitus* to develop. These elements may create a generative environment where specific postures that could encompass a dialogic lifestyle can arise and begin to thrive. Hinze, Tracy and Allen offer several suggestions regarding what could be called “dialogical virtues” that might support such a spiritual stance.²³ Other authors have offered additional “communicative virtues”²⁴ that could be useful for enacting constructive communication. While acknowledging this vast landscape of promising practices for supporting a “spirituality of dialogue,” we return to three Trinitarian hallmarks of communication found within the dialogic dynamism of Godself for theological grounding, as well as for providing

²³ See cited works.

²⁴ See Nicholas C. Burbules and Suzanne Rice, “Communicative Virtues and Educational Relations,” in *The Philosophy of Education 1992*, ed. H. A. Alexander (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1993).

foundations for practical attention to the human reality of dialogue. Having looked at them in relation to the inner Trinitarian life, we now look at their human dimensions, before moving on toward their potential implications for religious education. These three hallmarks are attentiveness, receptivity and response.

Attentiveness: On the human side, attentiveness rooted in Trinitarian mutual obedience calls for a profound disposition of listening to the other. This listening goes far beyond the simple intake of data and information; it requires a certain set of skills, including the ability to convey hospitality and welcome, the capacity to elicit participation and to provide encouragement when sensing the other's vulnerability. Practical considerations such as eye contact and an inviting posture are useful, but even more essential is a reverent attention to the other that cultivates an ability to ask the right questions at the right time, so as to help others better verbalize their thoughts...even if these thoughts may be different than our own.²⁵

Receptivity: Again rooted in the mutual obedience of the Trinitarian mystery, receptivity is a capacity for coming into profound contact with the other. Humanly speaking, this capacity taps into an ongoing process of conversion, requiring us to admit personal and communal faults and failings and to ask for forgiveness if necessary, so that we can truly receive what the other offers. Although never easy, this attitude of conversion at the service of receptivity can go a long way in the work of healing and reconciliation needed for true dialogue to take place. Borrowing practical lessons from interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, we can learn to avoid polarizing discourse, and offer an empowering experience in which the other can express his or her own reality in freedom and conviction, confident that we are disposed to receive it.²⁶

²⁵ Cf. Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 253-254.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 258.

Response: As one of the primary ways we give of ourselves in relationality, reverent response to otherness again recalls the Trinitarian mutuality in which love reaches out beyond the “self” to the “other.” Response involves a commitment to building relationship with the other, often a gradual process requiring patience and perseverance. This process can be supported by the ancient Christian practice of living in an attitude of discernment. Discernment allows for a certain flow, an “oscillating movement” that brings one outside oneself toward the other and back again. This being brought to another place has echoes of transformative mysticism, where *ecstasy* (encountering God) could lead to *ecstasis* (being centered in God), and thus a deeper reverence for the Divine Other, the One found and responded to in the encounter with “the other.”²⁷

Beginning to name some Trinitarian foundations for a “spirituality of dialogue,” as well as their practical considerations, allows us to see that honing “the skills, the habits—in short, the virtues—necessary for honest, generous, and fair dialogue”²⁸ could foster a living-into-dialogue as a “habitus” that describes who we, as an ecclesial community, are called to become. As perhaps few others in ecclesial professions, religious educators are faced with a unique opportunity to become front row facilitators in modeling these dialogic practices. Educating in a way that honors and upholds these practices could be a first step toward cultivating a “spirituality of dialogue” in our ecclesial communities...and beyond. Is it possible to imagine the educational directions that would allow attentiveness, receptivity and response to undergird a pedagogy that is both rooted in dialogue and that uses dialogue itself as a pedagogical framework?

Returning to the hermeneutical arc suggested by David Tracy, we encounter several dispositions that lend support to this task. The hermeneutical goal of dialogue is reaching a place

