

# Interreligious Dialogue

## A Catholic approach to religious diversity

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# Interreligious Dialogue

## Structure of the lecture



### The Victoria Scale *revisited*

#### A. Three Traditional Models

A1. Exclusivism

A2. Inclusivism

→ Critique of absolutism

A3. Pluralism

#### B. Beyond theological absolutism

B1. Particularism

B2. Interreligious Dialogue as 'translation'



# The Victoria Scale

Pedagogical school identity options

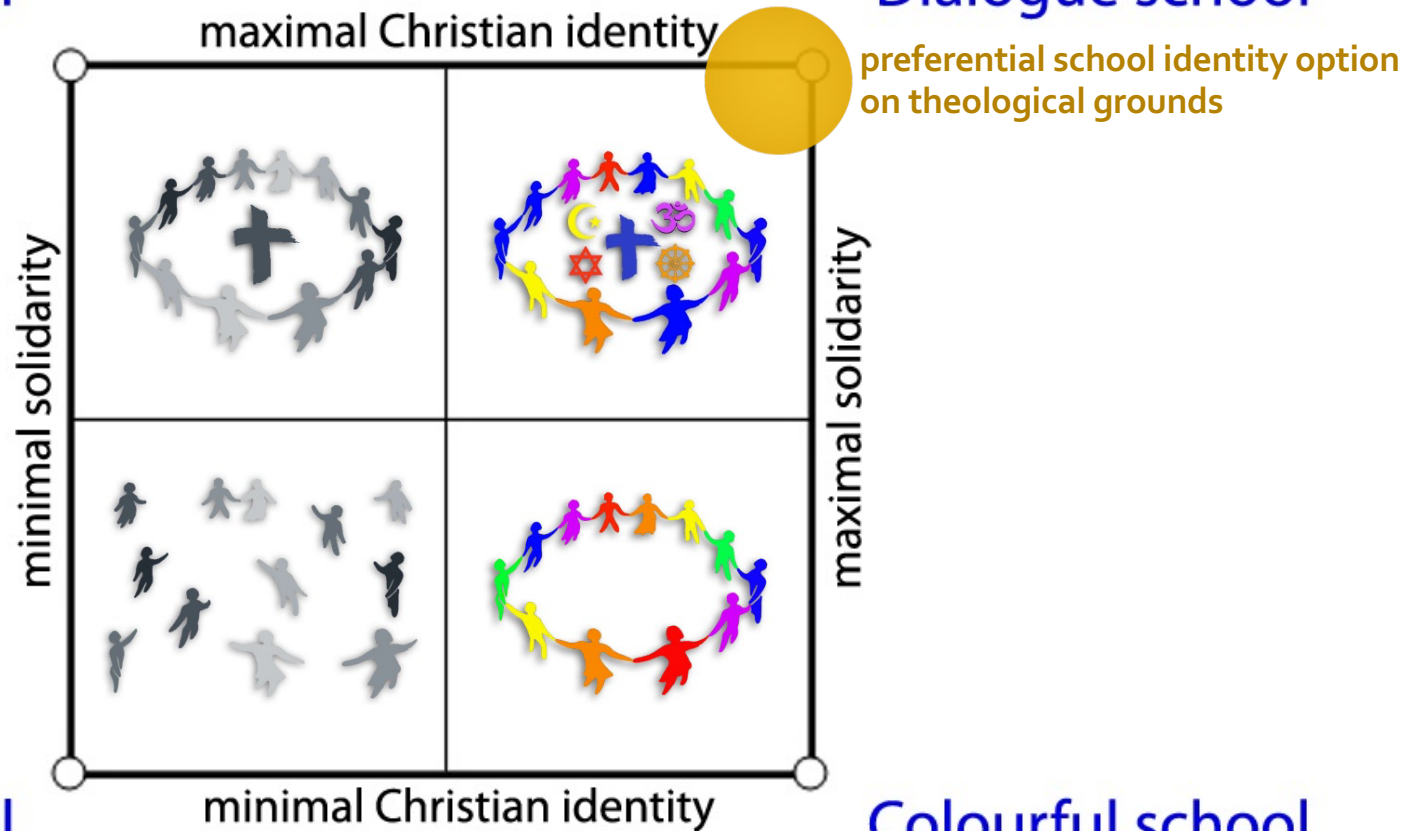
# Victoria Scale

## Diagram



Monologue school

Dialogue school





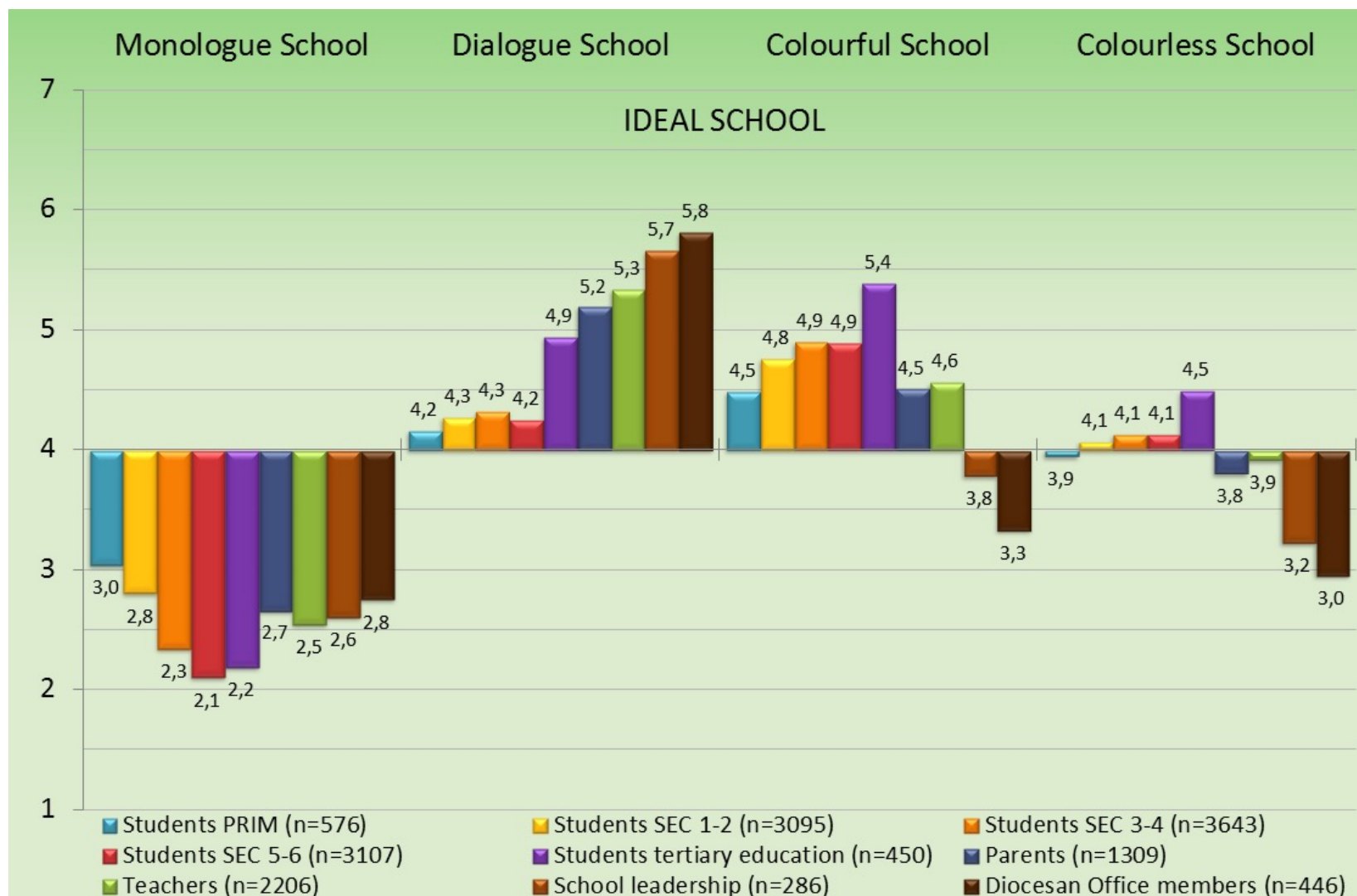


# Victoria Scale (2007-2012)

## Differentiated scale means, ideal school



### Ideal school



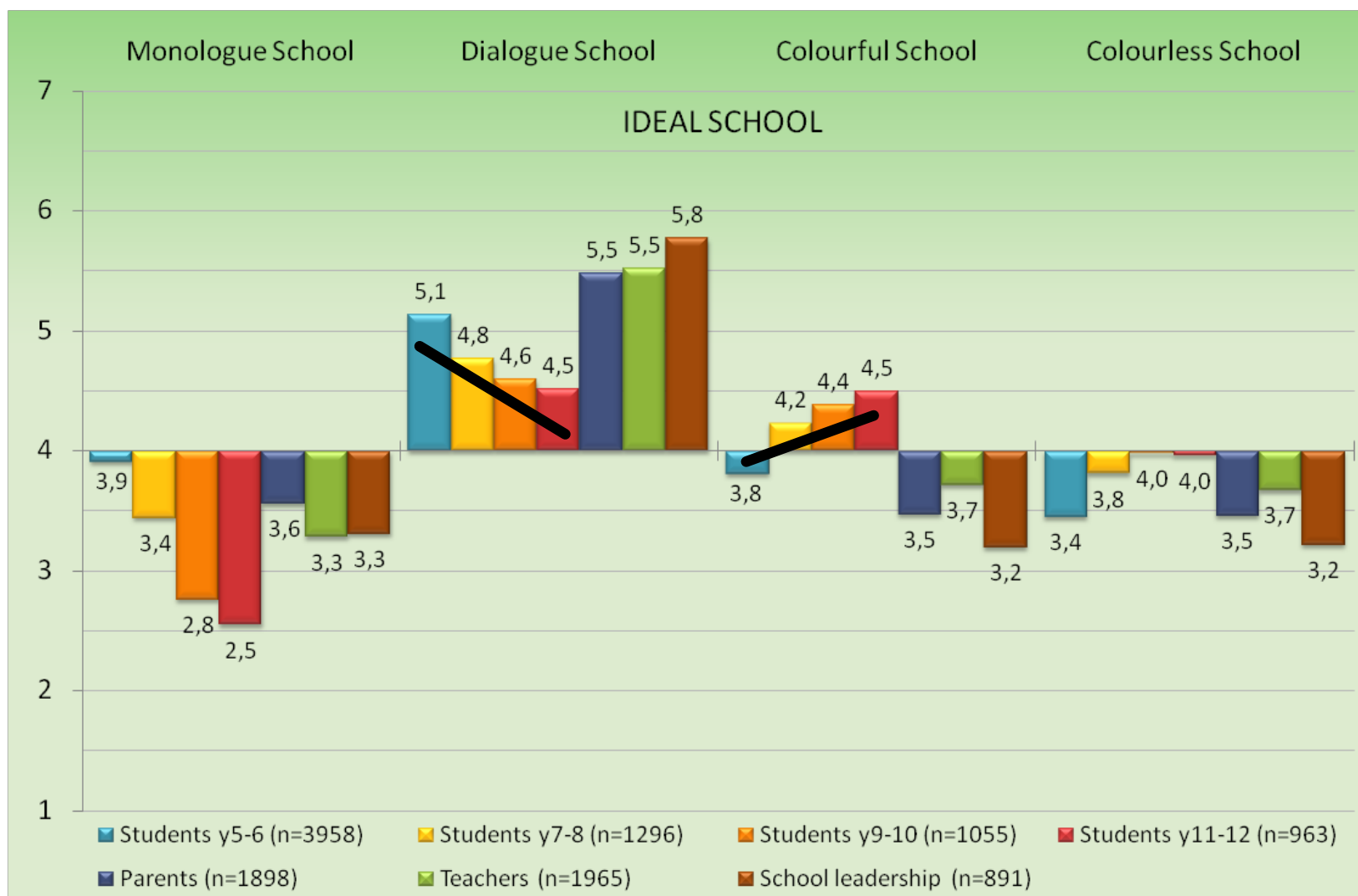


# Victoria Scale (2012)

Differentiated scale means, ideal school



All respondent groups compared



# Victoria Scale, Dialogue School subtypes

## A kerygmatic and a recontextualising variant



After factor analysis it seems