

## Article

# The Logic of Dialogue and Dialogical Theology

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**Abstract:** In this article, I introduce and develop a logic of dialogue and reciprocity as distinguished from a logic of reflection. I argue that interreligious dialogue is not only desirable, but logically necessary for two reasons: one, the logic of dialogue precedes the logic of reflection and, two, the intersubjective dialogue is a precondition for the dialogue with the Ultimate Reality. I proceed in three stages. First, I problematize the terms identity and belonging and expound on the challenge of dialogue. Second, I reflect upon the nature of interreligious dialogue and present my dialogical theology together with its crucial notion of “trans-difference”. Third, I refer to the dialogical philosophies of Buber, Fischer and Gandhi, whose thoughts contribute to a dialogical theology.

**Keywords:** logic; dialogue; dialogical theology; Buber; Fischer; Gandhi

## 1. Introduction

This article discusses the challenge of dialogue and of a dialogical theology, to which Buber, Fischer and Gandhi contributed. I show how religious dialogue and a dialogical theology support the creation of dialogical communities. Active interreligious dialogue—the object of a dialogical theology—could lead to a more united world. In an inclusive, dialogical theology, a mutual transformation of the partners in dialogue takes place and reinterpretation and revision of religious traditions become possible and necessary (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, p. 144; 2019, pp. 226–28). Instead of focusing on the Ultimate Reality itself, one may recognize that faith is always in the plural. In this way, interfaith dialogue becomes indispensable, and dialogical theology, which concerns the faith of all, conditions and colors the logic of each and every confessional theology (Meir 2019). Dialogical theology, I argue, influences and changes confessional theologies.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Identity and Belonging

Human beings are embedded in concrete situations; they act and think out of specific traditions. Yet, identities quickly become fixed and rigid. They are frequently formed on the negative background of others. Like the word identity, the word “belonging” is ambiguous. In more and more culturally diverse societies, there are multiple forms of belonging. We belong to our own group, to a more or a less degree, and we also belong to a pluriform world. Belonging denotes belonging to a particular group, but also to the world as such. Too much emphasis on particularity leads to parochialism. Too much accent on the cosmopolitical belonging to all neglects one’s always concrete embedment in a specific culture and group.

In our days, identity politics is gaining field in a growing number of countries throughout the globe, favoring belonging to one group at the detriment of other groups. In this unfavorable constellation, we are fortunate enough to witness counter-movements that advance a social, dialogical identity and the interconnectedness of all. Philosophers who develop a logic of dialogue criticize a logic of reflection that is unrelated to the logic of mutuality. The Jewish dialogical philosopher Martin Buber emphasizes the priority of the related I over the I in subject-object thinking: “Man becomes an I through a Thou” (Buber 1970, p. 80; comp. 62) Playing upon the initial phrase of the Hebrew Bible, he writes: “In the beginning is relation” (Buber 1970, p. 69). Philosophers of other continents equally



**Citation:** Meir, Ephraim. 2022. The Logic of Dialogue and Dialogical Theology. *Religions* 13: 1221. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121221>

Academic Editor: Dyon  
B. Daugherty

Received: 24 November 2022

Accepted: 14 December 2022

Published: 16 December 2022

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develop a similar logic of dialogue. The Kenyan philosopher John Samuel Mbiti pointedly formulates his view on the relational I in the sentence “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti 1969, p. 141). Such a view is characteristic of the entire African ubuntu culture. In Asia, the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh conceived “being” as “*tiếp-hien*”, “inter-being” (Thich Nhat Hanh 1998, pp. 3–113; 2005, p. 88). The list of dialogical philosophers and thinkers whose main theme is mutuality, coexistence and cooperation can easily be expanded. They open the horizon of an inclusive “new we” (Kalsky 2012). Different cultures contribute to the shaping of dialogical persons and societies.

Our time testifies to the rising of populists with a divisive, dichotomist policy and pathological nationalism. The therapy for such an anomaly is the formation of relational communities. Instead of building walls and justifying violence against minorities in the name of a majority or in the name of national security, inter-worldview and inter-convictional dialogue creates nearness between people. Of the three ideals of the French revolution, fraternity/sorority seems to be the most difficult one. Fraternity promotes equality and freedom; it is the basis of the two other ideals. In this perspective, a philosophical reflection on dialogue together with the development of dialogical skills is a remedy for nationalistic politics that focuses on making the own nation great again at the expense of minorities and other nations.

