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# TOWARDS AN ABRAHAMIC ECUMENISM? THE SEARCH FOR THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE DIVINE MYSTERY

## ABSTRACT

This contribution explores the notion of an Abrahamic ecumenism as proposed by Hans Küng and others in search for a way in which Islam, Judaism and Christianity can live peacefully together. It is argued, however, that to pursue a viable political pluralism, it is more promising for Christian theology to take into account the historical development of the image of God instead of an orientation on a common historical origin in Abraham. The elaboration of the universality of the divine mystery in history does not have to be won by going back to Abraham, but by going forward to Jesus Christ and by thinking of and living out of Him.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Before discussing the possibilities of an Abrahamic ecumenism, I wish to make a preliminary remark. This contribution is different from, for example, the book of Miroslav Volf, entitled *Allah*. Volf (2011:13) explicitly states that his book is an exercise in political theology and not in soteriology. His book is written in the shadow of 9/11 and the mutual fears and anxieties that this attack had elicited from different sides. Can Christians and Muslims live under one roof? Can Muslims support a theory of political pluralism and not merely a democracy? For this reason, Volf analyses God's character according to what he calls normative Christian theology and according to normative Islam. He concludes that it should be possible to be a

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religious exclusivist and simultaneously support political pluralism.<sup>1</sup> I am of the opinion that this method of stressing the commonalities between religions is indeed one way to achieve support for political pluralism in the public domain and, at the same time, its weakness is that it purposely and consequently covers the heart of the matter, that is the soteriological and salvation-historical background of a practice of political pluralism. This approach may perhaps be fuelled by the perception that, as soon as theologians start to focus on the specific identity of a religion, living together under one roof will turn out to be impossible. It will be my goal to proceed otherwise and to show that a plea for political pluralism has only its background and anchor in the core of Christian theology.

Volf is not the first to stress the commonalities. Long before the public debate on Islam and fundamentalism gained momentum in the wake of 9/11, the concept of Abrahamic ecumenism was already proposed in Europe as a programme that could function as an appropriate theological basis for dialogue among the three great prophetic religions. The concept became well known through the work of Karl-Josef Kuschel, a student of Hans Küng, and obviously there is a direct relation with the latter's plea for a world-encompassing ethos (Küng 1997). As far as this programme of an Abrahamic ecumenism is concerned, I wish to mention Anton Wessels' passionate voice for a common understanding of each other's stories. For Wessels, all three religions have at least one story, that of the choice as to whether one wishes to be a king or a servant or, in terms of Islam, a proud king or a *kalief*, a deputy or a vicar of God. This implies that all three religions want to teach people to take their place in humbleness over against God (Wessels 2011:105). Their story is about "the eternal values of humbleness and faithful submission to God, Islam in the deepest meaning of the word" (Wessels 2011:312). Is that true? It is my conviction that the core of Christian faith does not consist so much in values, but in a story or drama in which we partake.

According to Karl-Josef Kuschel, Abrahamic ecumenism means that one acknowledges the fact that Jews, Christians and Muslims take their religious orientation from different figures in history. Jews take Moses as their point of orientation; Christians point to Jesus, and Muslims organise their life according to the message recorded by Mohammed in

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1 Volf (2011:231) states that Christians and Muslims should be committed to three propositions. First, the one benevolent God relates to all people on equal terms. Secondly, love of neighbour demands that we grant others the same freedoms we claim for ourselves. Thirdly, there should be no coercion in matters of faith. His way of gaining that result is a comparison of the concept of God in both religions and an emphasis on the commonalities.

the Koran. However, Abrahamic ecumenism means that the participants, notwithstanding the difference in orientation, are willing to correct themselves in favour of a mutual esteem due to their common historical origin in Abraham. Abraham is the common origin of each of the religious traditions, and offers the model for belief in the one God (Kuschel 1994). It is argued that Abrahamic ecumenism offers Judaism, Christendom and Islam a theological framework for a society in which people of different religions live peacefully together. It could even be hoped that these religions, proceeding this way, might play a leading role in society and its politics. It is proposed that we need an ethos in which the three religious traditions all participate. This common ethos would be sufficiently strong to cope with the imminent clash of powers, religions and cultures. In this contribution, I will offer some observations and make some critical remarks with regard to the concept of Abrahamic ecumenism. What exactly is it and what is its aim? What is the perspective from the stance of Christian theology? Do we have to accept this concept as the essential theological basis for the pursuit of a moral goal, namely righteousness and peace?