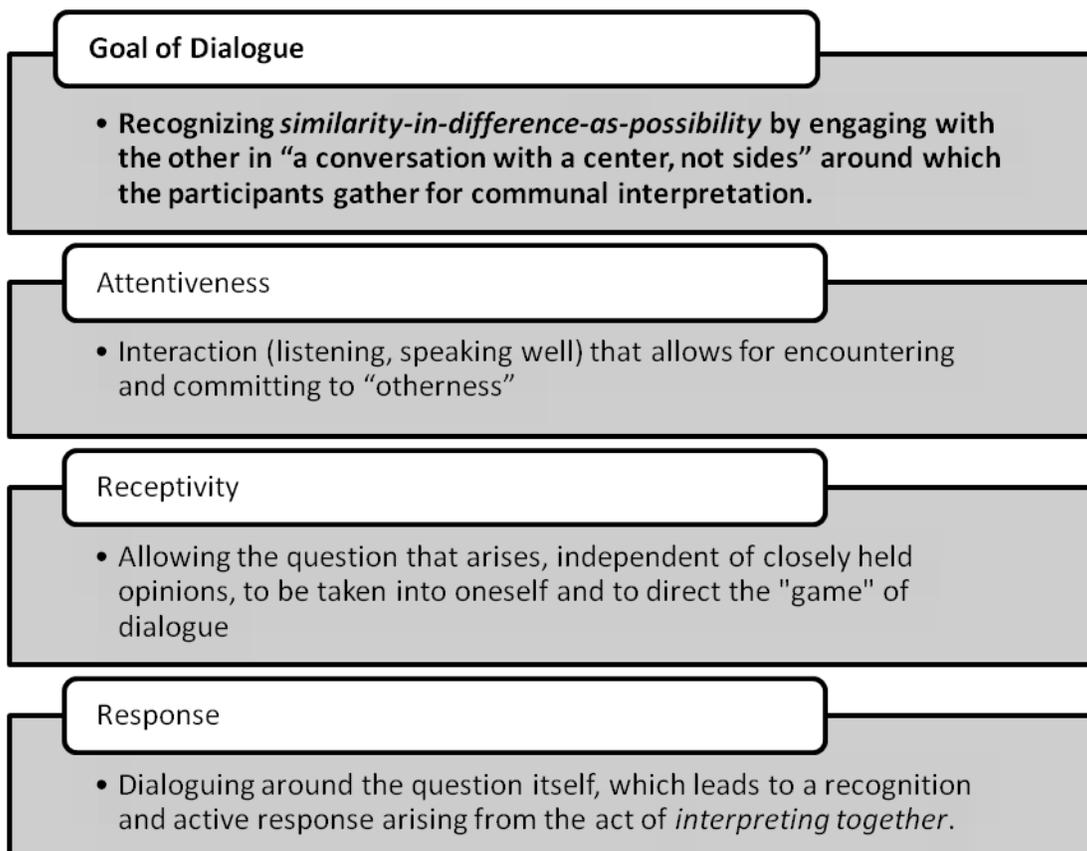
²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 254-256.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

of recognizing *similarity-in-difference-as-possibility*. Realizing this goal includes interaction that allows for encountering and committing to “otherness” in view of “recognition”—a recognition that arises from the act of *interpreting together*. This interpreting together can be compared to a game, in which participants allow the question that arises, independent of closely held opinions, to direct the interplay. Giving the question center stage in the dialogue process points toward engaging with the other in “a conversation with a center, not sides”²⁹ around which the participants gather for communal interpretation.

Interfacing the hermeneutical arc explored above with the Trinitarian dispositions of attentiveness, receptivity and response suggests a basic dialogic pedagogical framework.

Visually, such a framework could be thus imagined:



²⁹ See Chapter One in William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life*, 1st ed. (New York: Currency, 1999).

Within such a basic framework, many additional educational considerations undoubtedly arise. Interaction needs to find common ground; offering participants a concrete, generative theme names a central point for the unfolding learning process. In religious education, raising up themes that address the Christian tradition are foundational; allowing the participants to address these themes from their own lived perspective provides the groundwork for encountering “the other” in both tradition *and* person. Allowing questions to arise and to direct the dialogue calls for an epistemological humility that makes room for resources of the tradition to participate as equal conversation partners in the process of learning. Framing the dialogue so that the question itself remains at the center provides a space “to reach out toward common places of dialogue, and [to allow for] one’s willingness to correct or alter opinions as needed.”³⁰

Of its very nature, dialogic pedagogy is dependent on its participants; therefore, its particulars are referent to individual situations.³¹ However, enacting dialogue as a fundamental element of transformative education, requires that we begin to name some common elements in such an approach that point toward the future task of more fully describing a dialogic pedagogy for religious education.

Toward Educating for a “Spirituality of Dialogue”

The struggles involved in the act of dialogue, explicitly illustrated by Allen and specifically addressed by Hinze and Tracy, are many. These difficulties, when recognized and acknowledged, can reveal a subtle idolatry and “false construals of self and community”³² that can hinder the realization of profound Christian community. Thus, addressing the challenges

³⁰ Cf. Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 19, 25-26.

³¹ For more on this perspective, see Mary C. Boys, “Engaged Pedagogy: Dialogue and Critical Reflection,” *Seminary Journal* 6, no. 1 (2000).

³² Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church*, 16.

inherent in the very act of dialogue can become opportunities for conversion, reconciliation and renewal in living a more authentic communitarian life.

Ultimately, the aim of dialogue and conversation in a Christian context is not *pragmatic solutions*, but rather *participation* in God's life of self-communicating love. A fuller participatory life for ourselves, others, and ourselves-with-others—and with Godself—is an opportunity to journey further on the path toward *koinonia/communio*. Proposing pedagogical directions rooted in the Trinitarian mystery and a hermeneutics of dialogue reveals a particular opportunity for fostering and modeling dialogue within the communities to which we belong.

As we accept the challenge of engaging a dialogic pedagogy, we also acknowledge the opportunity to cultivate a “spirituality of dialogue.” Such a spirituality can nourish faith and bolster hope as we together engage in one of life's primary tasks, one that theology and religious education share: “to further practical skills for the central task of becoming human.”³³ Fostering a “spirituality of dialogue” is a unique contribution that religious education can make toward this “task of becoming human.” It also provides a concrete locus for the interplay and mutual enrichment of theology and religious education, demonstrating the powerful effect that an interdisciplinary approach—a *dialogic approach*—to these two academic fields might offer the Christian community...and beyond.

³³ Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 9.

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