that, within the Dialogue School type, there are two separate subtypes: a **kerygmatic variant** (focus on maintaining a traditional Catholic confessionality in the middle of pluralising culture) and a **recontextualising variant** (focus on the hermeneutical renewal of Catholic school identity through the dialogue with pluralising culture).

Dialogue School, kerygmatic variant



Dialogue School, recontextualising variant



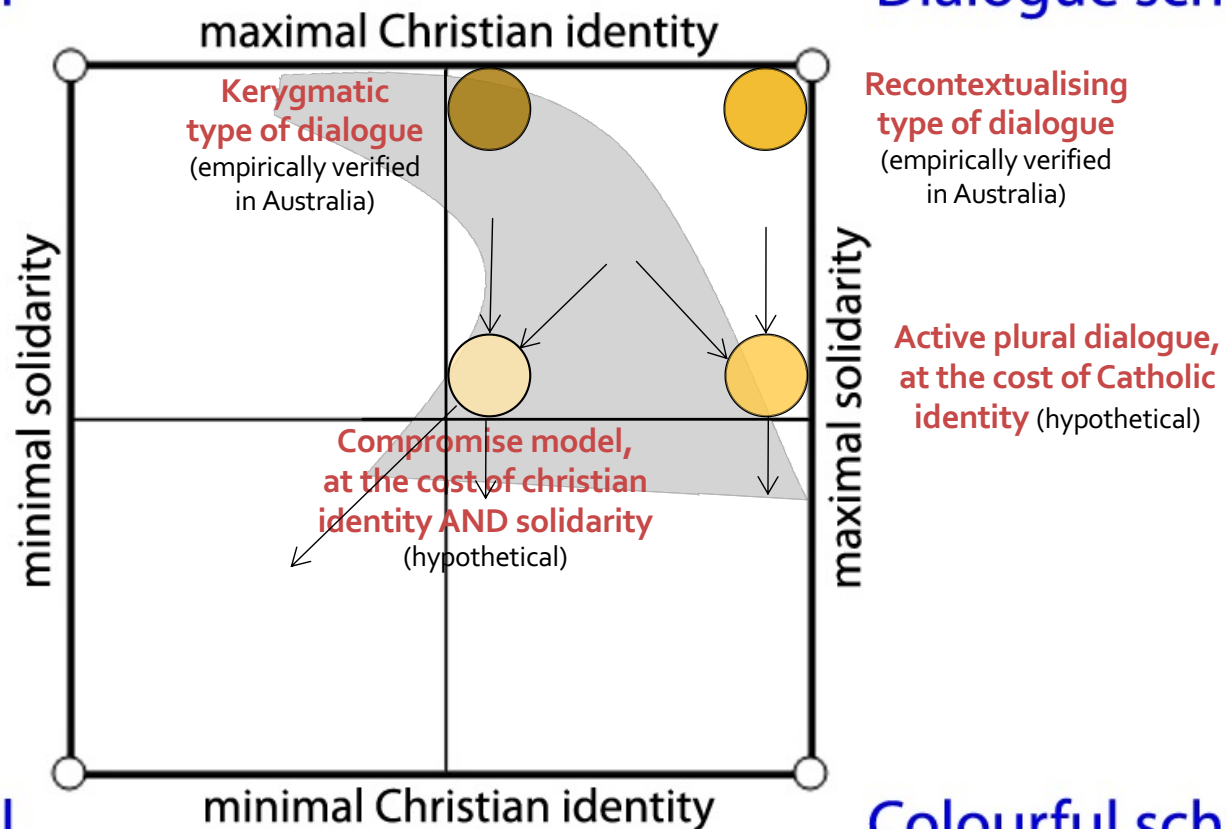
# Victoria Scale, Dialogue School subtypes

