

The Episcopal Church Religious Manyness: Steps Toward a Theology

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In 2009, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted a landmark Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations. This essay describes the Theological Statement, contextualizing it both historically and in relation to five other key documents which have embodied and conveyed the Episcopal Church's teaching on religious manyness—thus laying out the distinctive attitudes reflected in this document, outlining the interreligious-relations stepping stones leading to its adoption, and attempting to clarify the current theological stance of the Episcopal Church—itsself a multinational member of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The primary governing and legislative body of the Episcopal Church is the General Convention, which meets every three years. General Convention is bicameral: to take effect, resolutions must be passed by both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. Resolutions so passed become the voice and policy of the Episcopal Church. This is why the *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations* (2009) is a landmark: having been adopted by the 76th General Convention, it is the lengthiest, most comprehensive document on interreligious concerns to have borne canonical weight.¹

The 2009 *Theological Statement* aims to offer a rationale for the Episcopal Church's engagement with other religious traditions, and to provide a foundation upon which the church would continue to

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¹ *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations* (2009), Resolution 2009-A074. For the full text of this document, see http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2009-A074.

engage in interreligious dialogue at a time when (as the document itself puts it) “all of God’s human creation is challenged to find common ground for our mutual flourishing.” This essay will describe the *Theological Statement*, contextualizing it both historically and in relation to five other key documents which have embodied and conveyed the Episcopal Church’s teaching on religious manyness.² My goal is to clarify the current theological stance of the Episcopal Church—itsself a multinational member of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations (2009)

The *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations* has six sections. In Section I, it emphasizes the necessity to ground the Episcopal Church’s multifaith relationships in “thoughtful exploration of and reflection on the appropriate ways to profess Christianity.” It is, the statement insists, *because of* our embrace of the “foundational Gospel proclamation that ‘Jesus is Lord’ (1 Corinthians 12:3),” *because* we take Jesus’ Summary of the Law seriously,³ that Episcopalians “reach out in love and genuine openness to know and to understand those of other religions.” It is on this basis that dialogue is commended and encouraged—toward such ends as relationship-building, information-sharing, religious education, and celebration with people of other religions. Section I also includes a slightly adapted version, without heading or attribution, of four basic principles of dialogue articulated in 1981 by the British Council of Churches: “1. Dialogue begins when people meet each other; 2. Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust; 3. Dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community; 4. Dialogue is a medium of authentic witness by all parties and not an opportunity for proselytizing.”⁴

² This paper also considers *Guidelines for Christian–Jewish Relations for Use in the Episcopal Church* (1988); *Principles for Interfaith Dialogue* (1994); *Interfaith Relations and the Churches: A Policy Statement of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA* (promulgated November 10, 1999); *On Waging Reconciliation: Statement from Bishops of the Episcopal Church*, released by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, September 26, 2001; and *Renewing Our Pledge: Reflections on A Common Word Between Us and You from the Episcopal Church* (February 24, 2008). Mention is also made of *Companions in Transformation* (2003).

³ The Statement cites Mark 12:29–31 and the Catechism found on page 851 of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979) of the Episcopal Church.

⁴ *Theological Statement*, section I. The British Council of Churches is now called Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The four Principles of Dialogue currently

Section II, on the historical context, notes the various modes of interreligious engagement within the Episcopal Church. In addition to local efforts (diocesan, congregational, individual), there have been ecumenical efforts, particularly through the National Council of Churches of Christ; and international efforts through the Anglican Communion Office, including the Network of Inter Faith Concerns of the Anglican Communion (NIFCON). The office of the Presiding Bishop has its own particular initiatives, in addition to the work of task forces such as (currently) the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations.

