Jean-Luc Marion's Hermeneutics of Charity and its Relevance to Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue

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Abstract: This study examines the methodological relevance of Jean-Luc Marion's hermeneutics of charity to religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. Grounded in his phenomenology of givenness, Marion's framework challenges traditional interpretative paradigms by demonstrating that interpreters lack total epistemic control over a text. This limitation arises because the text maintains an independent phenomenal life and transforms readers into active, receptive witnesses. Consequently, this approach establishes an irreducible, infinite encounter with the 'text-as-other,' wherein the text asserts authority by giving and showing itself unconditionally. By applying this hermeneutical model to interreligious discourse, this paper demonstrates how the plurality of religious traditions uncovers a universal imperative for openness and mutual respect. The findings reveal that treating the 'other text' as an inherently valuable entity fosters a receptive disposition among dialogical partners. Ultimately, this framework provides robust methodological tools that strengthen current dialogical practices, offering critical epistemic resistance against the risks of cultural harmonization and assimilation.

Keywords: Hermeneutics • Charity • Religious Pluralism • Interreligious Dialogue • Givenness

Introduction

It is too obvious to say that there are many religions worldwide. Each religion claims to address the human condition, salvation, the world, and morality. We are all witnesses to the diverse religious practices and belief systems. In studying world religions, we emphasize that, as Sumner Twiss and John Hick argue, there is an underlying unity among them, "explicated as a set of differential responses to a transcendental reality conceived and perceived in alternative ways by different

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cultural and religious traditions. It is a thesis about the higher transcendental unity of all religions."[1]

Nevertheless, despite these similarities among religions, differences are evident as well. Since we recognize the diversity of religious traditions, this diversity arises from varied sources, such as culture, tradition, personal or collective religious experience, etc. But this poses an issue because "the fact that there is a plurality of religious traditions, each with its own distinctive beliefs, spiritual practices, ethical outlook, art forms, and cultural ethos, creates an obvious problem for those of us who see them, not simply as human phenomena, but as responses to the Divine."[2] Such a view runs contrary to other positions like exclusivism and inclusivism. Religious exclusivism believes that there is "no more than one non-contradictory set of claims can be correct."[3] While inclusivism recognizes "the possibility that more than one religious tradition can contain elements that are true or efficacious, while at the same time hold that only one tradition expresses ultimate religious truth most completely."[4] To be clear, pluralism, as a conceptual category, refers to a philosophical perspective concerning religious diversity.[5] Byrne offers three philosophical propositions: (1) all religious traditions point to the same ultimate reality; (2) they provide pathways to salvation; (3) they all offer a partial, revis-

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[1] Sumner B. Twiss, "The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism: A Critical Appraisal of Hick and His Critics," *The Journal of Religion* 70, no. 4 (1990): 533-568, https://doi.org/10.1086/488475.

[2] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Salvation," in *The Philosophical Challenges of Religious Diversity*, edited by Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (Oxford: Oxford Press University, 2000), 54.

[3] Michael Barnes Norton, "Religious Pluralism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* https://iep.utm.edu/rel-plur/.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Peter Byrne, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 8-9.

able understanding of the sacred or divine.[6] However, for Hick, pluralism is "a meta-theory," an operating theoretical framework to understand religious traditions' doctrines, creeds, or teachings.[7] With this, a discourse about pluralism affirms the existence of religious traditions and their diversity. This positive and affective attitude toward different religious traditions leads to the belief that religions' cognitive claims are equally valid. This is because "Religion is not an area of human discovery,"[8] where there is a singular and universal claim for a thing discovered. It is here where diversity matters. As Byrne explains, "the character of its [religion] diversity shows that alleged cognitive achievements are in fact explicable by rational and truth-blind causes, such as social power, custom and personal need."[9] Since pluralism leads to claims of equality in "some affective, cognitive contact with the transcendent capable of supporting a thesis about religions as vehicles of salvation or liberation,"[10] it affirms that no single religion can claim the uniqueness and absoluteness of religious teachings and transcendent beliefs. It then refutes the claims of exclusivism that there is only one true religion.

All these show that the discourse on religious pluralism is dominated by epistemic concerns, rather than issues that might be significant in enriching the methodological or theoretical discussion.[11] Knight believes that understanding religious pluralism must also

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[6] Ibid., *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism,* 12.

[7] John Hick, "The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa," *Religious Studies* 33, no. 2 (June 1997):163.

[8] Ibid., 2.

[9] Ibid., 2.

[10] Ibid., 5-6.

[11] Bindu Puri and Abhishek Kumar, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Religious Pluralism: Moving Beyond Liberal Tolerance*, viii.

be seen in the context of spiritual contemplation.[12] Puri and Kumar challenge the principle of tolerance as the ground for religious pluralism and highlight the value of "community, location, and cultural specificity as an unavoidable element in the understanding of all religions."[13] Sonia Sikka finds the central concern of Western philosophers of religious pluralism narrow, limited to the content of faith and belief systems, without considering the social world of individuals or the community of believers.[14] Lourdunathan calls this "contextual pluralism." It refers to the "rich plurality of ethnicities, languages, terrestrial differences, biodiversity, diversity of forms of life, religious and cultural variations in practice, etc."[15] This social world complicates our understanding of religious pluralism, and so hermeneutics becomes a valuable tool for theorizing it, especially in interreligious dialogue, where it serves as a crucial moment of healthy, mutual enrichment without reducing one to the other. Obviously, interreligious dialogue thrives in those religious positions that allow other voices to be heard and understood. However, not all allowances for hearing other voices resist domination, assimilation, harmonization, and flattening of a religious belief system. For instance, inclusivism may allow dialogue, but tends to be asymmetrically dominating, while a form of pluralism tends to reduce differences into abstract sameness or harmonization. To avoid this, a

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[12] Christopher C. Knight, *Exploring Religious Pluralism: From Mystical Theology to the Science-Theology Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

[13] Bindu Puri and Abhishek Kumar, "Introduction," viii.