## Diagram – types of dialogue



Monologue school

Dialogue school



# Three Traditional Models

A problematic typology of 'non-Christian religions'.  
Beyond absolutism, relativism and particularism

# Exclusivism

## Inclusion only through conversion



- In a religiously diverse world, exclusivists maintain that salvation only comes through **conversion to the one true religion**.
- Therefore, other religions are considered false and invalid (binary thinking).
- Exclusivism was especially a development within Christianity, most widely held in today's evangelical churches: Jesus **must be accepted** as Saviour and Redeemer, or else one is *lost*.
- While no longer the official Catholic position, Cyprian, 3<sup>rd</sup> century bishop of Carthage, helped reinforce this thinking in an ecclesiological manner: **no salvation outside the church**.

# Exclusivism

'Signs' of exclusivism



*Extra  
ecclesiam  
nulla salus*





# Exclusivism

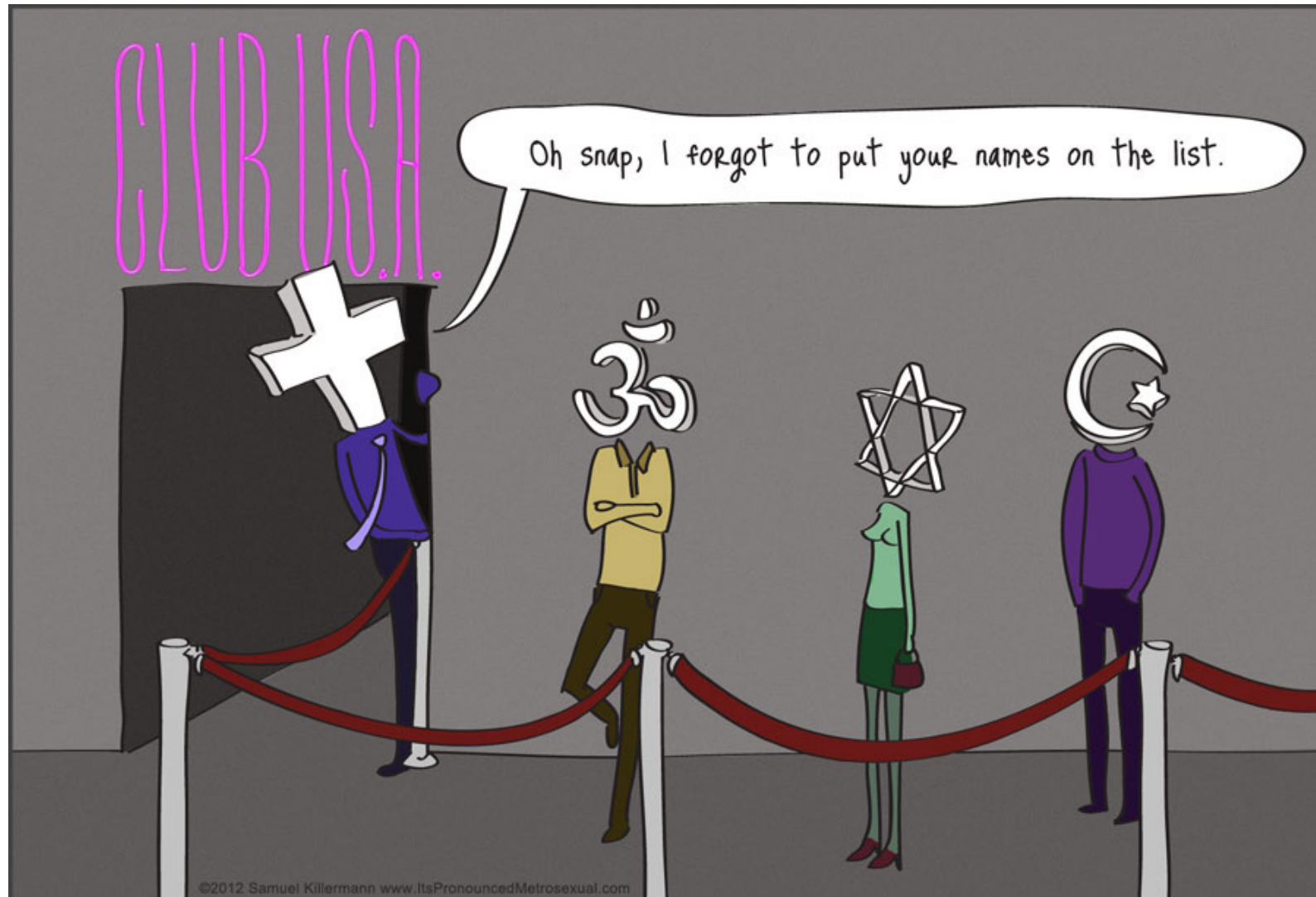
'Signs' of exclusivism





# Exclusivism

Motivates mission or incites crusades?



# Exclusivism

Motivates mission or incites crusades?



# Inclusivism

## Christ at work in other religions



- Inclusivism affirms that salvation *outside* Christianity is possible, but only **due to the salvific work of God through Jesus Christ**.
- Vatican II (1962-1965) established inclusivism as the **church's official position**:  
Pastoral Constitution *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2: "[The Church] 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**."
- *Explicit* knowledge of Christ is **not** needed for salvation. Other religions are 'included' in the Christian understanding of salvation.

