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Metanoia and Ahimsa: Inputs in Inter-Religious Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and Jainism

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Abstract

The study aims to unlock *metanoia* and *Ahimsa* as fundamental doctrines of Christianity and Jainism, respectively, that can bring harmony and peace through their character of inclusivity and listening. These are also important traits to achieve the goals of UNSDG that facilitated total human development in various spheres of life. *Metanoia* is an all-embracing Christian concept about change of heart, while *Ahimsa* is a Jainist doctrine on non-violence and causing no harm to any life form. In interreligious dialogue, their inputs open doors for transforming potentials that can address issues in achieving sustainable development. Husserl's phenomenological framework aids in finding meeting points that can bridge different religious strands. His *phenomenological* approach provides listening and suspension of judgments to bridge and deepen meaningful encounters. The research contends that both Catholicism and Jainism quest for spiritual liberation as a goal. Christianity adheres that *metanoia* is a way to achieve that where, through change of heart, it brings individuals to nothingness, shown in the unconditional love exemplified by Jesus on the cross. Jainism meets this view where *ahimsa* is the foundational principle in achieving spiritual liberation. *Ahimsa* goes with the other two pillars, namely, *anekanta* (multiplicity of viewpoints) and *aparigraha* (non-possession as lifestyle). Christianity and Jainism intersected in their aspirations for well-being and total liberation. Both agreed that human

beings need to purify through righteous actions or positive *karma*. Aside from the e-library method, the research engaged in actual research collaboration with Jainist scholars that deepened the study. Through inclusivity and integration of common areas for social welfare achieved in inter-religious dialogue, the church's agenda of synodality is facilitated.

Keywords: bracketing, change of heart, non-violence, moksha, UNSDG.

Background of the Study

Pope Francis ushered the Synod on Synodality in the Catholic Church for a three-year period (2021-2024) of listening and dialogue. Synodality represents the nature of the Church as People of God where there is journeying together through listening and compassion from all its members. Its aim is not just to produce documents about what it is like to be a Church after a series of meetings and consultations from its various sectors, but most of all, it is a process of finding meaning and how to be relevant to the needs of the changing times. In his speech during the Opening of the Synod on October 9, 2021, the Pope reiterated this: “we recall that the purpose of the Synod is to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, and learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, and give strength to our hands.” (Pope Francis, 2021). The Church’s Synodality theme is “*communion, participation, mission.*” This battle cry resonates Pope Francis agenda of inclusivity, reflected in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) or *On the Fraternity and Social Friendship* that promotes dialogue with different religious traditions around the globe. He also addressed total human development by tackling issues of poverty and ecological crisis shown in his early work, *Laudati Si* or *On Care for Our Common Home* (2015). The tone set by the Pope is in synch with the United Nation Sustainable Development Goal (UNSDG) which search for solutions and concrete actions on how to achieve well-being through programs that are realistic in each time frame. It is in this context that the research pursues an interreligious dialogue with a test case application to Jainist’ concepts of *ahimsa* or non-violence to illustrate a model of how two different religious strands can meet for the common good of humanity. In Christianity, the fundamental doctrine to dialogue starts with Jesus’ preaching about *metanoia* to build the kingdom of God where values of being a person for others are promoted. *Metanoia* means “change of heart.” It is an ancient Greek term that may also connote “change of mind.” *Ahimsa* is one of the foundations in Jainist’s teachings which is non-violence and causing no harm to all life forms. It goes along with other ethical pillars, namely, *anekāntavāda* (non-absolutism) and *aparigraha* (non-attachment/non-possession). The inputs of *metanoia* and *ahimsa* could facilitate the smooth integration of how discourses from both camps can bring to a productive result that propels listening and working together for a better world to live in.