[14] Sonia Sikka, "Pluralism about What? Religion as Belief and Identity," in *Re-thinking Religious Pluralism: Moving Beyond Liberal Tolerance*, 3.

[15] S. Lourdunathan, "Philosophical Hermeneutic of /for Religious Pluralism: Some Methodological Considerations," in *Re-thinking Religious Pluralism: Moving Beyond Liberal Tolerance*, 38.

better methodological approach to dialogue that requires a hermeneutical tool must be adopted.

While the likes of Schleiermacher, Gadamer, Heidegger, and Ricœur are best suited to hermeneutics, I draw on Jean-Luc Marion, whose hermeneutics remains underdeveloped yet valuable for reorienting our understanding of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. Instead of problematizing how to manage differences, it invites a methodological orientation that attends to the givenness of the religious text without reduction. To be sure, Marion's discussion of hermeneutics is a bit sketchy. Hence, this essay does not aim to compare Marion's hermeneutics with others, but to show that Marion's account offers another approach to religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. Marion's thoughts have limitations, and his personal faith may not be coherently aligned with some thoughtful insights on his account of *caritas* as a theological virtue.[16] Rather, it attempts to develop and expose a possible hermeneutical framework based on Marion's thoughts and draw some insights from them to further appreciate the value of understanding other religious beliefs and traditions. Despite its sketchiness, its development can be seen through his phenomenology of givenness, which deeply guides his view of hermeneutics. Perhaps, for lack of a better term, let us call this "hermeneutics of charity".

Three claims are offered in support of Marion's "hermeneutics of charity". First, it helps overcome the idolatry of some conceptual frameworks by treating the text as a phenomenon that gives itself in its own manner, rather than allowing such frameworks hinder a genuine encounter with the text and create polemical tension among members of various religious traditions. Second, it offers an alternative to theoretical positions such as

[16] See Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, translated by Stephen Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

exclusivism and relativism. Rather than bringing discourse into these unsatisfactory positions, Marion's "hermeneutics of charity" diverts it toward a more meaningful direction, where the issue of religious difference does not flatten into a single, monolithic category of harmonization, assimilation, and holy envy. The idea of excess in Marion's thought is a key against the tendency to reduce each religious tradition to conceptual categorization, harmonization, and assimilation. Third, there is a pragmatic dimension to the "hermeneutics of charity" when interreligious dialogue is seen as a moment of discovery and enrichment, without reducing it to sameness. The given of one's tradition reveals how existing methodologies of interreligious dialogue are inadequate to capture the whole event of dialogue. Given these reasons, an inferred definition of the hermeneutics of charity may be stated as a posture that suspends the idolatry of preconceived conceptual frameworks to receive or understand a text or religious other as a phenomenon that *gives itself,* thereby upholding an irreducible excess that resists reduction to, and seduction by, exclusivist or relativist approaches. Such a hermeneutics refuses to reduce or flatten diversity/difference to harmonization and competitive assimilation. Instead, it orients interreligious encounters toward authentic discovery and mutual enrichment while preserving the otherness of each religious tradition.

To do this, I will first present in broad strokes Marion's phenomenology of givenness, then move to his discussion of hermeneutics, and how such a hermeneutics can be considered a hermeneutics of 'charity', and lastly, attempt to relate it to inter/religious pluralism (and) dialogue and show how it helps enrich our understanding of interreligious dialogue as a praxis.

Marion on Phenomenology of Givenness

The idea of givenness is central to Marion's phenomenology, especially in his magnum opus *Being Given*. Givenness, its French equivalent donation, or *Gegebenheit* in German, is an essential Husserlian term that Heidegger uses and that Marion further explores. While Husserl presupposes givenness, Marion argues that further phenomenological investigation is required. He claims that there is more to givenness than Husserl articulated. That is why the *es gibst* (what gives) must not be presupposed. Only then do we find a more originary beginning of the phenomenon, allowing us to see its 'self,' or "quasi-selfhood."[17]

Givenness is not an "immediate sensible intuitiveness."[18] Rather, it is what the reduction accomplishes. When something is given, no matter how we try to grasp or conceptualize it, it escapes grasping. Givenness is "that which shows itself, gives itself,"[19] with no a priori conditions. A reduced given is reducible only to itself. For instance, *utang-na-loob*, as a Filipino value, is irreducible to transaction or economic exchange between the debtor and the debtee. This is because the given, which is the favor, the deed, or time, not the material object, cannot be returned. The money one owes the other can obviously

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[17] Shane McKinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 50.

[18] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," in *The Enigma of Divine Revelation: Between Phenomenology and Comparative Theology,* edited by Jean-Luc Marion, Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, 17-48 (Netherlands: Springer, 2020), 29, fn. 43.

[19] Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 5. See also, Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess*: *Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

be returned. But this is not what was initially given. What is originally given is the act of generosity, love, and care that comes with giving money, which cannot be erased. That said, Marion believes that his account of reduction overcomes those of Husserl and Heidegger's. Marion's point is that we do not presuppose intuition as the starting point or the condition of the possibility of experience or phenomenon. Instead, intuition comes after givenness because, without the latter, intuition is impossible. Intuition is, therefore, given. Marion explains,

> Givenness precedes intuition and intention because they make sense only for and through an appearance, which counts as the appearing of something that appears (a phenomenon being) only by virtue of the principle of correlation – and therefore of givenness.[20]

So, his phenomenology of givenness is rooted in one phenomenological insight. It is to let the phenomenon appear and show itself as it is, without conditions exerted by the one receiving the phenomenon. Here, givenness shows its absolute and foundational characteristics. It is absolute and foundational because "it [givenness] relies on nothing else for its criterion, but all the rest is measured by reference to it."[21] These characteristics reflect the nature of givenness made possible by the reduction that Marion employed, which states: "as much reduction, so much givenness."[22] The primacy of this phenomenological formula resolves the intrinsic diffi-

[20] Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 32.