In providing some of the history of Episcopalians' interreligious work, the Statement also acknowledges its debt to earlier major documents—among them, the Vatican's *Nostra Aetate* (1965); Lambeth Conference 1988 interfaith documents; NIFCON's *Generous Love* (2008); Archbishop Rowan Williams's *A Common Word for the Common Good* (2008); and "Relations with Other World Religions" from Lambeth 2008 *Indaba Reflections*. Here and in Section III is noted the profound changes in the context, activity, and dynamics of interreligious relations—not only in the United States, but throughout the Anglican Communion—wrought by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In fact, Section III goes on to describe, in rather dismal terms, the current dialogical context as one in which "borders and boundaries are fluid, easily fractured and unstable," one in which the view from space is simultaneous with the view from a personal computer screen; one in which nothing is now truly "distant." Thus the Episcopal Church acknowledges the multireligiousness of, and its own interconnectedness with, its neighbors. Further, it recognizes that "throughout the world, people of different religions can be seen searching for compatible if not common ways toward justice, peace and sustainable life." Shifting to a positive tone, the section concludes by noting that the Episcopal Church's "theological and ecclesial heritage offers significant resources for participating" in such efforts.

In Section IV, the Statement lays out particularly Anglican and Episcopal resources for interreligious dialogue. Among these is

posted by CTBI are: "1. Dialogue begins when people meet each other; 2. Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual trust; 3. Dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community; 4. Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness" (www.ctbi.org.uk/CDA/110).

Richard Hooker's teaching on the integral interrelationship of scripture, tradition, and reason. Accordingly, the Statement affirms scripture as a source of "the *invitation* and the *direction* to engage with people of other religions" (emphasis added).

Section V, "Salvation in Christ and Interreligious Relations," takes up, rather robustly, the matter of unique truth claims—particularly the Christian belief in salvation through Jesus Christ. Pointing to the historic creeds and the liturgy for evidence, this section asserts that "since God has chosen to share our life, we affirm that God is intensely concerned about *every* human life" (emphasis added). "Among Christians," the Statement claims, "Episcopalians have a particular appreciation of this teaching, in that we believe that the coming of God in Christ has already begun to transform all of creation."

Having explained the role of the cross, the meaning of resurrection, and the notion of incorporation into the body of Christ via baptism, the Statement insists that Christian truth claims are *not* barriers to interreligious dialogue. Quoting from Lambeth 2008 *Indaba Reflections*, it explains that the "purpose of dialogue is not compromise, but growth in trust and understanding of each other's faith and traditions. Effective and meaningful dialogue will *only* take place where there is gentleness, honesty and integrity. In all of this, we affirm that Christianity needs to be lived and presented as 'a way of life,' rather than a static set of beliefs."⁵

Citing a promise Episcopalians make (and reaffirm regularly) through the Baptismal Covenant, the Statement notes that to claim "Jesus as the Way . . . requires us to 'respect the dignity of every human being' (BCP, p. 305). . . . In mutual encounters and shared ascetic, devotional, ethical, and prophetic witness, we dare to hope that God will reveal new and enriching glimpses of a reconciled humanity."

Noting that the Episcopal Church is multinational, "with congregations in over sixteen different nations," Section VI offers a paradigm for continued involvement by Episcopalians in mission and evangelism, while simultaneously engaging authentically in interreligious dialogue. Given the foundational biblical mandate to love our neighbor, the Statement appropriates as a way forward the theology of

⁵ *Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008, Equipping Bishops for Mission and Strengthening Anglican Identity*, August 3, 2008, §89.

companionship articulated in *Companions in Transformation*, the official global mission vision statement of the Episcopal Church, adopted by General Convention in 2003.⁶ In hearty agreement with the position advocated therein, that authentic Christian witness is compatible with interreligious dialogue, the *Theological Statement* takes the global mission vision's seven modes of companionship and redefines them as "ways" of interreligious "companionship and partnership" toward the common "social, environmental, economic or political welfare." The missiology at work here resonates with the Episcopal Church's shift from *missio ecclesia* to *missio dei* documented by Ian Douglas in his acclaimed missiological history of the Episcopal Church.⁷