First, it must be made clear that the choice of the concept of ecumenism already implies a theological decision. The word “ecumenism” points to the fact that there is more than a common historical origin that was already observed and described in earlier theology. In the past, the relation and even the profound kinship between not only Christian faith and Judaism, but also between Christian faith and Islam was recognised in theologies, including Calvinistic theology.<sup>2</sup> All three traditions call themselves monotheistic and all three have important elements of the substance of their faith in common. However, these common aspects were never articulated as ecumenism. That this word is used by Kuschel and his followers points to the fact that the concept specifies a more inclusive concept, one that will persist in encompassing and uniting the worldwide community of the Christian church (Küng 1997:16). Choosing the word “ecumenism” presupposes that, apart from all differences, there exists a fundamental, common spiritual element that unites all these traditions into one community. As such, Abrahamic ecumenism is a concept that already implies a theological decision and programme.

Kuschel is not reluctant to clearly state this implicit choice and programmatic goal. At the end of his book *Streit um Abraham*, he gives a

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2 Abraham Kuyper, for example, wrote with appreciation on “the semitic-monotheistic bond, in which Jews, Christians and Muhammedans principally are related to each other” (Kuyper 1907:23).

summary of the programme that has unfolded in the book. I give a longer quotation:

An ecumenical discourse among Jews, Christians and Muslims will only make sense, if it is not the use of Abraham to advance one's own truth-claim, but rather the cause of Abraham that is in the foreground, which all believers strive toward: turning away from the false idols (including elevating themselves above others) and trusting in the one true God, Who is greater than all images formed by human religious traditions and conventions, also trust in the one God 'Who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist'. Abrahamic ecumenism only will exist when Jews, Christians and Muslims regard themselves as *hanief* like Abraham: as people in search of God, relying on God, provided with gifts by God (Kuschel 2001:299).

This citation clearly indicates that the point of recognition and acknowledgement is located in something that is of fundamental importance in all three Abrahamic religions, namely sincere devotion to the one God. That seems to be the meaning of Abraham. One's personal act of faith, the zeal and practical behaviour of the individual toward the one God, is basic. The appeal for mutual recognition and acknowledgement finds its ground and scope in faith as a human act of devotion and trust. The content of what is believed seems important only insofar as it speaks about the one God. But, at the same time, the content of belief remains unclear, particularly when it is argued that this one God is greater than "all by human beings formed religious traditions and conventions".

It should be noted that this last qualification implies a thorough theological decision with regard to the religions in question. In this instance, these religions are qualified as religious traditions formed by human beings. This raises a question on which I will elaborate later: How far is Kuschel willing to leave room for the claim of revelation that is so essential for each of these traditions? He explicitly states that he does not want to erase the differences, but is theological particularity not ceded too quickly? Is particularity something dangerous, because religious exclusivism can easily result in societal and political intolerance? Kuschel observes that this has happened too often in history, and he attempts to prevent this by means of a theological intervention. He puts himself in a position in which it is possible to critique each exclusive appeal to Abraham simply by means of a religious historical critique of the image of Abraham in each of the three religions. In the analytical section of his book, he shows that the Jews make Abraham an orthodox Jew, who is faithful to the law. In Christendom, Abraham is made the believer, who already believed in Christ before Christ. Finally, Islam honours Abraham

as the *hanief*, who lives a life devoted to God. By a critical-historical deconstruction of all these images of Abraham, Kuschel arrives at his own Abraham, who can function as the original image, as the example of the way in which faith and obedience is practised in all these religions. This image of Abraham becomes the reference point that enables a critique on all forms of abuse of Abraham (Kuschel 2001:238).

## 2. THE MORAL MOTIVE

An important point of departure for Abrahamic ecumenism deserves more attention. The focus is primarily on the practical life of concrete individuals, who believe, pray, perform rituals and keep religious rules. Those people who try to find their way through life in all sincerity are at the centre of this. Abrahamic ecumenism should not be restricted to the study, to meetings of professional religious leaders, or to experiments by enthusiastic idealists. This ecumenism should arise in places where people tell their stories to one another and become aware of their common roots. The ideal found within the concept of Abrahamic ecumenism is a lived dialogue. The interreligious dialogue consists of people getting to know each other in daily life, and learning to respect each other's habits and practices. Therefore, it is particularly the stories of ordinary people that deserve attention and have to be considered in the evaluation of a religion. It is not doctrine that leads the parade, but the stories of common believers, because in them we find the traces of what people have experienced and the way in which they have sought God.