[21] Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," 21.

[22] Marion, *Being Given*, 5.

culties of other principles of phenomenology,[23] which then aim to bring givenness as a fundamental principle of phenomenology. Marion further explains that "givenness is thus set up, by its certitude and automatic universality, in principle unconditioned. There could, therefore, be a 'first philosophy' according to phenomenology."[24]

With givenness, talk of reduction is inevitable because, for Marion, "no givenness that does not pass through the filter of a reduction."[25] But it does not mean that givenness is conditioned by reduction. On the contrary, Marion insists that the legitimacy of reduction is drawn from its function of serving givenness.[26] With givenness, reduction is presupposed and a necessary condition for a particular phenomenological act. Reduction as the 'servant' of givenness implies that without the 'master', a relationship with the 'servant' is nothing because the servant's value depends on its relationship with the master. This analogy emphasizes the independence of givenness by redefining reduction as an operator of givenness.[27] While Husserl's employment of reduction is to broaden the scope of intuition and the constitution of the object as grasped by the subject, and Heidegger's reduction is employed to investigate the question of Being (*Seinfrage*), Marion's reduction aims to broaden the field of givenness to let the phenomenon appear unconditionally without restrictions. To be sure, his phenomenological reduction does not claim to explain the origin of givenness. Instead, it aims to show how given-

[23] Michel Henry, Joseph Rivera, and George E. Faithful, "The Four Principles of Phenomenology," in *Continental Philosophy Review* 48 (2015): 1-15.

[24] Marion, *In Excess,* 23.

[25] Marion, *Being Given,* 16.

[26] Ibid.*,* 21.

[27] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Reduction and 'The Fourth Principle,'" trans. Daniel Gillis, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 41-63.

ness works. It is like a "duct"[28] through which everything flows without restriction, and everything is understood through it. But Marion did not elaborate further on the characteristics of his reduction except that it accomplishes what Husserl and Heidegger hesitated to do, i.e., broadening the scope of givenness to allow other phenomena to appear in their unique manner of appearing.

The consequence of this is the possible occurrence of what he calls the saturated phenomena. Though not an original discovery,[29] Marion believes that his articulation of it redefines the notion of a phenomenon. Marion wishes to prove that parts of phenomena are unseen, not because they *per se* cannot be seen, but due to our incapacity to break what impedes our seeing of them. Our attitude to constitute the phenomenon as a mere object of knowledge hinders our seeing of the phenomenon's inner self. The saturated phenomenon exceeds the categories we use to constitute an object. For Marion, contra Kant, "intuition is king."[30] It is because any concept is a product of the given intuition. Without intuition, no idea with content is possible. As Marion explains, "Intuition without concept, although still blind, nevertheless already gives matter to an object. Whereas the concept without intuition, although not blind, nevertheless no longer sees anything,

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[28] Kevin Hart, "How Marion Gives Himself," in *Breached Horizons: The Philosophy of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Rachel Bath, Antonio Calcagno, Kathryn Lawson, and Steve G. Lofts, 13-26 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 20.

[29] Jean-Luc Marion explains that this idea is not original to him. He acknowledges Immanuel Kant who for Marion has initiated the possible conception of saturated phenomenon. Marion says, "he is the thinker of the intuitive shortage of the common phenomenon to have envisioned and defined what I am calling a 'saturated phenomenon.'" See Jean-Luc Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," in *The Visible and the Revealed,* trans. Christina M. Gschwandter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 32.

[30] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 28-29.

since nothing has yet been given to it to be seen."[31] Intuition's kingly character is grounded in its power to provide an epistemic role for the whole object of possible experience. Meanwhile, according to Marion, the phenomenon is thought and rendered possible because of the concept. But to be thought, the concept must "first be given; and it is given only through intuition."[32]

Since the phenomenon of saturation saturates intuition, the intention is rendered helpless to capture or synthesize what has been received. It questions the subject's capacity to constitute a thing being experienced. Consequently, essential elements in this process of phenomenological reflection are put on hold or even considered unnecessary. What a saturated phenomenon accomplishes is to account for a particular experience without the subject's total constituting capacity. Because of its bedazzling and blinding light, the constituting subject is rendered captive and powerless to grasp the received phenomenon. Marion's discovery led others to consider him at best an 'unorthodox' phenomenologist who "push[es] further or make[s] horizon irrelevant—which, on the contrary, [is] too important for Husserl."[33] In this case, it appears that a saturated phenomenon, based on its characteristics, rubs the subject of "epistemic integrity,"[34] because the subject no longer holds any power to constitute knowledge from what is given. The Western epistemological tradition dictates that the subject constitutes knowledge of any object being experienced. Classical theories of epistemology tell us

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[31] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 28.

[32] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 29.

[33] Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 33.

[34] Kristof Oltvai, "Another Name for Liberty: Revelation, 'Objectivity,' and Intellectual Freedom in Barth and Marion," in *Open Theology,* 5 (2019): 434.

that any knowledge acquired is based on the subject-object a/symmetrical relationship. It is either the subject, the object, or both that have the power to dictate what to know and how to know it. Some early modern philosophers, before Kant, believed that in the acquisition of knowledge, the subject is passive in the sense that the mind adjusts itself to receive sense data. Kant, on the other hand, viewed the object as no longer an emperor that dictates what the mind must receive or see. Rather, the object adjusts according to the mind's structures. It means the mind determines or constitutes an object.