The Statement concludes with a reminder that, presently, "Christianity lives and serves in a global setting in which all of God's human creation is challenged to find common ground *for our mutual flourishing*" (emphasis added). Just as in the 1886 Chicago Quadrilateral, in which the Episcopal Church outlined what is essential to ecumenical engagement, so the *Theological Statement* seeks to articulate for the twenty-first century principles "for authentic interreligious relations and dialogue." It highlights three particular Episcopal gifts to this ongoing process: a "comprehensive way of thinking by which we balance Scripture, reason and tradition in relationship building"; an incarnational theology centered "on the Crucified One who leads us to self-emptying, forgiveness and reconciliation"; and a "practice of focusing mission in terms of service, companionship and partnership between people as demonstrative of God's embrace of human life."

Noting that Martin Luther King, Jr., "foresaw a time when *as one* all human beings of every religion would have to learn to choose 'a non-violent coexistence' over a 'violent co-annihilation'," the Statement asserts that "interreligious relations are no longer about competing religions but about mutual demonstrations of Love Incarnate." In fact, the last word is given to Martin Luther King (whose life and

⁶ *Companions in Transformation* includes several long passages advocating interreligious dialogue. See particularly III.5, "Mission in the Conflicts of Religions and Peoples" and IV.5, "Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Cooperation to Unify the Witness." *Companions in Transformation: The Episcopal Church's World Mission in a New Century* was adopted by the 74th General Convention in 2003. For the complete text, see <http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/WorldMissionVisionStatement2003.pdf>.

⁷ See Ian T. Douglas, *Fling Out the Banner! The National Church Ideal and the Foreign Mission of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1996).

ministry the Episcopal Church honors annually), by excerpting a 1967 sermon in which he asserted that 1 John 4 sums up a “Hindu–Muslim–Christian–Jewish–Buddhist belief about human reality”—that “Love is the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality.”⁸ Thus, for the first time, explicit mention of Hinduism and Buddhism is included in a document on interreligious relations adopted by the Episcopal Church’s General Convention.

Stepping Stones

The 2009 *Theological Statement*, as the text itself acknowledges, is but the most recent step (albeit a quite hearty one) in the Episcopal Church’s development of a theology of religious manyness. Certainly, this cannot be seen as entirely separate from developments in missiology. As missiologist Ian Douglas reminds us, the first two decades of the twentieth century saw the most dramatic expansion of Episcopal foreign mission activity before or since. By 1919, Douglas notes, “American Episcopalian missionaries were serving overseas in twelve foreign and five extra-continental missionary districts of the Episcopal Church.”⁹

Without doubt, such activity was coupled with interreligious relations of various sorts, as twentieth-century records associated with the work of the Episcopal Church’s mission and peace-and-justice structures show. Yet it is striking that, in General Convention Journals prior to the 1970s, descriptions of missionary activity in places such as Japan, Pakistan, India, Korea, or Alaska rarely mention the religions embraced by the peoples among whom Episcopal Church missionaries were serving.

While the 2009 *Theological Statement* references a *missiological* document, it is itself a rationale for participation in what is often called the “modern interfaith movement,” which (it has become commonplace to assert) was launched by the World’s Congress—sometimes called the World’s Parliament—of Religions meeting in Chicago in 1893.¹⁰ Among the presenters at that first parliament was the Reverend Dr. Thomas Richey, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, New

⁸ King quotes 1 John 4:7–8, 12b to support his claim.

⁹ Douglas, *Fling Out the Banner!*, 83.

¹⁰ See Kusumita P. Pedersen, “The Interfaith Movement: An Incomplete Assessment,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 76.

York.¹¹ Thus, significantly (I think), the Episcopal Church was involved in the movement's founding. The parliament was an important event, but it would be well after World War II before the Episcopal Church (or most other U.S. ecclesial bodies) would take official note of the need to engage in, or provide guidance for, interreligious relations as a category of its own. Since the 1970s, six major, somewhat overlapping, moves in that direction by the Episcopal Church can be identified.