### *The Challenge of Dialogue*

I argue that the logic of dialogue in an other-centered practice precedes the logic of pure reflection, which receives its meaning and vitality in the encounter with others. Reasoning becomes violent when cut off from the interhuman relationship. It becomes alive in dialogue as in-betweenness and in addressing another human being. The French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas maintains that greeting the other comes before any objective content. In his view, correct reasoning is the result of the need of justifying ourselves in front of the other: the necessity of critical thinking or correct reasoning stems from our being faced with her face. Consequently, metaphysics as the confrontation with the other’s face precedes ontology (Levinas 1969, pp. 82–101).

In dialogue, one transcends one’s own self in orientation to the other. “Self-transcendence”, in which we relate to others permits us to discover the “self-difference” or the presence of alterity in the sameness. The deeper I, positively alienated from itself, is the related I (Meir 2019, pp. 48–49). We do not live in parallel worlds, one alongside the other, and neither are we merely a part of a whole. Dialogue creates unique persons and strives to create unity without dissolving singularity. It creates a shared world, a world of the “and”. It is more about attitudes than about contents, more about deeds than about words, and more focused on the doable than on the knowable.

The creation of a relational I and, more broadly, of a dialogical society contests a static identity and surprises a closed identity with alterity. Dialogue produces an “in-between” space with interaction between people and concrete involvement with others. In interaction, one makes the other present. It is not only about allowing others to be different but to recognize them in their otherness that cannot be absorbed in sameness. Concomitantly, one does not leave the other in his or her otherness; one engages in communicating and shaping a common world. In dialogue, one celebrates plurality and promotes the other, who becomes visible. Looking positively at others and at their specific contribution to human culture and society influences their reality and future. In what is known as the Pygmalion effect, expectations affect the behavior of others.

In dialogue, language and time become alive. Language is poor in blindness to the other. It flourishes in the interhuman relation. In the orientation of the I to the other, it flows and becomes living speech. Far from a weak discourse, dialogue is the acme of speech. In purely descriptive, objectifying or self-centered talk, language is dead, without reference to unique others. It is resuscitated in dialogue, in the aliveness of questioning and answering. In populism with its binarized thinking, living speech is repressed; in interconnectedness, it is restored. Time too receives its meaning in dialogue; in passing to the time of the other,

one creates time. The unification of separated beings, who remain unique and irreplaceable in their union, generates meaningful speech and time ([Amado-Levy-Valensi 1968a](#), p. 224; [1968b](#), p. 270).

### 3. Interreligious Dialogue and Dialogical Theology

Agenda-less openness to and respect for the other is the condition for any successful discourse. “Interreligious dialogue” receives its relevance and vitality in the perspective of creating a dialogical identity and society. I claim that interreligious dialogue has foremost an eminent ethical dimension. The religious other asks to be listened to; she demands that one approaches her private religious story without preconceived ideas.

However, interreligious dialogue is not easy. Religious exclusivists are more concerned with the survival, corroboration and expansion of their own group than with communicating with religious others. In radical dissimulation, they feel superior, they belittle or blatantly discriminate against others. In their isolation, they forget alterity. On the other edge of the spectrum, cosmopolitical people may forget their specificity. In their radical assimilation, particularity gets lost in an all-absorbing unity.

It is, therefore, necessary to go beyond radical dissimulation and radical assimilation in what I call “trans-difference”. In trans-difference, one communicates not despite differences, but thanks to them. People belong to different worlds, but also to the larger world. Since we live in *one* world, communication is a lofty human possibility. Shaping one’s identity takes place in the own group and in relation to other groups. Interrelatedness goes against identity politics and works with mutual acceptance and promotion. From this perspective, interreligious encounters have the potential of healing religious rivalry and diminishing the clash between cultures. In interreligious dialogue, one receives the gift of the other’s alterity and becomes different from oneself.

One does not have to be an academic specialist of religions or a formal representative of an instituted religion to engage in interreligious dialogue. Each of us is a unique human being, who belongs to a particular religious narrative, with her own life experience and position. However, we are also in contact with religious and non-religious others. In the words of the English poet and scholar John Donne: “No man is an island”. Donne’s utterance was made concrete by Abraham Joshua Heschel, who claimed that: “No religion is an island” ([Heschel 1966](#), pp. 117–34). All religions are interrelated as human reactions to the Transcendent. The aim of interreligious dialogue is to create bonds with religious others.