However, with Marion's explicit articulation of the saturated phenomenon, he finds the classical account of knowledge and subject-object relation incomplete. In the context of a saturated phenomenon, the subject-object category is rethought or radically disappears. Instead, there is only the evental relationship between phenomena: the human event and the givenness of the given. To be clear, this epistemic arrangement appears only in saturated phenomena because, in Marion's view, some phenomena are poor in intuition, such as mathematical intuition. So, they are constituted by the subject and therefore are objects of thought. Objects and events are two modes of phenomenality. Their status depends on the series of "hermeneutical variations." In other words, "The more a phenomenon appears as an event, the more it is saturated with intuition. The more it appears as an object, the more it is deprived of intuition."[35]

Note, however, that I will no longer recount the criticisms against Marion's deployment of hermeneutics in his account of saturated phenomenon. Christina

[35] Claudio Tarditi, "From Negative Theology to Hermeneutics: Marion as Interpreter of Saint Paul," in *Breached Horizons: The Philosophy of Jean-Luc Marion,* edited by Rachel Bath, Antonio Calcagno, Kathryn Lawson, and Steve G. Lofts, 218-230 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 227.

Gschwandtner has comprehensively and lucidly summarized important critical points on this matter.[36] Another is Shane Mackinlay, who points out that Marion's view of hermeneutics is narrow and limited to epistemic acts. He highlights the lack of hermeneutics in Marion's saturated phenomenon, arguing that Marion did not explicitly acknowledge the recipient's hermeneutic activity in the reception of the saturated phenomenon.[37] Against these claims, Marion affirms the role of hermeneutics in the reception of saturated phenomenon, saying that "the saturated phenomenon… also requires a hermeneutics, where the existential 'as' agrees to expose itself to the counter-experience, and to thus enter into a battle with the inevitably objectifying experience expressed by the apophantic 'as.'"[38] Hence, the passage shows that there is no reason to assume that givenness prohibits hermeneutics.[39] In fact, it demands it because even in the very manifestation of the appearing, interpretation occurs.[40] Hence, hermeneutics is the necessary implication of the givenness of the given. He does not deny hermeneutics in the determination of the given as it gives and shows itself. Rather, he insists that hermeneutics inevitably operates within that field. A case in point is the movement of the phenomenon from a poor to a saturated degree, which requires interpretation since the transition does not depend on the given, but "on the manner in which the *Adonné* receives it, experiences it, and expresses it — in short, the manner in which he

[36] Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 18.

[37] Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess,* 2.

[38] Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Hermeneutics*, translated by Jean-Pierre Lafouge (Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2012), 60.

[39] Ibid., 19.

[40] Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," 40.

knows how to interpret it."[41] Such a manner of interpretation, for Marion, is informed by his view of charity or love and givenness. It is this kind of hermeneutics that is at work, not one of suspicion (ideological), ontological (being's existence), psychological, or historical (authorial).

Marion's Hermeneutics of Charity: Displacing the Subject as the Master Interpreter and the Clearing of the Hermeneutical Field

In Marion, hermeneutics is understood as an evental phenomenon, not a subject-object relationship with the text, which essentially characterizes our understanding of the science of interpretation. This traditional view explains that there is a subject that interprets an object. Without a subject and an object, no interpretation takes place. However, Marion finds such a view too narrow and limiting because hermeneutics is not only "a matter of finding *a* sense…it is a matter of finding *the* sense that that which requests interpretation requests for itself."[42] One can find in this statement Marion's clear resistance and a consistent phenomenological posture regarding the inherent character of givenness as the fundamental presupposition of phenomenology and its implications when taken operationally.

To be sure, this view does not discount the fact that the subject neither participates in nor brings anything to givenness. For one, no matter how self-giving a phenomenon is, no phenomenon is encountered without subjective conditions of receptivity. This receptivity is what the subject brings to givenness, for givenness to manifest or appear. In other words, a phenomenon does not appear in a vacuum. It appears to someone. Receptive

[41] Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," 43.
[42] Ibid., 33. Italics in the original.

subjectivity, in a way, is needed for givenness to be manifested. However, this does not mean that the subject co-constitutes a manifestation of givenness. It only means that a phenomenon must appear to someone to appear at all. Simply put, manifestation is structurally relational. That is, it is always related to a subject or a recipient. Hence, the subject is phenomenologically necessary, but not productive. The subject makes manifestation possible as reception, not as construction.

From the givenness view, it informs us that a text as a phenomenon is shaped, like other phenomena (since some are intended or constituted), not by the subject, because a phenomenon shapes itself according to its mode of givenness. It gives itself first. It means that without a phenomenon, we cannot give anything at all. The phenomenon is the first giver, and since it is the first, what we give is just secondary. Marion states, "The sense comes actively to the interpretable, of itself, the interpreter needing only (as with musical sense) to let unfurl itself that which is implicitly available in and suggested by the given itself."[43] What it means is that we do not give meaning to text first. Rather, the text first gives its meaning before us. It is like saying, "before you love me, I love you first," or like the burning bush that calls Moses. He did not understand at first what the call was all about until 'I am, who Am' spoke to him. Note that while showing is a necessary condition for the given to be given, it is insufficient for the given to show itself. Giving is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for its showing. Marion clarifies, "[T]he given does not yet show itself through the simple fact that it gives itself: this necessary condition does not suffice."[44] For the text to show itself, the interpreter "reorganizes in the given the sense *of that*

[43] Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," 33.
[44] Ibid., 39.

given itself and effaces himself."[45] If one receives the givenness of the text, then one must reorient one's 'seeing' of the text by surrendering one's despotic autonomy to the text's terms of revelation. When one lets the text give itself, the more it shows itself. Imagine, for example, the child's drawing. You might not appreciate the scribbles and color mixtures as artful since you have your own standard for gauging whether a drawing is art. Having this view of the child's drawing reveals your imposition of meaning on it. In reverse, if you look at the child's drawing with charity and kind receptivity, you are led to see more in it. It is this 'more' or 'excess' that one understands how the shift from 'what I want to see' to 'what the drawing wants me to be *seen as*' takes place. This hermeneutical orientation satisfies the conditions for the text to give and show itself to us.