1. Affirmation of Jews and Judaism, Rejection of Anti-Semitism

The early 1970s saw the establishment of the Presiding Bishop's Advisory Committee on Christian–Jewish Relations. This development—the first major move, as I see it—grew directly out of the 1964 General Convention's action condemning anti-Semitism of all sorts.¹² The document *Guidelines for Christian–Jewish Relations for Use in the Episcopal Church* (1988)¹³ signals the teaching of explicit neighborliness to Jews, the study for which was launched officially by the 1979 General Convention.¹⁴

The primary theological underpinning here is the notion that God has never abrogated God's covenant with the People of Israel. This teaching was reinforced in 1991, by a request issued by General Convention that “the Presiding Bishop's Committee on Christian–Jewish Relations be consulted [in the future] whenever liturgical materials are developed or adopted for use by the [Episcopal] Church.”¹⁵ Theologically, this request rests on the notion *lex orandi lex credendi* (praying shapes believing); thus Episcopalians should take care not to pray in ways that are disrespectful of or harmful to Jews. Again, in

¹¹ Professor Richey gave a paper on “The Relations Between the Anglican Church and the Church of the First Ages.” For the text, see http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/_includes/FCKcontent/file/Richey.pdf.

¹² Cynthia Wedel chaired this committee from its inception until her death in 1985; the committee was reconstituted in 1986, with the Right Reverend John H. Burt (Diocese of Ohio, retired) at its helm, and with staff assistance from the Office of Ecumenical Relations.

¹³ *Guidelines for Christian–Jewish Relations for Use in the Episcopal Church*, General Convention, July 1988. The full text of this document is available at http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/protestant/Episcopal_Guidelines.htm.

¹⁴ General Convention Resolution 1979-A044 and Resolution 1988-B004. All acts of General Convention for the years 1976 to 2009 may be found at <http://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/acts/>.

¹⁵ Resolution 1991-D181.

1994, General Convention acted to urge congregations to engage in dialogue with Jews,¹⁶ and in 1997, this commitment was reaffirmed in even stronger terms.¹⁷

2. *Attention to Islam and Muslims*

A second move dates from 1979 as well, when the General Convention instructed the Standing Commission on Ecumenism “to identify existing conversations between the Christian community and Islam,” and to “commend and encourage” such dialogues.¹⁸ This was reinforced by the General Convention in 1982, which determined that such would happen through participation in Christian–Muslim conversations conducted by the NCCCUSA.¹⁹ Again in 1994, General Convention reiterated its call for dialogue between Episcopalians and Muslims.²⁰ However, only in the early twenty-first century would theological bases for doing so be put forth. In the Episcopal bishops’ pastoral letter *On Waging Reconciliation* (September 26, 2001),²¹ we find reconciliation advocated in incarnational and soteriological terms; in *Renewing Our Pledge* (2008),²² we see an acceptance of a Muslim invitation to dialogue that is expressed in terms which are Trinitarian, Incarnational, and biblical.

3. *Embrace of the Value of Dialogue*

A third move, embrace of interfaith dialogue as valuable in and of itself, can be seen in 1994, in the General Convention’s provision of strategies through its approval of the document *Principles for Interfaith Dialogue*.²³ While much of this text bears similarity to teach-

¹⁶ Resolution 1994-A102; Resolution 1994-D130.

¹⁷ Resolution 1997-D055.

¹⁸ Resolution 1979-D133.

¹⁹ Resolution 1982-A046.

²⁰ Resolution 1994-A102; Resolution 1994-D130.

²¹ *On Waging Reconciliation: Statement from Bishops of the Episcopal Church*, released by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, September 26, 2001; <http://library.episcopalchurch.org/article/waging-reconciliation>.

²² *Renewing Our Pledge: Reflections on A Common Word Between Us and You from the Episcopal Church*, Third Sunday in Lent (February 24, 2008); complete text may be requested from the author at lucinda@lucindamosher.com.