# Inclusivism

## Christ at work in other religions



*"But if it is true that a person who becomes the object of the church's missionary efforts is or may be already someone on the way towards salvation – and if it is at the same time true that this salvation is Christ's salvation; since there is no other salvation – then it must be possible to be ... an **anonymous Christian**."*

Theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984)

# Inclusivism

## Creating a safe space for dialogue?



- By conceding that people in other religions can still be saved through God's grace, inclusivism *appears* to make room for **genuine interreligious dialogue**.
- Pope John Paul II demonstrated how the **proclamation of Christ** is not in conflict with interreligious dialogue – he saw the inclusivist paradigm as a means of peace.
- He called on Catholics to have "*respect for one's personal conscience, rejecting all forms of coercion or discrimination with regard to faith, freedom to practice one's own religion and give witness to it, as well as appreciation and esteem for all genuine traditions.*"

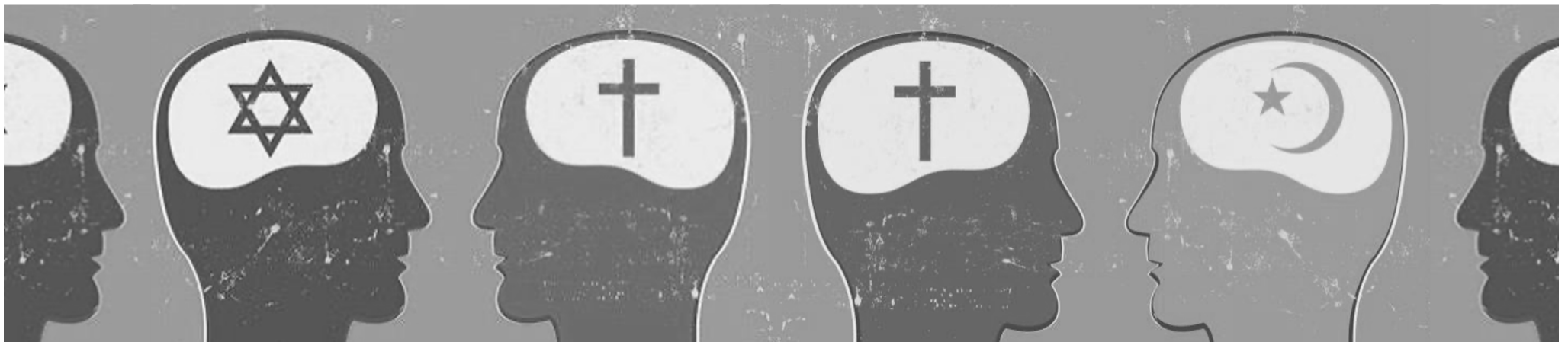


# Critique of inclusivism

## Actually inclusive?



- Inclusivism appears to have high regard for other religions by opening up a dialogue, but it ultimately considers **Christianity to contain the fullness of the truth.**
- Salvific action at work in other religions is due to unnamed Christianity (Are Christians "anonymous Buddhists"?).
- Unwittingly, inclusivism is often considered as a new kind of **Christian imperialism**: other religions only have value as far as they reflect aspects of the Christian truth.