#### 3.1. Religious Texts and Contexts

An innovative approach to the religions could focus upon classical foundational texts and look for positive utterances about the religious other. Yet, just as in the case of the words identity and belonging, religious texts are ambiguous. It is more and more recognized that they function in specific historical and geographical contexts, which radically change over the course of time. What is decisive in the interreligious dialogue is not the number of positive utterances in Holy Scriptures. Decisive is rather how religious texts function in present-day cultural, economic, social and political contexts. Texts are important; the context of the interpreters of texts is even more important. Holy Scriptures are finally for the development of human beings. Hence the need for a dialogical hermeneutics, in which responsibility and human dignity are central. Interreligious dialogue should not merely focus on texts; it should discuss lived religiosity in its relevance to society. In the problematic relation of religions to each other, the othering of the religious others has led to estrangement. Deep listening to the narrative of religious others leads to diminishing hatred and conflict and prepares the way for more peaceful coexistence. What is at stake in the interreligious dialogue is the shaping of an open identity that cannot be conceived without care and compassion for others and without a common concern for the future and the creation of a “new we”. Participants in the interreligious dialogue may become partners, who care for human rights, democracy, freedom and equality, with and beyond their religious affiliations.

### 3.2. *Interconnectedness*

In interreligious dialogue one trusts the religious other in view of developing a new consciousness of the interdependence of all religions and in view of greater interconnectedness. The underlying idea is that if religions are not for the world, they remain perhaps high and magnificent trees, but without fruit. Religions do not exist for themselves, but for the world. They are for human beings, not vice versa. They have a soteriological function. In a genuine, transformational and trustful dialogue, emphasis is upon the moral quality present in the various responses to the inconceivable Reality.

In interreligious dialogue as in any dialogue, the primordial aim is not to “know” the other. Meeting the other requires foremost an ethical mindset. Knowing, comparing, experiencing and situating are secondary. Moreover, ethical orthopraxis is more important than correct orthodox thoughts: to be righteous is more important than having the right faith. In acknowledging the religious other, one testifies to the Divine. With all our specificities and differences, we are not condemned to live in separated and unconnected worlds or to see others negatively. A sustained interreligious dialogue offers alternatives.

### 3.3. *Dialogical Theology*

“Dialogical theology” is a theology that has dialogue as its goal and method. It also conducts a dialogue with the secular world and its values. This relatively new theology is based upon dialogue and reflects on it. It continues the pluralist theology pioneered by Wilfred Cantwell Smith and John Hick (Smith 1981; Hick 1980, 2001). Schmidt-Leukel prefers the term “interreligious theolog” over Smith’s “world theology” (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, p. 117) because of the interpenetration and interdependence of religions and because of the transformational power of dialogue. I agree with him that a theology of the faith of all human beings is a joint and open-ended process (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, pp. 138–39). In dialogical exchange, the partners in dialogue who belong to different living traditions may correct prejudices and revise elements in their own traditions. “Dialogical theology” analyses and promotes this dialogical exchange. It does not only accept the plurality of religions in their unique approach to the transcendent reality. It also values the different religious perspectives and their interaction and complementarity in view of a dialogical society.

Dialogue maintains separateness and develops one’s relational capacities. In my view, dialogical theology is characterized by “trans-difference”, which avoids the absolutization of differences as in post-modernity and the absolutization of sameness as in modernity. It avoids the pitfall of an otherness that is not approachable and of a sameness that annexes and functionalizes the other, reducing her to the same. Dialogical theology as well as religious and non-religious dialogues are about the self and the other, about boundaries and crossing boundaries, about celebrating one’s specificity and getting inspired by others. Boundaries mark different spiritual homes, but they are relative: loving one’s home does not exclude involvement with others in the broader world. Exchange and cooperation replace isolated entities and create coexistence in a pluralist society. Most importantly, in the trans-different religious dialogue, one’s uniqueness stems from the ethical link to the other. In interreligious dialogue, incommensurable particularity and reaching out to others go hand in hand. Sharing and bridging are as important as living one’s own culture. Such an openness may create a “new we”, that is not opposed to “they” (Meir 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021a).