²³ Resolution 1994-A033. The full text of *Principles for Interfaith Dialogue* is included in the *Supplemental Report [to General Convention]: The Presiding Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Interfaith Relations* (1994); http://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/blue_book/reports/1994/bb_1994-R007.pdf.

ings about dialogue by social scientists such as Daniel Yankelovich,²⁴ it is far from devoid of theology. Its tone and context as official ecclesial teaching resonates with an attitude well articulated by David Lochhead, who argues that, when compared to such responses as hostility and competition, a vastly preferable response to the religious Other is that of *dialogue*—defined as a relationship of openness and trust which is clear, unambiguous, and has no other purpose than itself.²⁵ A note of humility emerges in the last paragraph of the 1994 *Principles* where, in commenting on the appropriateness of Christian prayers for the conversion of others, we read: “In any event, it is God who converts people. Christians themselves are far from fully understanding or obeying God’s will.”

4. Preference for Ecumenical Conduct of Interreligious Work

A preference for ecumenical conduct of interreligious work (the fourth major move) is made clear in the *Principles for Interfaith Dialogue* (1994). For many years, taking up interreligious relations work was resisted by the Executive Council and General Convention—the argument being that the Episcopal Church belonged to the National Council of Churches, which conducted interreligious relations on behalf of its members.²⁶ In fact, for six years, the Episcopal Church supported this robustly by seconding the Reverend Dr. Bert Breiner to the NCCUSA, as Co-Director of Interfaith Relations.²⁷ During this period, the Council’s Interfaith Relations Commission produced *Interfaith Relations and the Churches: A Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.* (November 10, 1999).²⁸

²⁴ Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

²⁵ See David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), particularly chap. 13.

²⁶ The National Council of Churches of Christ USA is an association of some thirty-five churches: Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed; historic Black Churches and historic Peace Churches are also members. The major Evangelical denominations and the Roman Catholic Church do not participate.

²⁷ Bert Breiner had been the secretary to the Working Group responsible for penning the interfaith materials emanating from the 1988 Lambeth Conference, and was in fact one of the principal authors of that material. He shared the position of co-director with the Rev. Dr. Jay Rock, a Presbyterian.

²⁸ Professor Terry Muck (then on the faculty of Austin Presbyterian Seminary) wrote the first draft. The NCCUSA Interfaith Relations Commission—a dispa-

Breiner served on the writing team for the Policy Statement, and later wrote a companion theological introduction, which—with the original document—remains available on the NCCCUSA website. The Policy Statement, Breiner explains, does not attempt to resolve theological differences which the National Council's member churches bring to discussions of interfaith concerns. Rather, it “seeks to make a positive contribution to the understanding of interfaith relations by placing the theological questions within the context of Christian discipleship.”²⁹

In its report to the 2000 General Convention, the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations applauded the NCCCUSA Policy Statement, noting that copies could be obtained from the Episcopal Church's ecumenical office. It noted further that “the NCCC's Interfaith Commission maintains that, theologically, it is crucial to connect interreligious work to Christian Unity. For that reason, and because for many years any connection between ecumenical and interfaith relations was resisted in our church, *one of the first tasks of the [newly constituted] Episcopal Interfaith Relations Committee will be to explicate clearly the theological reasons for linking interfaith relations with the search for Christian unity*” (emphasis added).³⁰

5. *Locating Interreligious Relations Work*

This brings us to the fifth move taken by the Episcopal Church: determination of the official locus within the church's structure for interreligious concerns *per se* (as distinct from mission or peace-and-justice work which might have interfaith aspects or implications). In 1991, General Convention requested the Episcopal Church's Structure Commission to “prepare a recommendation for policy oversight of interfaith dialogue.”³¹ In 1997, Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning broadened the ecumenical office's concerns. As a result, the church's

rate group in terms of denominational membership and theological perspective—critiqued it. As part of the revision process, the NCCCUSA Faith and Order Commission, the Black Church caucus, and interfaith officers of various Protestant denominations and Orthodox churches were also consulted. For the full text of the Policy Statement, see <http://www.ncccusa.org/interfaith/ifr.html>.