This interest in practical life is directly related to a great concern about situations of conflict and war and, for this reason, this programme has a strong moral dimension. The plea for an Abrahamic ecumenism finds a strong motive in the concern for the conflicts among Muslims, Jews and Christians that increasingly threaten peaceful coexistence and destroy communities. Kuschel (2001:300) argues that the future of both Europe and the Middle East in the third millennium will depend on the question of whether Jews, Christians and Muslims can find their way towards a common Abrahamic brotherhood and sisterhood. We read in his work that the world would become more friendly and peaceful if these religions could temper their exclusive claims on the heritage of Abraham and open themselves to a critique from an Abraham who cannot be identified with one particular tradition, but who functions as the common forefather who can teach his heirs to behave as friends of God.

What is to be said of all this? First, the concerns of Kuschel and his adherents are also my concerns. Religions can be a source of violence and

hate due to the claims they make, although, in fact, various other factors besides religious ones also play a considerable role. There are other political and social factors that can be far more important. I do agree with Kuschel that the focus on practices is crucial. Our theories and beliefs are tested there where people live together, in one village, in one city, in one business, or where they belong to each other as a family or close relatives. Concerning this emphasis on practices, the question of whether the programme of Abrahamic ecumenism is theologically satisfying becomes, in my opinion, a burning one.

### 3. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOTERIOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

The figure of Abraham plays a key role in the concept of Abrahamic ecumenism. A criterion for true religion is found in his faith, in his way of reacting to the call of God, in the way in which he calls upon God, and in the way in which amid the idols of his world he enters into communion with that one God. Methodologically, this is an anthropological approach. This characterisation is not at all intended to be negative. The anthropological point of view has a long history and is well rooted in both older and modern Roman Catholic theology, where the doctrine of salvation is constructed along anthropological lines. The starting point for theology is found in a broad concept of human experience. Theology begins methodologically and practically with the human being, who seeks happiness and fulfilment of his eternal desire. Human beings' high esteem for the longing, searching and responding has its roots in the immediate given awareness that, with all their experiences, human beings are surrounded and challenged by the divine mystery. All human beings, and therefore all religions live, sometimes more hidden, sometimes more overtly, from the divine mystery that totally permeates life. This awareness became decisive in the view of other religions, particularly when Vatican II strongly supported and elaborated on this issue.

Another point of departure is chosen when one starts in the middle of the theological loci and begins with soteriology or the saving acts of God. The contrast is not taken as nature in relation to grace, but as sin in opposition to grace. This theological perspective is mostly found in Reformation theology. It is not the questioning and searching by the human being that are foregrounded in this instance, but God as the acting and deciding force who drives history toward its goal. In line with this, it must be mentioned that it is not the deeds of Abraham, but what God does in the history of Abraham that are of primary significance. The articulation and direction of this theology is not structurally linked to anthropology,

but to soteriology. This move to the middle of theology does not mean that the Reformed tradition does not know about the breadth of human life and culture or that it would deny the universality in God's revelatory acts. The Reformation learned from the early church that the eternal Son as the Logos also works outside the incarnation. The concept of a general revelation implied the awareness that God makes himself known outside the boundaries of Christendom and the church. God is the creator of heaven and earth; he makes every moment witness to himself, and again and again calls for response (cf. Acts 17:27). In the reformed tradition, the missiologist J.H. Bavinck (1895-1964) worked along these lines (Bavinck 1981, 1989). The Reformed tradition is based on the discovery that God's saving acts are not self-evident, and it therefore begins with the opposition between sin and grace. This is observable and present in the Lutheran tradition with regard to the justification of the sinner. In the Calvinistic tradition, this lack of self-evidence was located further back in the Counsel of God and in election. Election does not point to the human being as actor, but transfers the attention to the mystery of God's acts in our history.