One may leave one’s own comfort zone and cross one’s boundaries to visit religious others and come back with new insights into one’s own religion. Interreligious encounters require imagining. They presuppose a religious conviviality that challenges the usual rift between religious groups. In a dialogical theology, one’s own religion is only one collective experience in the mosaic of religious experiences that all testify to the Transcendent. Dialogical theology as the theology of dialogue with dialogical means contains a sustained reflection on a multiplicity of approaches to the Transcendent. In such a theology, one learns from religious others and their perspective on the Transcendent. One asks how the other looks at the world and embraces his or her perspective. One enters the other’s world

and communicates in words that the other understands. One is also critical of others, but most of all one develops a healthy self-criticism. Interreligious theology is the privileged ground of religious seekers, who are ready to transform traditions and themselves in view of a more dialogical society.

#### 4. Dialogical Philosophers

Martin Buber (1886–1965), Franz Fischer (1929–1970) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) were religious dialogical thinkers, who greatly contributed to a developing dialogical theology.<sup>2</sup>

##### 4.1. Buber's I-You

In his *I and Thou*, Buber develops a dialogical-relational way of thinking, in which not the self and its interests, but the orientation to a you is central. He strived to transform the human being into a dialogical being; through a you, a person becomes I. The inter-human (*das Zwischenmenschliche*) was the primal category of human reality (Buber 1979, pp. 271–98). Buber pointed to the sphere of the “between” (*zwischen*) as a humanizing factor in human society. He distinguished between I-you and I-it. The I in itself is inexistent: it is I-you or I-it. In I-it, the I borders on another it; I-you is without borders. I-you does not have or experience something: I-you stands in relation (Buber 1970, p. 55). I-it, on the contrary, creates a world of space and time, experience and description, of measure and comparison. This is the world of analysis, causality and classification. The I-you attitude is holistic, non-partial and unmediated. I-it brings order in the world; I-you respects the world order (Buber 1970, p. 82). Encountering the other, the I is entirely “present” (*gegenwärtig*) and makes the other present (Buber 1970, p. 63). In Buber's philosophy, the logic of dialogue is contrasted with the traditional logic of reflection. Presence precedes knowledge and eschews a functional view of the other human being. A one-direction relation, *Beziehung*, could develop into an encounter, *Begegnung*, which is characterized by mutuality. For Buber, “all actual life is encounter [*Begegnung*]” (Buber 1970, p. 62). The logic of correlation and reciprocity is primordial and deeper than the logic of pure reasoning (Buber 1970, p. 67).

Buber's dialogical philosophy describes the “spirit” as happening between I and you. The spirit is the possibility to say “you”, the ability to relate: “Spirit is not in the I but between I and you. It is not like the blood that circulates in you but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to his you. He is able to do that when he enters into this relation with his whole being. It is solely by virtue of his power to relate that man is able to live in the spirit” (Buber 1970, p. 89). Placing the intersubjective encounter at the center of his philosophy, Buber deems that one is really oneself in relation to the non-self. In the outward movement from the I to the other, one senses the humanity of a human being. I-you is the deeper I, beyond experiencing and using. It is a dialogical I, which makes the human being human: “[...] without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human” (Buber 1970, p. 85).

Describing the evolution of a human being, Buber states that our first and primal way of living is a life in relationship to others. In his transformational writing, he wants us to turn to the other.

Instead of an isolated being that absorbs otherness in a subject-object scheme, Buber meditates on what is “between” human beings. In dialogue, the individual and the community become real. Buber criticizes both individualism and collectivism. The human being is not isolated nor absorbable in the masses. In a time of totalitarianism, he writes that the human being is uniquely responsible (Buber 1967, pp. 202–3). The alienated human being is summoned to communicate and to relate to a you. The presence of the divine Thou takes place in the encounter between people, as expressed in Ex. 25:8, “I will dwell amongst them” (*ve-shakhanti be-tokham*). The relation with the eternal You (*das ewige Du*) and the relation with other human beings are intertwined, like in a Moebius strip. With his dialogical philosophy, Buber taught us to relate to the other as a “you”, not to talk about her, but with her. Moreover, the turn to God was only possible in the turn to the fellow human being.