²⁹ Bert F. Breiner, *Interfaith Relations and the Churches: A Brief Theological Introduction to the Policy Statement*; <http://www.ncccusa.org/interfaith/brieftheocom.html>.

³⁰ Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations Report to the 73rd General Convention of the Episcopal Church (2000), 115; http://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/blue_book/reports/2000/bb_2000-R008.pdf.

³¹ Resolution 1991-A237.

ecumenical officer now bore the title “Presiding Bishop’s Deputy for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations.”³² However, the name and portfolio of the relevant Standing Commission would remain unchanged until 2003, when the 74th General Convention amended the canons. With this action, the Episcopal Church now has a Standing Commission *and* an Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. Why *interreligious* rather than *interfaith*? The winning argument was that *religion* is a more comprehensive category than *faith*. In 2007, restructuring reconciled the name of the office with that of the Standing Commission, giving the Episcopal Church an Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer. In late 2011, however, subsequent further restructuring has yielded a Deputy for Ecumenical and Interfaith Collaboration. Thus, to this day, the office and the commission responsible for its work endure periodic discrepancy in *naming* the arena in which they operate. Be that as it may, the theological move here is to affirm what is sometimes called the broader ecumenism, grounded in love of neighbor. Further, this freshly redefined officer now operates as part of the Mission Department–Global Partnerships Team, yet remains tied closely to the Office of the Presiding Bishop. This realignment allows for greater internal collaboration, and is informed (at least to some extent) by the embrace in the 2009 *Theological Statement* of concepts and language of the earlier Global Mission vision statement, *Companions in Transformation* (2003).

6. *Establishment of a Rationale*

The locus of the work having been established, the sixth move would be the articulation of a theological rationale. As we have seen, this was accomplished in 2009 with the adoption of the *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations* by the 76th General Convention. Like the 1988 *Guidelines* and the 1994 *Principles*, this document includes practical strategies. However, its theologizing is much broader and deeper. Unlike any of the five previous documents, it projects awareness that the Episcopal Church is more than a U.S. body. The Right Reverend Pierre Whalon, since 2001 the Bishop of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, brings particular multinational awareness to his service on the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. He is fond of issuing the reminder that “the Episcopal Church stretches from Taiwan to Austria!”

³² Episcopal News Service 97-1672U, January 23, 1997. See http://www.episcopal-archives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=97-1672U.

Some Episcopal Church dioceses, he notes, are far more concerned about dialogue with Buddhism than with Islam. To its credit, the 2009 *Theological Statement* offers substantial guidance, whatever the religion of our dialogue partners.

Since 1988, as we have seen, six major interreligious-relations documents have emerged from or have been embraced by the Episcopal Church. Are there common theological threads uniting these resources? Certainly—with varying degrees of emphasis, depending on a document's character and purpose. A Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God is certainly latent in each, but it is most overtly expressed in the NCCC Policy Statement (1999) and *Renewing Our Pledge* (2008). Pneumatological language is present in interesting ways in the 1988 *Guidelines* and the 2001 pastoral letter *On Waging Reconciliation*, but is most prevalent in the NCCC Policy Statement, in *Renewing Our Pledge*, and in the *Theological Statement*. These latter two documents both draw on the language of Lambeth 1988's *Christ and Other Faiths* in this regard.

All six documents work with incarnational and soteriological themes, albeit in varied ways. Christian understandings of salvation are given special attention in the 2009 *Theological Statement*, but are also particularly clear in the NCCC Policy Statement (1999) and in *On Waging Reconciliation* (2001). A related theme, that God is at work in all of creation (thus that God's gracious love is not limited to the Christian community), can be found in all of these documents—vigorously so in most of them. Reconciliation is a major theme, quite obviously, of *On Waging Reconciliation* (2001). It is also well developed in the 2009 *Theological Statement*. While the term is not used, the notion is foundational to the *Guidelines for Christian–Jewish Relations* (1988). In short, all six documents are, to varying extents, eschatologically inclusivist in posture.