#### 4. THE HISTORY OF TWO SONS

These short remarks on election and God's Counsel as the decisive drive in history serve to show that the questions regarding Abrahamic ecumenism can also be very urgent within another theological framework, and cannot be ignored without cost. These questions touch upon what is often called the "mystery" of Islam (Mintjes 1996:159, 168). This reminds me of the stories of Isaac and Ishmael in Genesis. These stories are about God's electing and deciding acts. The biblical narrative is about two sons, both of whom will grow up to become forefathers of peoples. According to Genesis 21:8-20, a great feast is given when Isaac is weaned. In a world where child mortality reigns, a celebration is called for when a child survives the first stage of life. The story is about the first son of Abraham, the son he begot with Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave. The story explains that Sarah will not tolerate the companionship of Ishmael for her son Isaac. Sarah forces Abraham to send her slave away with his son, "because the son of this slave will not be heir with my son, Isaac". Although Abraham is reluctant, according to this narrative, God himself urges him to yield to Sarah's demand. Sarah's word dominates the scene and links up with what God chose to do regarding the two boys. "For through Isaac one will speak of your offspring". God goes his way with this world along the path of particularity, namely the way of Isaac. That is the track of election. However, at the same time, Genesis explains that the choice for Isaac does not mean that Ishmael is dismissed.

What is a warped situation to our mind, does indeed happen. Abraham sends his wife's slave away. Everyone is anxious as Hagar gets lost in the loneliness of the desert. In her anguish, she puts the child, of whom it is later said that he became an archer, under a bush, and she herself sat a good way off, "about the distance of a bowshot" (Gen. 21:15). Although Hagar is portrayed as the "*mater dolorosa*", the reaction of God is not in the first instance directed at her weeping. Rather, "God heard the voice of the boy". Undeniably, the narrative in Genesis 21 illustrates that Ishmael does not bear his name without reason. Again, we hear the promise that God will make Ishmael a great nation. "God was with the boy and he grew up" (Gen. 21:20). On the basis of this section of the Scripture, one must mention that the election of Isaac, Jacob and the people of Israel is not literally exclusive election. These chapters are not only of interest for religious-historical reasons. One can regard these chapters in which the other sons of Abraham are mentioned (Gen. 21 and 25:1-18) as an echo of the relationship of Israel with the neighbouring peoples. In addition, these sections also pose a question to Christian theology. It is also said of Ishmael and his offspring that they stand under the blessing of the God of Abraham. This is important, because Ishmael is regarded as the father of the Arab tribes and, therefore, there is a direct line to Islam.

However, this does not answer the following questions. What does this blessing mean? Does it imply more than a powerful promise of God's care? Does it imply that they will play a role in the way of the peoples towards God's final kingdom? Kuschel links this blessing to the physical continuation of the Arab peoples, and with the sign of the covenant that they bear, and he argues that all dualistic thought about a twofold outcome of history has already been broken (Kuschel 2001:244). After all, Ishmael does not fit in either of the two categories.

According to this narrative, the continuation and survival of Ishmael rests directly on the will of God. The eye of God rests on these peoples. For the proponents of an Abrahamic ecumenism, this care of God for Ishmael and his heirs is a weapon against every form of Jewish or Christian exclusivism in relation to the inheritance of Abraham. The latter has two sons and they both are under a blessing, although the content of the blessing is different. But it is a blessing of the one God, and Kuschel therefore criticises the decision of Vatican II in the Declaration "Nostra Aetate" to deal with Islam as a religion that is outside biblical revelation history, and that it is, therefore, not considered for the critical self-reflection of the church. In addition to this, there are others who plead for a new Christian appreciation of Mohammed as a prophet. Mohammed, it is argued, may be an extra-biblical prophet, but he must certainly be appreciated as a prophet of the same God who revealed himself to



Abraham (Wessels 2001a:37-63; Wessels 2001b:2-20; Küng 1997:60). The proponents of Abrahamic ecumenism propose emphatically that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have drawn too much from the same source to permit the exclusion of Islam. Kuschel chooses a very definite route. He is completely clear in his appreciation:

Without harmonising the revealed writings of the Bible and the Koran, or minimising the contradictions, or speculating about salvation history outside of Christ, they will recognise the spirit of God in the rise of Islam, the same spirit who is, for Christians, the risen and exalted Jesus Christ (Kuschel 2001:259).

Some sort of *pneuma* theology dominates this thought. In brief, according to this train of thought, Christian theology must recognise that the same spirit through whom God raised Jesus from the dead is also responsible for the coming into being of Islam.