#### 4.2. Fischer's Proflexion

Franz Fischer is a second dialogical thinker who contributed to dialogical praxis and theology. In September 1969, less than one year before his death, he wrote an essay with the significant title "The Logics of Reciprocity". The still unpublished essay shows great nearness to Buber's dialogical philosophy. In the last decade of his life, Fischer breaks away from a subject-object thought. He qualifies the eternal return to the self in reflection as "*die Aporie des Selbst*", the logical impasse of the self that cannot think itself (Fischer 1985, pp. 85–122). Not epistemology, but loving attention to the other is central. He started developing a proflexive thought, in which reflection is replaced by the non-reflective look at the face of the other. His logic of humanity (*Logik der Menschlichkeit*) is based on the primacy of practical reason. His *Proflexion und Reflexion. Philosophische Übungen zur Eingewöhnung der von sich reinen Gesellschaft*, published in 1965, comes close to Buber's dialogical thought on the holistic I-you and the alienating I-it (Fischer 1985, pp. 348–453).

In his mature philosophy, Fischer contrasts self-reflection and proflexion. In reflection—the theoretical, cognitive approach—one returns to the self. In proflexion, the attention to the other reveals the meaning of all meanings, the *Sinn von Sinn* (Fischer 1980). In his "concrete" philosophy Fischer put recognition and mutual relationship central (Fischer 1985, p. 543). Knowledge (*Wissen*) was not acknowledging (*Gewissen*). He developed a new thought "pure from itself" (*von sich rein*), "without me" (*ohne mich*) and "with the other" (*mit dem Anderen*) (Fischer 1985, p. 349). In a meditative, transformational style, and much like Buber, he places the reader before the choice: or reflection that leads to a dead end or an other-centered praxis.

#### 4.3. The Logics of Reciprocity

Fischer's text "The Logics of Reciprocity" is difficult to read for a number of reasons. First, Fischer's English frequently reflects the German substrate. Second, the document contains many linguistic innovations that aim to lead and reorient the reader to a new way of thinking. Finally, Fischer has a hermetic way of writing that demands the utmost concentration. Notwithstanding the mentioned difficulties, his main thought is quite clear. An other-centered "proflexion" replaces a self-centered "reflection". In "The Logics of Reciprocity" as in many other texts, Fischer is in search of a new philosophical language that expresses the idea that one finds oneself not in reflection, but in proflexion, in the turn to the other. His essay contains a great number of neologisms, which all point to the necessity of thinking differently. The frequent wordplays and the creation of non-existing words urge the reader to think otherwise in an other-centered manner. The manuscript contains neologisms such as proflexion (instead of reflection), prolotion (instead of relation), pronewing (against renewing) or proalization (instead of realization). With all his linguistic innovations, Fischer invites the reader to redirect and to reorient him- or herself to the other.

"The Logics of Reciprocity" reminds us of Fischer's concise philosophical sentence in "Proflexion und Reflexion", which resumes his entire philosophy: "We are without ourselves with the one who is without himself with us. We are with ourselves without the one who is with himself without us." (*Wir sind ohne uns mit dem, der ohne sich mit uns ist. Wir sind mit uns ohne den, der mit sich ohne uns ist*; Fischer 1985, p. 357). As elsewhere, Fischer intends in his manuscript to create a new "we". This new "we" is called a progressive "social synthesis" in contrast with a regressive "social separation". In "social separation", reciprocity is diminished; in "social synthesis", it is increased. Similar to Buber's distinction between I-you and I-it, Fischer leaves the "reflection" of "I and I" in It and embraces the "proflexion" of "You and You" in We. His logic of humanity, oriented to the other, replaces a logic of reflection. Fischer's thought on "We" in proflexion as opposed to "It" in reflection is reminiscent of Buber's thought on the mutual relationship between I and Thou.

#### 4.4. Buber's and Fischer's Relational I

Both Buber and Fischer contrast a relational I with an objectivizing I, that merely describes, categorizes or uses. The I is more than a *cogito*. One is called to respond to the

call of the other: *respondeo, ergo sum*. The non-reflective look at the other replaces reflecting insight, just as a holistic I-you contests the alienating I-it. Buber's I-you as the creation of a between-person and Fischer's proflexive I are attempts to break away from the subject-object ontology in favor of loving attention to the other. In their relational thinking, both dialogical thinkers bring the sciences, politics and economy within the sphere of dialogue. They criticize professional activities that remain in the I-it sphere. Beyond the immediate intersubjective meeting, both Buber and Fischer are interested in society. Fischer developed a xenological philosophy that welcomed the stranger as constitutive of the collective I.