One radical implication of this is the displacement, if not the rupture, of the standard structure and object of interpretation. The subject is rendered as a mere witness or receiver of the text's phenomenality. It is not we who give ourselves the capacity to understand the text. Instead, it is the text's power or force that enables us to understand, for instance, the story of Moses and the burning bush. As one interprets this narrative, expectations and assumptions set in. To understand what it is all about, we use interpretive tools. With these tools, we decipher or decode the text. However, applying the idea of givenness, Marion holds that the sense of the text does not come from applying those external tools. Rather, the sense must come from how the text presents or gives itself to the interpreter. He explains, "The sense that hermeneutics (re-)finds for what it interprets does not come from the ego but from the thing itself awaiting interpretation; the ego less fixes a sense for that which

[45] Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," 34.

awaits one than it receives a sense from that which awaits one."[46] One can, therefore, infer that Marion reinterprets hermeneutics not as an activity that imposes meaning or signification on what is being received. Rather, it is about discovering, rather than inventing, the *sense* that the text itself asks to be received *as*. He says, "[I]t is a matter…of letting come to the phenomenon *its* own sense [*propre sens*], discovered rather than invented, recognized [*reconnu*] rather than known, by the temporary intervention of the ego."[47] How the text gives and shows itself must be the primary task of an interpreter. Marion notes, "Hermeneutics interprets not only the given in a phenomenon but, to do so, it must leave the hermeneutic actor to be interpreted by the given, which has to be phenomenalized."[48] The interpreter is being interpreted by the given text, and at the same time, the text is being given meaning through its own showing, its self-giving of meaning. The asymmetrical relationship is typical of the structure of givenness, where the recipient is powerless and remains a 'witness' to what is being received or given. Only then can an interpreter fully receive what the text intends to be received *as such*. The reversal allows Marion to argue strongly against his critics by implying that they misunderstood or missed the point of his account of givenness. Dahl affirms this view, saying,

> [It] is clear that his [Marion's] position cannot be drawn into the debate between an 'active' and 'passive' subject. In fact, in the figure of the *adonné*, we find an account of selfhood in which the work of interpretation flows from the authority of the phenomenon through a receiver whose work of reception is as 'active' in the

[46] Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," 33.
[47] Ibid., 34.
[48] Ibid., 43.

> showing of *adonné*, as it is passive to the giving of the phenomenon.[49]

One can see the target of his account of hermeneutics. It extends or broadens the meaning of what it means to interpret or do hermeneutics. His primary thesis is that "hermeneutics must be understood following the understanding of the given, in the form of the call and response."[50] It is in this call-response structure that Marion finds the "obligatory place and function of hermeneutics," where the gap between the given's giving and showing dissolves by "*interpreting the call* (or, often, the intuition) *by the response* (the concept for signification)."[51] Moreover, one can sense that Marion dislodges hermeneutics of its decoding power and objectifying tendencies, thereby signifying the subject's control over meaning. He places instead givenness as the originary point from which hermeneutics must begin. In this case, by implication, intentionality is kept at bay until the text's showing commences and opens a space for reception. In short, since intentionality triggers an imposition of meaning on the text, and so the subject initiates the meaning-making process, the principle of givenness suspends it temporarily. Intentionality is activated once a space is wide open for the text to disclose itself. Yet, the reception of what the text reveals does not nullify the role of intentionality. In receiving, what one receives needs to be intended. Put another way, the "phenomena are not only interpreted *after* they have appeared, but are *always already* interpreted in their

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[49] Darren E. Dahl, "Giving, Showing, Saying: Jean-Luc Marion and Hans-Georg Gadamer on Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Revelation," *Religions* 14 (2023) 1250, 11. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101250.

[50] Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," 36.

[51] Ibid., 40.

very appearing,"[52] explains Mackinlay. Just like a gift being given, when it is received and found, one looks at it and reflects, "Why did he give me this?" "What's the meaning of this?" and so forth. It is here that meaning-making begins to develop. Although as an event, it is inexhaustible. Yet, one can make sense of it. The more one encounters it, the more one finds meanings in it. Such that, in the future, one forms a narrative from it. Sometimes, narrative becomes a substitute for explanation. If this happens, such an event becomes saturated. As Han puts it, "There are events that cannot be explained but only narrated. A narrative often has something wondrous and mysterious around its edges."[53] An example of this is when one experiences, for the first time, the beauty of nature, say, on top of Mt. Pulag, or the first time joining the *Traslación* of the Nazareno in Quiapo, or the first kiss or 'I love you' from someone you most want to hear it from. Either one can just say, "it's heaven," "wow," or narrate what happened. There, we find one's experience as saturated yet interpreted. Tarditi, speaking about the icon's gaze, says, "If the subject forsakes all pretense of supremacy over phenomenality and considers itself as having been *gifted*, it can experience the icon's gaze, beyond whose eyes the *unenvisageable* opens the infinite field of invisibility."[54] What it means is that a genuine interpretation is completed "only if the interaction between phenomenality…and subjectivity is shaped as a relation between a call and a response."[55] We can truly comprehend how something shows itself to us only if we approach it not as something to master or explain, but as something that

[52] MacKinlay, *Interpreting Excess,* 36.