## 5. AS ABRAHAM

An appeal is made to the spirit of God, manifest in the faith of Abraham, for a critique of the exclusivist pretensions of each of the three religions. Judaism may not exclusively claim the inheritance of the people who came from Isaac; Christendom may not restrict Abraham as the father of all believers to those who believe in Christ, and Islam, in turn, may not lay exclusive claim to Abraham as a model Muslim. The three religions are, according to Kuschel, three articulations of the Spirit of God. The following questions are still open: What is God's way with the Abrahamic religions? What will be the outcome? For the present, all three religions should recognise each other as articulations of belief in God in line with Abraham, the believer *par excellence*. According to Kuschel, the yardstick whereby believers must measure themselves is the question as to whether they believe as Abraham. In this regard we read:

For Jews, Christians and Muslims, believing like Abraham does not mean a rigid clinging to the past and to inherited possessions, but rather going forward, breaking camp 'without knowing where they will arrive' (Kuschel 2001:300).

My question is: Does the plea for an Abrahamic ecumenism in effect theologially and practically mean a request to each of the conversation partners for far-reaching restraint in relation to the truth of their own tradition? If the one and true God is "greater than all human traditions and conventions", then one is making a doctrinal statement with a truth claim which is diametrically opposed to what is believed in the very

traditions themselves. In brief, one must be aware of the truth claims of such statements about human beliefs, even if they want to advance something about the limitation of human beliefs. They function as nothing less than doctrinal statements, which are intended to regulate the dealing with narrative traditions.

The kind of hopes and expectations that surround appeals such as those by Kuschel were outlined earlier. According to him, when people treat other traditions with openness in the conviction that God's Spirit is also working elsewhere, then peace and tolerance will, in fact, be promoted. However, I question whether one does not choose in this instance a means of attaining that goal which does violence to a particular religion, in spite of all assurances that the conflicts will be eliminated. Kuschel is at least using a methodology in which he does not have to identify himself with one of the traditions as such. However, modern historical criticism helps him reach a position which keeps itself above those traditions. The reduction of belief to believing "as Abraham" is actually no more than a systematic theological proposal which, in my opinion, does not do justice to the various traditions in their self-understandings. The intended universal openness to the other Abrahamic traditions is obtained at the cost of particularity and identity.

## 6. THE IDENTITY OF A RELIGIOUS TRADITION

The identity of a religious tradition is formed by foundational and decisive experiences. In a process of sifting and appropriating decisive moments, experiences and insights are absorbed and assimilated, and these determine the manner in which new experiences are assimilated. In this instance, the identity of religious traditions shows some similarity to the coherence of a life history and identity of individuals. Some decisive experiences cannot be omitted from the life story of a person. In light of the preceding, I therefore ask myself, to what extent the strategy that is followed in the concept of an Abrahamic ecumenism is itself not almost a violent intrusion into the identity of the existing traditions. I am of the opinion that this is at least true in the case of the Christian tradition. It is an invitation to partially obscure what is essential in that tradition. How far does one still do justice to the identity of the Christian faith if it is emphatically stated that any Trinitarian formulation must be avoided in an interreligious service? Does it not mean that elimination of doxological formulations in which Jesus Christ is called the Son, who shares in the glory of the Father, does violence to the manner in which, in the scriptures of the New Testament, the Oneness of God is reinterpreted from the Old Testament? (Bauckham 1998:40-42). Certainly, this is not about liturgical formulations or doctrinal concepts of the fifth century, which must be retained at all cost. This is about basic

ideas and confessional formulations, which have their origin in the text of the New Testament witness and have substantial effects. It is about the question of how we must speak about God and in which narrative we live. Can the basic ideas of incarnation, kenosis and substitution still receive the key position if we theologically return to Abraham? Do these concepts not represent a differentiation in the doctrine of God himself, and are they not demanded by the narratives and text of the New Testament itself? The question is: What is essential and determinative in our dealing with other human beings, with ourselves and with creation. Christological and Trinitarian doctrine is merely a reinterpretation of God and his power and mercy.

## 7. MUTUAL IDENTIFICATION

The history of Jesus Christ is essential for the Christian narrative about God. The stories of Jesus's life, his dealing with human beings, his proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven and, finally, his crucifixion and his resurrection by God the Father determine the identity of the Christian faith. Theologically, one can regard this history as one of mutual identification. There are two agents who identify themselves with each other. They do not become identical, but they become inseparably tied to each other. First, we note that Jesus identifies himself with the cause of the Kingdom by his actions and by speaking about the Kingdom of God. Jesus identifies his own actions with the coming of God's dominion, a new and now definitively salvific coming of God in his saving and healing power. In the eyes of the responsible leaders, this identification, however, was something that unquestionably transgressed the boundaries of the permissible.