# Critique of absolutism

## Inclusivism and exclusivism



**Inclusivism and exclusivism** are different sides of the *same* coin:

- Exclusivism fixates on one **unique mediator** of divine truth.
- Inclusivism purports to be inclusive, but really sees Christ hard at work within other religions.



# Critique of absolutism

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995)



Authentic interreligious dialogue begins when we resist the inclination to exclude the other ('exclusivism') and **stop reducing the other to ourselves** ('inclusivism').

*"The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name 'face'. (...) The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure. (...) It expresses itself."*

*Totality and Infinity, p. 50-51*



# New variants of inclusivism

Inclusivism opens itself towards the plurality of religions



## What does inclusivism means for us today?

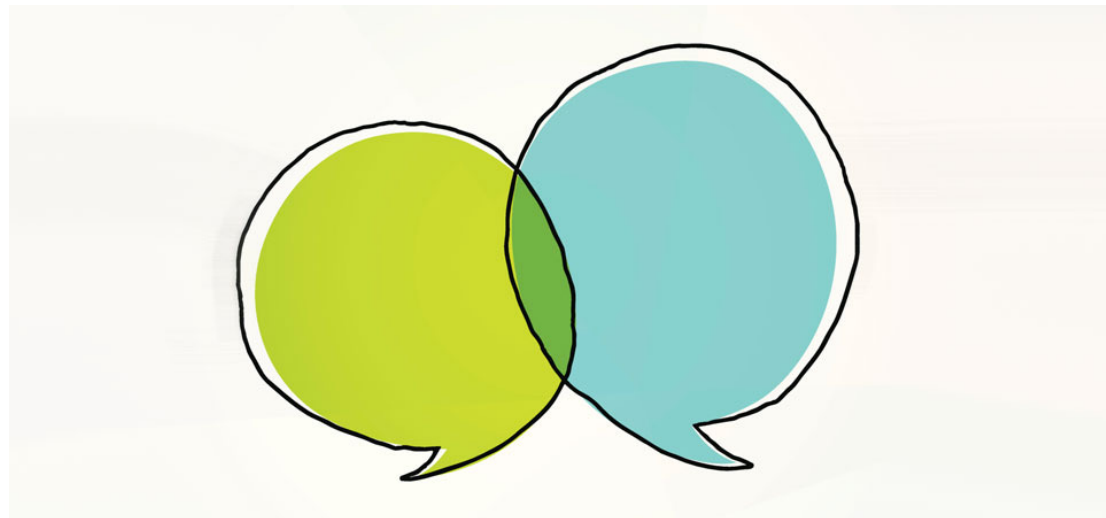
- Nobody can 'detach himself' from his religious perspective.
  - Image of the glass window.
  - Image of he glasses.
  - Difficulty of conversion.
- Recent developments indicate that there is not one form of inclusivism, but many:
  - The '**inclusivist pluralism**' of the Catholic Jacques Dupuis (1923-2004). A logo-centric approach.
  - The **trinitarian theology** of the protestant Mark Heim.
  - The '**open inclusivism**' of the Catholic Paul Griffiths.

# Pluralism

Equality at odds with particularity



- Pluralists tend to see their model as the only possibility for genuine interreligious dialogue.
- Pluralists consider all religions equal, all revealing *some* aspect of the **Ultimate Reality**.
- All religions offer salvation in as much as they **transform** followers away from their own **egoism** toward the greater divine truth.



# Pluralism

## Equality at odds with particularity



- Dispensing with particularity, pluralism inevitably begets **agnosticism**.
- The pluralistic paradigm will likely dispense with:
  1. The particularity of the **incarnation**
  2. The particularity of a **theistic God**
  3. **Any religious claim** whatsoever.
- Ironically, pluralism often then becomes *exclusivist* – there is no room at the table for those who don't accept the pluralist presuppositions...