#### 4.5. Buber's and Fischer's God-Talk

In "The Logics of Reciprocity", Fischer also raises the God-question. As in Buber's philosophy, God is actual and in the between of I and Thou. God is approached as "the fulfilled pure we", which is "pure from ourselves". God is the aim of mankind, eternally present in the "ciscendence" of the universe. In a Spinozian-panentheist manner, Fischer deems that God is the "spirit" or "structure" of the matter. "[...] god isn't mankind, but mankind will be god". Buber too develops a panentheistic thought, inspired by Hasidism: in the meeting, in man's turn, God's presence is palpable; according to one expression in *I and Thou*, one even "actualizes" God (Buber 1970, p. 163). However, Fischer has a more monistic understanding of God and distances himself from a religious personalism that believes in a personified deity. God is the all-pervasive spiritual presence. In Zoharic parlance: no place is devoid from God (*lét atar panuy miné*); God precedes and pervades all that is.

Fischer writes "god" with a small letter, most probably to distinguish his own notion of an immanent force in human beings from the more traditional, totally transcendent God. In Buber's *I and Thou* the dimension of the Divine is opened in the dialogue between I and Thou. This is parallel with Fischer, who sees "god" in all as the condition of we. Both philosophers write about God not in speculative metaphysics, but in a practical sense. Whereas Buber writes on God's eternal presence perceivable in the presence of people to each other, Fischer approaches "god" as "the synthesis of us in the reciprocity of us", as "the actual union of us, so actual like the morning today". God is the precondition for a life in love and harmony, the preexisting meaning of all meanings, present in reciprocity, the driving force behind the progress of humanity in love and care. He is the "prolational presence", "the actuality of the you and you in the pure we". In this way, Fischer perceives the divine presence in a nonviolent, peaceful and other-oriented humankind.

#### 4.6. Buber and Fischer on Religion

Both Buber and Fischer were critical participants in their religion. They refused a piety that was estranged from and even inimical to the world. They criticized their own religion and reimagined it as intrinsically linked to one's turn to the other. Religion had to be freed from the I-it sphere. With his "pro-ligion" Fischer corrected a "re-ligion" that is too much focused on itself. In a religion-less Christianity, reminiscent of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he maintained that one had to depart from a metaphysical concept of God towards a God found in the midst of life. In a parallel way, Buber developed a Judaism that was not a mere religion, but rather an exemplary dialogical life. In the logic of the dialogue of Buber and Fischer, the turn to other human beings and to God is central. They conceived mutuality as a God-given reality.

Both Buber and Fischer redefined philosophy and religion. Fischer wrote about "Proflexion" and "Proligion". Similarly, Buber developed a dialogical philosophy and criticized a religion that leads away from life. They both developed an anti-institutional approach to religion, linking religion to society. As such, they preceded and advanced the dialogical turn in religions.

#### 4.7. Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi was raised in Vaishnavism, with its belief in Lord Vishnu and his avatars Rama and Krishna. He was influenced by the *Krishna-bhakti*, which teaches that God is accessible to all and by the *Rama-bhakti*, which breached narrow caste, class and gender divisions. Through his experiments, he desired to realize the Truth/God. His optimism stemmed from his profound belief that God was present everywhere: all had the potential for goodness and forgiveness. In the *Isha Upanishad* he found the kernel of his religiosity: all is filled by Isha (God) and belongs to God alone. Gandhi uncovered Brahman in all human beings, even the evil ones. One had to make efforts to become conscious that creation was nothing less than Brahman's self-multiplication. The unity of mankind unveiled the oneness of God: "I believe in the absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source" (CWMG 1999, vol. 25, p. 199).

Gandhi was a reformer, not a stubborn traditionalist. Nevertheless, he maintained the traditional four major occupations, without hierarchy between them. He was not a temple goer and did not build temples in his ashrams. God was not to be found in temples, but rather in the face of the oppressed, whose suffering had to be alleviated. Religion had to be brought into contact with economic, social, and political life. Gandhi opposed the discrimination of the *Dalit*. In his view, untouchability was irreligion. The untouchables were *Harijans*, people of God. All human beings had "sparks of the divine"; all were rooted in God and therefore interconnected. Like Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi saw God in the faces of the poor. Meeting poor peasants and living with untouchables, he felt face to face with God.

Gandhi's belief in the divine presence in everybody made it possible to look to what unites, more than to what separates. His religion was a "religion underlying all religions" (Gandhi 2009, p. 41). It was the pursuit of Truth, present in all religions, transcending them and allowing one to see the equality of all. Religious truths were relative, they were different sides of the Truth. For Gandhi, the Truth is God and a matter of experience (*Harijan*, 16 February 1934, pp. 4–5). The praxis and social action made the manifestation of Brahman in everybody and everything visible. No religion had a full grasp of the multidimensional Truth since all religions had to realize the Truth practically in different ways and since they were only human responses to God.