The second identification takes place in the resurrection of Jesus by God. According to the witness of the New Testament, God identifies himself in the resurrection with the way and the person of Jesus. This identification is such that one can no longer think and speak about God apart from this history and this person. Psalm 110:1 is one of the texts which reinterprets the occurrence. Recalling this psalm, it is said of Jesus that he sits at the right hand of the Almighty. In other words, Jesus shares in the rule of God. Jesus is the one Who was sent, in terms of Acts, as the servant, whose actions revealed the outline of the Kingdom. God declares Himself in solidarity with this Jesus, who will be the judge in the final judgement. The Ethiopian eunuch, whose story we find in Acts 8, knew the one God already, and Jesus is now proclaimed to him, because God has definitively tied Himself to his name and history. This structural relationship between the person of Jesus and God certainly creates a great gap and a continuing uneasiness in the relationship with Judaism and Islam. Jesus Christ is

more than a prophet, an example, an advocate: he is the foundation of the new communion with God.

There is no essential triumphalism or superiority in the underlying Christology and soteriology which arise out of this structural union between Christ and God. Christology emphasises that the history of the story of the cross definitively belongs to the Christian narrative of this God. To trust in God is to yield to Jesus in his history. This also means that from now on what is declared in theology about divine attributes such as power and mercy, or what is articulated in soteriological concepts such as justification and substitution, points to this history. The story about God has received a form and definition through the history of Jesus Christ, and one may certainly not detract from this within the Christian tradition.

## 8. EXTENT, CRITERION AND EXPECTATION

The above clearly indicates that I am critical of the concept of Abrahamic ecumenism. Is it really possible within the construction of this programme to confess Jesus Christ as the One, who is more than a prophet, and to emphasise that the new and surprising is hidden in this “more”? I do not mean by this criticism that one cannot speak with openness with the adherents of other religions, or that the Spirit of Christ would limit itself to dwelling within the church walls. On the contrary! The question about the nature and extent of the work of the Spirit of God is a theme that must be distinguished from the question of identity, although it cannot be separated from it. If within the tradition of the Christian faith Jesus Christ is recognised and confessed as the Light of life, then this joyful knowledge provides room to recognise and acknowledge the light in other faith traditions. I point to the fact that in Protestant theology it was especially Karl Barth who articulated the theme of universality under the heading of Jesus Christ as the Light of life (Barth 1959:107-109, 132-134).<sup>3</sup> The light and the truth in other religions do not have to be denied. Whoever has learned to know Jesus has opened himself to meeting with other religions and world views with great freedom, in the expectation and knowledge that Jesus can also witness to Himself in other places. One could say that Barth, in principle, creates room for an ecumenism of truth, which finds its foundation and criterion in the story of Jesus Christ and in the call to follow that Lord. The elaboration of the universality of the divine mystery in

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3 For an elaboration of the dialogue, as it could be worked out on the basis of Barth's articulation of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ and his universal outreach, see Geense (1995:119-132). For another interpretation, see also Van der Kooi (2005:387-414).

history does not have to be won by going back to Abraham, but by going forward to Jesus Christ and to thinking and living out of Him. This does not lead to a politics of exclusivism, but to the concept of a political pluralism and a polity that supports the rules listed by Miroslav Volf (2011:259-262). It leads immediately to a responsible exercise of the right of freedom of speech. Christians should know that it is not necessary, but forbidden to insult and make provocations. It leads to a policy of decency, maybe uncommon decency (Mouw 1992).

Of course, the question remains as to how the religions can live together peacefully. Indeed, it must be a lived dialogue, in which each tradition will have to clarify what is understood by peace, obedience to God, the relation of church, and so on. Christianity and, in particular, Christian theology will give its own contribution, not by recurring to Abraham, but by living and thinking out of Christ, out of the communion with the triune God. And it will take the lessons learned in a long and sometimes painful history, in which church and state or Western culture and Christian faith were identified seriously. It is the task of Christian theology not to forget these experiences and histories. And it will be the task of every Christian to live out of the life and love of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. This will drive out the fear and will encourage us to be open to each other and to the work of Jesus Christ in places where we do not expect it.

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