# Pluralism

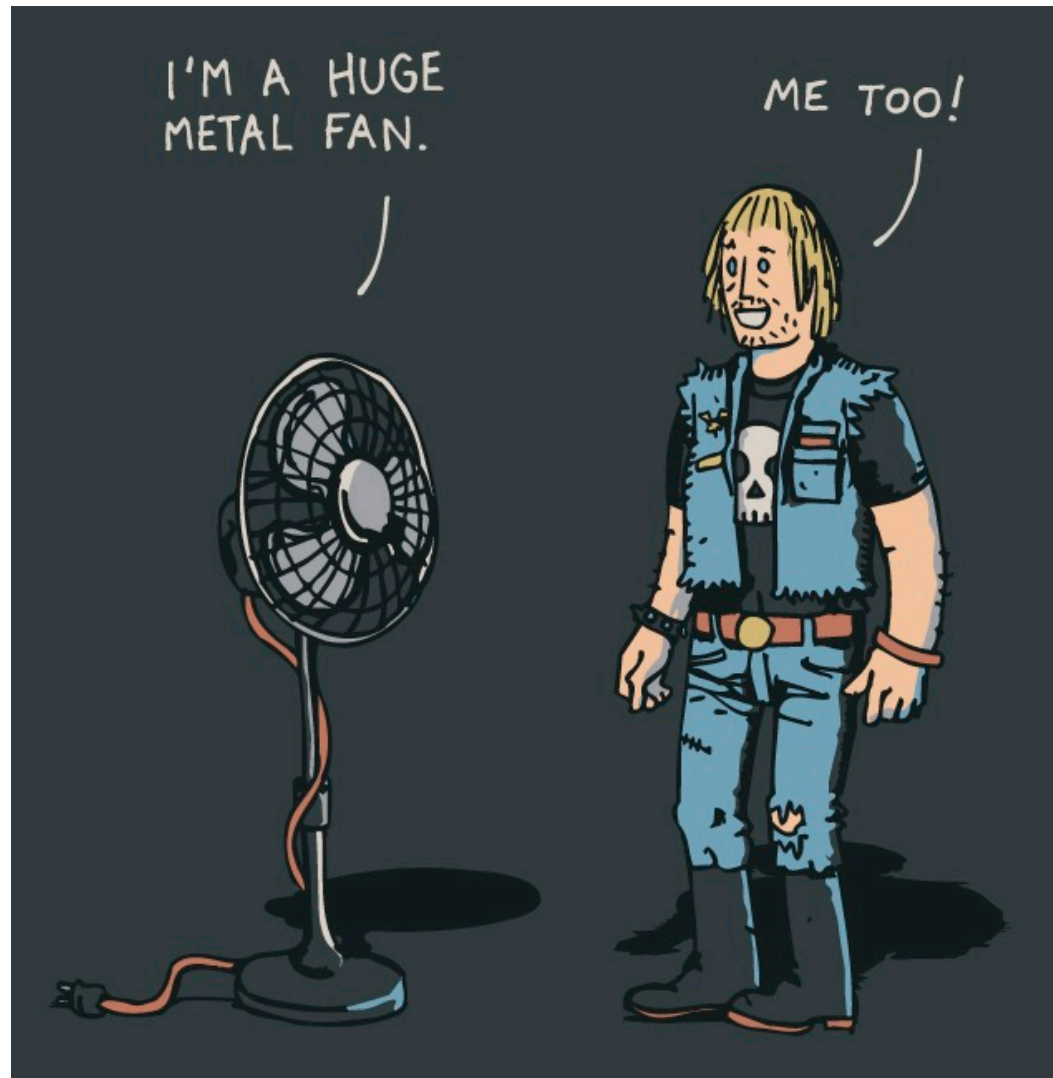
Equality at odds with particularity



"Really. He said *EVANGELIZE!* Can You *believe* it??"

# Superficial pluralism

Commonality at the expense of authentic dialogue





# New perspectives on the interreligious encounter

Beyond theological absolutism

# Particularism

Or why we should stop talking...



- The discourse seems to be *trapped* in the exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist typology.
- Christian theologians often have a '**soteriological fixation**', which George Lindbeck considers to be an expression of the idea of **Christian superiority**.
- Differences in religions do not only point to different experiences of the divine, but to **different religious experiences**.



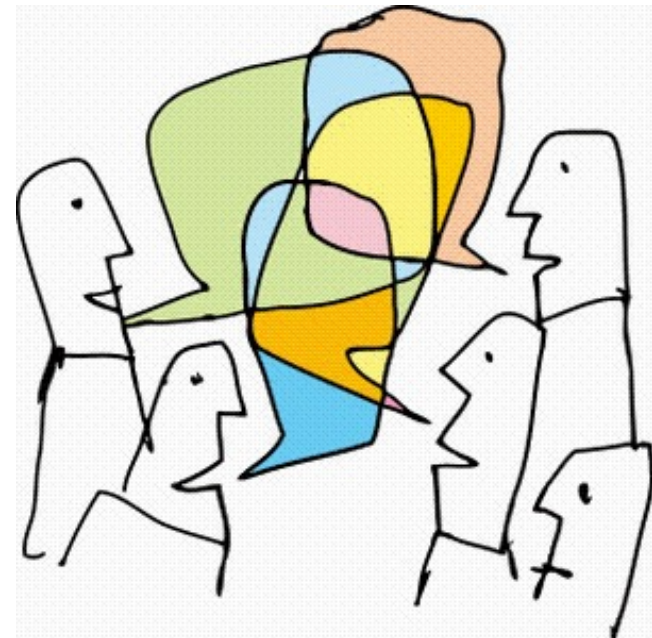


# Particularism

Or why we should stop talking...



- Particularism wants to change the terms of the discourse:
- Particularism does not focus on common ground, but intentionally looks to **religious differences**.
- George Lindbeck does not consider **religions as different frameworks** expressing humanity's relationship to the divine.