[53] Byung-Chul Han, *The Crisis of Narration,* translated by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), 10.

[54] Tarditi, "From Negative Theology to Hermeneutics," 442.

[55] Ibid., 443.

speaks to us and awaits our response. We become a witness, or the *gifted* (*Adonne*), of the text. We do not fully control or shape the text. The text frames the meaning we construct after receiving it. It is here that Marion's 'endless hermeneutics' takes a concrete form, since it is the text that possesses control over itself. It appears that the subject who receives the text may gaze at such a text in varying degrees of saturation. Thus, from one point to another, it becomes possible to see and understand the same text in different ways. The plurisignifications of the text, one can infer, depend on how it shows itself and is received by the subject in different occurrences. For instance, the more one reads and reflects on the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) or the *Beatitudes* (Matthew 5:3-12), the more one unravels layers of meaning and realization. Such an occurrence only happens when one can cross the chasm from one phenomenality (poor) to another (saturated). That is why Marion believes that once one reaches the saturated experience, infinite hermeneutics takes form.

Another central assertion is that "The meaning given by hermeneutics does not come…from the decision of the hermeneutical actor, as from that which the phenomenon itself is…waiting for and of which the hermeneutic actor remains a mere discoverer and therefore the servant."[56] It means that the hermeneutic actor, or interpreter, is secondary to the text's givenness. This kind of hermeneutical disposition is required in the practice of the hermeneutics of charity. Marion describes hermeneutics as an event that "must be understood according to the understanding of the given, through the call and answer figures."[57] He calls for a phenomenological hermeneutics and distinguishes four hermeneutic moments in givenness. These four moments are: (1) the

[56] Marion, *Givenness and Hermeneutics,* 41, 43.
[57] Ibid., 47.

call must be heard and identified as a call; (2) the saturated phenomenon is so rich that it requires infinite interpretation; (3) one must distinguish between poor and saturated phenomena; (4) the final distinction of all phenomena into objects or events has its origin in the hermeneutic operation.[58]

The call assumes priority over the response (the interpreter), without which no interpretation can occur. The call or the given is preconditioned on the possibility of the interpretation taking the form of a response. While the response is already within the structure of the call, the moment one hears the call, any response becomes hermeneutical. A response to a call is not necessarily verbal or written. A bodily reaction, feeling, or mood also counts as a response that carries understanding figures. In short, the interpreter has a hermeneutical dimension: "it tells the phenomenon's story. While the story may well remain fragmented due to the incredible weight and overwhelming nature of the phenomenon, it is still a narration of some sort, even if it must not be verbal. It is hence hermeneutic, at least on some level."[59]

Another essential point that Marion also emphasized is the text's singularity, which means it shows itself singularly to the recipient. The singular revelation of the text allows outsiders to a religious tradition to discern and see the truth or meaning in virtue of the text's givenness. Showing the meaning is available to everyone with a disposition to receive and understand it. Unlike the view that meaning resides in the interpreter, which arbitrarily constructs and legislates imperial or dogmatic pronouncements, Marion dislocates the authority of the interpreter and places it in the phenomenon itself.[60] A

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[58] Marion, *Givenness and Hermeneutics,* 54-63.

[59] Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness,* 20.

[60] This is where the issue regarding the authority of bishops, "the theologian par excellence" (*God without Being,* 152) can be an issue.

phenomenon that shows itself by itself shows singularly to anyone disposed to receive it. As already said, hermeneutics is not limited to interpretation. An understanding not only of a text one is confronted with but primarily of one's experience and encounter with existence, since "phenomena are not only interpreted *after* they have appeared but are *always already* interpreted in their very appearing."[61] Marion says, "understanding, or rather being able to understand something, does not imply transforming or deciding on a (new) meaning for a subsisting object."[62] Therefore, hermeneutics is not restricted to the interpretations of existence that arise when it is subsequently recounted. Human existence is considered hermeneutic in the very structure of its happening.[63] That is why Marion insists on the possibility of hermeneutics in the event of the 'call and response play,' so "we can have a glimpse of how hermeneutics can be articulated on the issue of given-

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In Marion's theological works, he appears to privilege the bishop as a normative ecclesial authority in interpreting theological text or tradition. And so, the question how can he reconcile the universal possibility of receiving revelation or interpreting the text with the claim that bishops possess a unique or normative authority in theological interpretation? A quick answer to this, perhaps, is that Marion distinguishes between the reception of revelation or text (in general) and the ecclesial regulation of doctrine. The bishop's authority belongs to a different order altogether, i.e., the responsibility for ecclesial discernment. In addition, in an interview, for Marion, even revelation as a concept is "not a theological concept" but, historically, "it is a philosophical concept" (*Quiet Powers of the Possible*, 59). See, Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being,* 2nd edition, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982); Tarek R. Dika & W. Chris Hakkett, *Quiet Powers of the Possible: Interviews in Contemporary French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[61] Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess,* 36.

[62] Marion, *Givenness and Hermeneutics,* 47.