The biblical theme of neighbor-love is foundational to Section III of the 1988 *Guidelines for Christian–Jewish Relations*, which addresses hatred and persecution of Jews as “a continuing concern.” It is hinted at in the 1994 *Principles for Interfaith Dialogue*'s advice that we “approach others with the same kind of respect we would wish to be accorded.” Mentioned in the NCCC Policy Statement, it is developed quite explicitly in *Renewing Our Pledge* and in the 2009 *Theological Statement*. Closely related to love of neighbor is the inclusion in several of the documents of advice against (if not outright condemnation of) proselytism.

On the way to a robust *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations*, the Episcopal Church learned to be more explicitly biblical when mounting an argument. Of the six major documents reviewed in this paper, the earliest two (the 1988 *Guidelines* and the 1994 *Principles*) contain no direct biblical citations at all. By contrast, the rather short 2001 pastoral letter *On Waging Reconciliation* quotes passages from Colossians, Deuteronomy, and Romans.

The 2009 *Theological Statement* is dramatically more overtly biblical than its direct predecessors, the 1988 *Guidelines* and the 1994 *Principles*. In this, cues came presumably from the NCCC Policy Statement (1999), which was laden with biblical material.³³ Even more so, reports the Reverend Daniel Appleyard, who chaired the Interreligious Relations Subcommittee during the drafting process, the content of the *Theological Statement* was influenced by the NIFCON document *Generous Love*.³⁴ Particular note was taken of *Generous Love*'s "heavy use of scripture references,"³⁵ Appleyard explains, remarking further that "being more overtly biblical seems to have become more necessary of late."³⁶

Indeed! *Renewing Our Pledge: Reflections on A Common Word Between Us and You*, because it addresses a Muslim document full of references to and quotations of both the Qur'an and the Bible, is exuberantly biblical: it makes some nineteen direct quotations from Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, Micah, Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, Galatians, and Philippians.³⁷

³³ Some twenty-three Bible passages are cited in the NCCCUSA Policy Statement, which draws from Genesis, Psalms, Amos, Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Colossians, and James. It also quotes Hebrews 13:2, but without attribution, and makes allusions to Exodus, Joshua, and Ruth specifically, and to the entirety of the Hebrew scriptures generally.

³⁴ Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue: An Anglican Theology of Inter Faith Relations* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2008); http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/resources/documents/generous_love.cfm.

³⁵ The 2009 *Theological Statement* cites some twenty-three Bible passages, drawn from five books of the Old Testament, and nine of the New.

³⁶ Author's telephone interview with Daniel Appleyard, October 23, 2011. Had *Generous Love* been received sooner, says Appleyard, there is no doubt it would have had a deeper influence on the 2009 document.

³⁷ The document also excerpts the canticle *Dignus es*, the text for which is derived from Revelation, and can be found in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 93–94.

An Intermediate Stage

Renewing Our Pledge takes its name from the conclusion of the pastoral letter *On Waging Reconciliation* (September 26, 2001). In late 2007, *A Common Word Between Us and You* (an open letter to Christian leaders signed by 138 persons, embodying the breadth of Islam geographically and otherwise) had been promulgated. This pan-Muslim initiative deserved and received substantial responses from many Christian bodies. Given that, by virtue of action of the 74th General Convention, “substantive dialogue between Christians and Muslim communities . . . that maintains the theological integrity of both” had already become its official policy, the Episcopal Church contributed its own response, *Renewing Our Pledge*.