# Particularism

Or why we should stop talking...



- Rather, each religious framework is a **radically different experience** for its practitioners.
- In this way, religions can be compared to **linguistic systems** – there is no *general* language.
- In contrast to linguistic systems, religious systems cannot be **translated**.
- Translation would only result in **perversion**, diminution or incoherence of meaning.

# Particularism

Or why we should stop talking...



- From the perspective of particularism, conversation is *not* key.
- Radical particularism, according to Lindbeck, implies the end of interreligious dialogue attempts because there is **no common ground** and **no common language**.
- By doing away with our obsession for sameness, otherness is now the dominant interest of particularism.

# Particularism?

Or why we should stop talking...



- Is Lindbeck's theory plausible?
- Does he do **justice to religions** by considering them closed, untranslatable and all-absorbing linguistic systems?
- Several aspects within how religions understand themselves seem to suggest otherwise.

# Critique of Particularism

## Religions themselves don't allow for particularism



We find within religions themselves agreement to disagree with Lindbeck:

1. In monotheistic religion, humanity is created in God's own image, therefore human beings are **connected to God and one another**.
2. The end goal is **unity and connection**, not alterity and separation.
3. Just as linguistic systems refer to God as someone or something outside the system, so too **religions are not auto-referential**.
4. Religious systems have plenty of historic, cultural, linguistic and theological **overlaps and mutual references**.
5. Religions are not static, but **developing and dynamic** due to their outside living referent.

Lindbeck risks mistaking religions as auto-referential systems that become violent or indifferent toward the other, rather than **hetero-referential systems that exist in a relationship of difference themselves**.



# Paul Ricoeur

*Sur la traduction [On Translation] (2004)*

# The (un)translatability of languages

## Paradox between particularism and pluralism



- French protestant philosopher **Paul Ricoeur** (1913-2005).
- **Translation** always risks losing or changing the meaning of the original text.
- There is no such thing as a 'perfect translation'.
- Yet translation does not stop at the potential loss of meaning because the **potential for new meaning** emerges!
- The new meanings may have been tacit or even latent, unknown to the original speaker. **New revelation occurs!**





# *The Tower of Babel* (Gen 11:1-9)

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, c. 1563



# Rereading the story of Babel

## An alternative reading of alterity



- In an alternative reading, the story of the Tower of Babel need not be considered as a **punishment**.
- Rather, God saw humanity's means of pursuing the infinite as detrimental to their relationship with one another.
- The infinite had been reduced to common ground.
- Through the confusion of languages, introduced by God, an **encounter with the stranger** was now unavoidable.
- God **redirected humanity** to the true source of transcendence, thereby *breaking open* their misguided ambition to create a totalitarian system.



# Rereading the story of Babel

An alternative reading of alterity



"ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO GO  
AHEAD WITH THIS 'TOWER OF BABEL'  
THING?--IT COULD LEAD TO  
MULTICULTURALISM!"

# *The Pentecost* (Acts 2:1-13)

Duccio di Buoninsegna, c. 1308



# Rereading the story of Pentecost

## A fundamental shift



- Just as the tower of Babel is reread, we can then reread the story of Pentecost.
- Commonly interpreted as God's means for **righting the wrong of Babel**, we can now instead consider the story as **affirming God's introduction of different languages**.
- Through the different 'languages' we speak and the accompanying **translation activities required** of one another, we find that mutual respect, understanding and learning can begin to flourish.

# Interreligious Dialogue

## Structure of the lecture



### A. Three Traditional Models

**A1. Exclusivism** (Monologue School)

**A2. Inclusivism** (Kerygmatic Dialogue School)

→ Critique of absolutism

**A3. Pluralism** (Colourful and Colourless School)

### B. Beyond theological absolutism

**B1. Particularism** (Monologue School)

**B2. Interreligious Dialogue as 'translation'**

(Recontextualising Dialogue School, starting inevitably from a Christian preferential perspective. Inclusivism in some way is always inescapable!)



# *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*

Quote from new Vatican document



*Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools.*

*Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*

Congregation for Catholic Education (for Institutes of Study)

Vatican City, 22 October 2013



"From the pedagogical and intercultural points of view, the finest gift that Catholic education can make to a school is that of **witness**. Catholic schools give witness to a constant, personal network of relationships, which are lived out **between the poles of personal identity and otherness**. This network is marked by dynamic osmosis, in the various dealings between adults (teachers, parents, educators, those in charge of institutions, etc.), between teachers and students, and among students – without prejudices of culture, sex, social class **or religion**." (50)

"Rather, our paradigm seeks, by every means, to foster a culture of **dialogue**, of understanding and **mutual transformation**, so as to reach the common good." (42)

**Catholic identity in dialogue with diversity.  
But is it *Kerygmatic* or *Recontextualising Dialogue*?**

# Interreligious Dialogue

## A Catholic approach to religious diversity

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