[63] Ibid.

ness,"[64] which has been shown by him when he explained how the call and response demands a hermeneutic reaction. Here, Marion contends that "*Hermeneutics manages the gap between what gives itself and what shows itself by interpreting the call (or intuition) by the response (concept or meaning).*"[65] By responding to the givenness of the text or phenomena, the recipient responds to the "call," and such a response is hermeneutical. In what sense is it hermeneutic? It is not purely based on one's utterance and articulation of the meaning of the call that hermeneutics takes place. Marion explains it by saying, "hermeneutics never deals *first* with the text (vision of its meaning), but with the intra-worldly being opened to and by the possibility (the avenue for the coming of the interpreter)."[66] Instead, hermeneutics begins to operate in the very experience and encounter of the call's recipient. The *fiat* of Mary may be the concrete manifestation of one's response to the call of God to be Christ's bearer and mother, but before the *fiat* is the silence that responds profoundly to the call. Mary's *fiat* may not be enough to capture the excessive intuition she had received from the call. But the *fiat* becomes a manifestation, a testimony of extraordinary experience and excess. Marion explains, "the gap, in fact, never filled, between saturated intuition and the scarcity of meanings or concepts, must be lived, failing to be filled, by the invention of many, if not of all, the possible interpretations of intuition."[67]

Therefore, we may say that, in Marion's view, hermeneutics plays a role in his phenomenology, though less significant than the others. Nevertheless, it somehow addresses the issue. But in line with the central

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[64] Marion, *Givenness and Hermeneutics,* 51. Italics in the original.
[65] Ibid.*,* 55. Italics in the original.
[66] Ibid.*,* 49.
[67] Ibid.*,* 59

issue of this essay, how can Marion's view of hermeneutics (of charity) be used as a methodological approach to discussing religious pluralism? By this kind of hermeneutics, I mean looking at the phenomenon or a text with the thought that one is being offered or given much intuition to process. Any constitution from the interpreter is no longer necessary. In other words, the hermeneutics of charity allows for a more comprehensive horizon and openings for one to receive more fully what must be accepted as revealed or shown without condition by the text or phenomenon. In this case, one becomes humbled and attentive to the anonymous voice from nowhere that calls to one's voice when confronted with a text or religious phenomenon.

Hermeneutics of Charity and Interreligious Dialogue

This essay adopts a specific perspective on interreligious dialogue. It is informed by the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of it, while remaining conscious that this perspective neither represents nor reflects a way other religious traditions approach interreligious dialogue. Nevertheless, the essay assumes that the Roman Catholic Church's view is synoptic in orientation, serving as a concrete expression of her fidelity to the spirit and essence of interreligious dialogue, and recognizing its integrality, while remaining steadfast and grounded in her own proclamation as a pilgrim Church.

The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue clarifies the role of dialogue within the Church's mission, emphasizing that, though "an integral dimension of the

mission of the Church,"[68] it does not in any way "replace proclamation."[69] Rather, both must be seen as aiming at communicating salvific truth in a pluralist world. This document reiterates the Church's operative definition of dialogue in its third sense, as articulated in the 1984 document *Dialogue and Mission*, which defines it as "not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment."[70] This meaning of dialogue is sensitive to and respectful of each religious tradition's doctrinal teachings and other significant differences. It aligns with the spirit and letter of key Church documents on dialogue, such as *Nostra aetate, Redemptoris missio,* and *Dominus Iesus,*[71] among others,

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[68] Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue," Thesis 2 (April 1987).

[69] Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientation on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html. For a context of this issue, see also Marianne Moyaert, "*Nostra Aetate* 2: Between Dialogue and Proclamation," in *Hard Sayings Left Behind by Vatican II: Stumbling Blocks for Ecumenism, Interfaith Dialogue and Church-World Relations,* 113-138 (Palgrave Macmillan: 2023).

[70] Secretariatus Pro Non Christianis, *The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, (1984), https://www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Dialogue_and_Mission_ENG.pdf.

[71] Written and published during the time of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) as the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. One of its aims is to emphasize the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ amidst the widespread and growing theological relativism and religious pluralistic relativism. When seen in the context of Marion's phenomenal openness of the text and its implications to interreligious dialogue, one can say, though

which underscore the value of dialogue for inclusivity and relationality. Dialogue, in this sense, is not confined to debates or discussions on various theological levels. But also, more importantly, it values mutual understanding and enrichment as part of the relational and inclusive process of encounter, where openness, respect, goodwill, and charity bring together all religious traditions at one table. Already in Pope Paul VI's document *Ecclesiam Suam*, charity is a key element of his definition of dialogue. He views dialogue as an "internal drive of charity"[72] that manifests externally in one's openness to understanding another's beliefs and doctrines.

This working definition of dialogue must operate across all its forms. The Church identifies four forms of dialogue: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the theological exchange, and the dialogue of religious experience.[73] Analogously, each form corresponds to a part of the human person: head (theological exchange), heart (religious experience), hands (action), and the totality of the human person (life).[74] To be sure, dialogue here is understood as praxis. As Morali explains, it is not

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tentatively, that Marion's thought can still preserve genuine openness to mystery and alterity. The *Magisterium,* one may argue, provides normative boundaries for ecclesial teaching but does not monopolize the phenomenality of revelation itself. See https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

[72] Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam,* (1964): 65, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html.

[73] See *Dialogue and Proclamation,* 42. Some further explanations, see Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, "Asian Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," in *Asian Christianity and Theology: Inculturation, Interreligious Dialogue, Integral Liberation* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 88.

[74] Sergey Melnik, "Types of Interreligious Dialogue," *The Journal of Interreligious Studies,* 31 (2020): 50. Note that the last analogy is mine, not of the author.