#### 4.8. A Basis for Dialogical Theology

Gandhi did not develop a full-fledged dialogical theology. Yet, his openness to religious others and his interaction with them represent the basis for the construction of such a theology. Prayers from different traditions were an integral part of the routine in his ashram. He valued the great variety of religions and focused on the Hindu-Muslim relation, in view of the necessity of their cooperation in India.

Gandhi's religiosity was praxis oriented. He conducted a lifelong interreligious dialogue and endeavored to move religious others to a non-violent way of life. Although he less accentuated the differences between religions, he knew about "trans-difference", in which there is unity as well as a multitude of particularities. He dealt with all kinds of diversity: children, women, languages and religions. He was a pluralist, although one may also find some inclusivist standpoints.

#### 4.9. Transforming the Human Being

Gandhi was in *sampradāya*, the flow of tradition, which aimed to improve humanity. He reformulated his tradition in view of mending the world. Similar to Buber and Fischer, he wanted to transform the human being; it was not enough to analyze, one had to act and change reality. This meant that one had to be the change one wants to see. His *satyagraha* was a love-force, based upon non-violence (*ahimsa*) as a process and upon Truth (*satya*) that must be realized (Meir 2021b, p. 12). It aimed at changing people by not perpetuating the circle of violence. Active non-violence would bring forth a new world, in which



state violence, oppression, humiliation, conflicts and wars could be avoided or at least diminished. Instead of being motivated by greed, people could be metamorphosed into a universal brother- and sisterhood. Through *satyagraha* Gandhi wanted to melt the heart of his opponents. He was convinced that, in the end, Truth would vanquish. He developed a non-violent hermeneutics of foundational religious sources. The Gita was and is used for violent purposes, but Gandhi interpreted this scripture as an allegorical description of the inner battles of the human being. A human being would fully realize his potential by turning to others in non-violence. In all of Gandhi's experiments and activities, dialogue was central.

## 5. Towards a Logic of Dialogue

A logic of reciprocity characterizes interreligious dialogue and dialogical theology. The eternal, obsessive return of the self to itself is the problem of traditional logics. A higher or inspired rationality is the root of rationality. A loving approach or thinking with the heart influences the logic of the mind. In the logic of dialogue, meaning stems from the other and from the relation to her. The turn to the other delivers the self from his heavy weight and its substance. Fischer's logic of meeting and communication is concisely expressed in the sentence "*Es, ergo sum*" (I am because you are) (Fischer 1985, p. 445). Buber's "between-person" comes into being if one speaks to a you and not merely about a you. He writes about the "mystery" of reciprocity (Buber 1970, pp. 67–68). Gandhi's belief in the interconnectedness of all is also the product of a logic of reciprocity. Buber, Fischer and Gandhi were dialogical thinkers, whose philosophies lead away from an I-centered thought to an other-centered thought, in which the "we" is permanently expanding by extending hospitality to others. In the praxis of outreaching to the other, in the orientation to her, one discovers one's deeper self. In a logic of mutuality, the I becomes estranged from his egocentric self. Other-centered thinking welcomes the other, the stranger, who is not to be absorbed in one's own thinking, but to be saluted and taken care of in practical situations.

In a dialogical theology, God comes to mind in the interpersonal relationship. For Fischer, God is present in "prolation" and reciprocity. He affirms God "in the pure of the union of separations". For Buber, the oneness of God is related to the unification of mankind, until "the day that God will be One and His name One" (Zechariah 14:9). For Gandhi, God's absolute unity was manifest in the unity of humankind. His *satyagraha* was profoundly relational and experimental.

Interreligious dialogue and dialogical theology redirect the human being to the other. This is the challenge created by the logic of dialogue, the logic of mutuality and interconnectedness. The logic of a confessional theology without dialogue is insufficient. Philosophical logic and theological logic are rooted in a higher reality that reveals itself in a logic of reciprocity.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The basis for this article was a lecture entitled "Interreligious Theology and the Logic of Dialogue" at the Third World Congress on Logic and Religion, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), 7 November 2022.

<sup>2</sup> In discussing Buber and Gandhi, I am using some materials that were previously published in *Religions* (Meir 2021c, 2021d).

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