I wrote *Renewing Our Pledge* at the behest of our Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations officers, and in conversation with Clare Amos of NIFCON, as a contribution to the process of preparing a response to *A Common Word* on behalf of the Anglican Communion. However, it was hoped that *Renewing Our Pledge* might also be an educational tool, helpful to Episcopalians in understanding and answering this Muslim call for dialogue, and useful in the Episcopal Church’s ongoing dialogue at various levels with Muslim organizations and networks.³⁸

When responding to NIFCON’s request for input regarding *A Common Word*, one may ask why the Episcopal Church’s Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations turned to me, an independent consultant, rather than to the Standing Commission. In fact, having been renamed officially, and having been charged formally by the 74th General Convention with broader oversight, the newly empowered Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations had brought to the 2006 General Convention a resolution containing a short but pithy formulation of a strategy for interreligious relations.³⁹

³⁸ In January 2008, I received two almost-simultaneous requests—one from the NIFCON office, the other from the Episcopal Church’s Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations (OEIR)—for some input which might inform a response from Archbishop Rowan Williams on behalf of the Anglican Communion. (See his *A Common Word for the Common Good*, July 15, 2008.) Upon reflection, the OEIR authorized me to put forth my thoughts in the form of an Open Letter on behalf of the Episcopal Church (rather than a mere list of talking points). In February 2008, the resulting document was forwarded to NIFCON and was made available via the website of the Episcopal Church.

³⁹ Thomas Ferguson and Daniel Appleyard were the principal authors of this resolution.

However, the call for the adoption of this item got mired in the legislative process. While disappointing, this provided opportunity to create a much more comprehensive document during the next triennium. The Standing Commission was immersed in this task when *A Common Word* was proffered. While I was penning *Renewing Our Pledge*, their focus was on the formulation of a full-bodied *Theological Statement* to present to General Convention in 2009. This offering was accepted, as we have seen, and is now the Episcopal Church's policy.

Concluding Observations

Where are we now? For the Episcopal Church, the 2009 *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations* is the teaching on this matter. Since its adoption, it has been presented and put to use in various ways, often by those directly involved with authoring it, but on the whole, it seems to have received rather little attention. Its reaffirmation by General Convention in 2012 renewed interest in it somewhat. In the hope of sparking more, steps were taken in the fall of 2013 toward publishing the Statement in several engaging, user-friendly electronic and print formats. However, it still awaits translation into Spanish and French (as, according to our canons, all official documents must be published).

Urban T. Holmes, one of the great teachers of the Episcopal Church in recent years, argues that Anglican Christianity is radically incarnational. That is, it embraces the notion that "even if humanity had never sinned, God [still] would have become flesh."⁴⁰ Radical incarnationalism implies, among other things, that since God created everything that is, the material world is good. It means that the Incarnation encompasses all aspects of life—including life's pain, ambiguity, evil, the entirety of human experience. It reminds us that Christ is the transformer, not the projection, of culture.⁴¹ As the pastoral letter *On Waging Reconciliation* puts it, through Christ, God's "radical act of peace-making is nothing less than the right ordering of all things according to God's passionate desire for justness, *for the full flourishing of humankind and all creation*" (emphasis added). My close read-

⁴⁰ Urban T. Holmes III, *What Is Anglicanism?* (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1982), 28.

⁴¹ Here, in addition to Urban Holmes, I am drawing somewhat on Carl P. Daw, Jr., "The Spirituality of Anglican Hymnody: A Twentieth-Century American Perspective," in Raymond F. Glover, general editor, *The Hymnal 1982 Companion, Volume One* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1994), 11.

ing of the six interreligious relations documents discussed in this essay leads me to say with confidence that, as the Episcopal Church's theology of religious manyness has taken shape over the past half-century, it has always been radically incarnational and increasingly overt about that fact.

Since, in their several ways, all six documents discussed herein cast dialogue in terms of authentic mutual witness, it should be clear that the Episcopal Church sees in interreligious dialogue the potential for (even the likelihood of) deepening one's own faith. It should be clear that the Episcopal Church's teaching on interreligious relations encourages us Episcopalians to "offer our gifts for the carrying out of God's ongoing work of reconciliation"⁴² toward our mutual flourishing.

⁴² *On Waging Reconciliation.*