"a criterion for theological evaluations or dogmatic conclusions regarding Christian faith, nor is it a speculative a priori for theologically judging the truth of revelation."[75]

However, as Melnik points out, this classification, aside from the broadness of some categories, such as theological dialogue, lacks what he calls "a polemical aspect of interfaith interaction," which he calls "polemical dialogue" or Marianne Moyaert calls "diplomatic dialogue."[76] It suggests that the classification could be broadened to include other aspects not identified in the Roman Catholic framework. Melnik cites Sallie B. King, who identifies three additional types, viz., internal dialogue, parliamentary-style, and intervisitation.[77] According to Melnik, there are more typologies and frameworks in interreligious dialogue practice. However, he partially concludes that despite these attempts to thematize and systematize approaches to interreligious dialogue, one thing remains clear, i.e., interreligious dialogue is "a complex and many-faceted phenomenon,"[78] and so, one can safely say, following King, that "there can be no standard list of types of dialogue."[79] Despite this, Melnik offers a different classification, aiming to be more comprehensive than previous ones. He offers four types,

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[75] Ilaria Morali, "Catholic Theology vis-à-vis Religions and Dialogue Fifty Years after Vatican II," *The Past, Present, and Future of Theologies of Interreligious Dialogue,* edited by Terrence Merrigan and John Friday, 81-94 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 82.

[76] Melnik, "Types of Interreligious Dialogue," 50. See also Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations,* ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[77] Melnik, "Types of Interreligious Dialogue," 52. See Sallie B. King, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, ed. Chad Meister (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[78] Melnik, "Types of Interreligious Dialogue," 53.

[79] Cited in Melnik, King, "Interreligious Dialogue," 102.

viz., polemical dialogue, cognitive dialogue, peacemaking dialogue, and partnership dialogue.[80] The point is simply to show that scholars and experts in this field seek an encompassing framework that captures the totality of the practice of interreligious dialogue. However, they admit it is untenable. The admission speaks to what Marion believes the phenomenon's character is, i.e., it is saturated. Since interreligious dialogue is an event, which is a saturated form of a phenomenon, any attempt to comprehend and grasp all its phenomenality is rendered ineffective or deficient.

Relating all these to Marion's hermeneutics of charity, one can see that in a religious pluralist society, understanding of some salient core teachings and doctrines of different religious traditions requires hospitality or charity in the sense that one must strive to understand, appreciate, value, and interpret generously different views before judging them to avoid dissolving doctrinal convictions or foreclosing truth claims. Rather, interpretation must be ordered by love and the realization that the givenness of any encounter with different religious traditions is overflowing with intuitions that go beyond total grasping or comprehending. In various types of dialogue, one can see how Marion's hermeneutics of charity reframes or reconfigures the dynamics of interaction and dialogical encounters. For instance, theological exchange or polemic dialogue aims at an agapeic form of truth-seeking and telling. Love precedes and shapes theological propositions, arguments, and claims. The actors listen hospitably, bear witness to the 'other' text, evade conceptual idolatry, and recognize the excess of others' givenness. Viewed in this context, the theological exchange/polemic dialogue turns into a practice of clarification and reasonable toleration rather than

[80] Melnik, "Types of Interreligious Dialogue," 58.

breeding antagonism and hostility. Its aim is the mutual harnessing and purification of concepts, which may help reduce doctrinal conflict and escalation. This kind of hermeneutic activity within the field of polemics transforms the act of interpreting texts into a shared responsibility to produce robust theological convictions that enable collaboration and cooperation across religious traditions.

Relating this to a methodology of interreligious dialogue, Aaron Dun introduces what he calls "Constructive Problematizing Dialogue." This methodology addresses one of the three issues, i.e., harmonization, which is a tendency that participants exhibit in interreligious encounters, such as reading or sharing one's understanding of another tradition's text. He finds three causes for harmonization: favoring constructed commonality, misplaced empathy, and a liberal understanding of religious pluralism.[81] Hence, rather than emphasizing creative distinction and avoiding holy envy,[82] harmonization places more value on similarity and correlation. What this issue demonstrates, in relation to the hermeneutics of charity, is the failure to control and resist the assimilation of what one receives from the text of another tradition. A hermeneutic assimilation of the text to establish harmony is resisted when using a hermeneutic of charity. What charity allows is the reception of how the text gives itself and appears to the interpreter, rather than establishing harmonization. In the hermeneutic of charity, it retains the text's distinctness or difference.

Since *Nostra Aetate*, the Catholic Church has treated interreligious dialogue as integral to her mission in the

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[81] Aaron R. Dun, "Constructive Problematizing Dialogue: A New Model for Abrahamic Exchange," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 46 (July 2025): 118.

[82] Aaron R. Dun, "Constructive Problematizing Dialogue," 118.

world marked by deep religious diversity. As *NA* 2 states, "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."[83] The document emphasizes values common to all peoples, such as respect, fellowship, collaboration, unity in diversity, peace, harmony, justice, and human destiny. It pivots from polemics, though it remains a part of dialogue today, toward encounter and shared work on attaining a common vision and goals. Considering this context, dialogue presupposes pluralism or diversity. It channels diversity or plurality into constructive relations seeking mutual understanding and enrichment without abandoning the Church's mission. Mapping typologies, frameworks, strategies, motivations, purposes, and applications of interreligious dialogue implies seeking ways in which interreligious dialogue of any kind can prosper or succeed.

Conclusion

The essay seeks to show Marion's hermeneutics of charity as a significant methodology for addressing issues in interreligious dialogue, especially in the context of a particular methodology that attempts to overcome or resolve the issue of harmonization, which can be an impediment to attaining dialogical success. The hermeneutics of charity resists the tendency of textual assimilation. Rather, it plays an important role in countering the interpreter's strong tendency to harmo-

[83]Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate* (October 28, 1965), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

nize their understanding of the 'other text,' the goal of which is to exercise respect, tolerance, and sensitivity toward other traditions' perspectives. However, as pointed out above, harmonization has its downside as well. It does not always deliver the best possible outcomes, beneficial for creating a better relationship with other traditions.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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