There is a plethora of literature surrounding the theme of interreligious dialogue. When such topic is within the scope of its relationship to sustainable development, the work of Tatay and Devitt (2017) about *Sustainability and Interreligious Dialogue* outlines why cooperation among different religions can leverage the “*bridging, binding, deepening, and transforming potentials*,” where collaboration is an end to achieving development. This is demonstrated in the environmental concerns manifested in Pope Francis *Laudai Si* (2015) offers inter-denominational shared narratives about earth as our home, where the denunciation of religious leaders on the abuses of the environment had social effects in a secular context. There are religious traditions that present “*strategic points of entry*” for collective social actions. Rasmussen’s (2013), *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* articulates these intersections or commonalities shown in asceticism, mysticism, rituals, and sacred books that help realize the common good. Grundmann’s *Interreligious Dialogue: An Anthology of Voices Bridging Cultural and Religious Divides* (2015) punctuates essential questions about why inter-religious dialogue matters and how to live with it in an era of globalization. The collection of articles contains a view of different traditions and some practical examples of how to do it. The view of religious traditions includes Ratanasara’s (date) *Buddhist’s Perspective*, Nasr’s *We and You: Let Us Meet in God’s Love*, Seshagiri’s (date) *Hindu Viewpoint*, Gispert-Sauch’s (date) *Hindu-Christian Spirituality*, and Bishop Knestout’s *Life Dialogue*. Some practical samples comprise the avoidance of clash, intercultural understanding, drawing commonalities in sacred books, and coping with the changes of the time.

In recent years, Pope Francis underlines the social teachings of the Catholic Church to shout for inclusivity and care for our common home in his agenda of total human development, where nobody should be left behind. The transformation in the Church is guided by its foundational principle of change in “*metanoia*” that encompasses a paradigm that is to be opened with the ears of the heart. This view has been captured in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, On Fraternity and Social Friendship (2020), that draws inspiration from St. Francis of Assisi, who visited Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Egypt during the height of the Crusade. On April 2, 2019, approximately 800 years after that interfaith dialogue initiated by St. Francis, Pope Francis replicated it in his visit to Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi. His involvements in inter-religious dialogue walked the talk of his agenda of inclusivity that transcends religions and all forms of borders and mediates a religious divide to harmony, peacebuilding, and sustainable development (Piscos, 2021: 250-251). The term *ahimsa* means

non-violence, which is considered one of the foundational tenets of Jainism along with *anekāntavāda* (non-absolutism) and *aparigraha* (non-attachment/non-possession). Shugan and Pandey's series of writings on *ahimsa* reflect how it bears a universal value and has the capacity to resolve conflicts. In the book, *Jainism Before 650 BCE* (2022), Shugan and Pandey (2022) pointed out that *ahimsa* is based on equality of all living beings and not just human beings. Pollution and destruction, be it in plants or animals, are acts of violence. Violence can penetrate in the very fabric of human existence, be it in mind, speech, or actions that may cause exploitation, physical harm, or torture. As mentioned by Shugan and Pandey, violence may occur when people motivate or inspire others to do violence. As further argued by Shugan and Pandey, *ahimsa* plays a bigger meaning and broader connotation. It has positive social aspects like empathy, compassion, forgiveness, and friendliness. Given such an attitude, it is an important tool in creating spaces for dialogue and establishing peace and harmony in society. (Shugan and Pandey, 2022) The recent literature studies mentioned above present the rich opportunity in the working relationship between the Catholic Church and Jainism given their similarities, intersectionality, and openness shown in the inputs of *metanoia* and *ahimsa*. There are research gaps in the areas of putting the meanings of the foundational concepts of the two religious strands as basis for inter-religious dialogue and collaboration. It is also interesting how their inputs can pave the way to do sample practical tips for cooperation that can propel in designing sustainable development goals based on the exchange of wisdom from both camps that can facilitate the attainment of harmonious working relationships for the common good.

Statement of the Problem and Objectives

The paper aims to: 1. Understand metanoia and ahimsa in the context of inter-religious dialogue and collaboration. 2. Discuss Catholic metanoia as a religious phenomenon when appropriate understanding of Hindu ahimsa 3. Present the Catholic and Jainist perspective on "life" as common ground for dialogue and collaboration for sustainable development. Thus, the paper seeks to answer the following questions: 1. How does a Catholic experience metanoia in dealing with the Hindu belief and practice of ahimsa? 2. What is the common ground for Catholics and Hindus regarding their beliefs on life and living things? 3. What are the practical implications for a Catholic who experiences metanoia regarding Hindu ahimsa's perspective on sustainable life perspective?

Significance of the Study

1. This study is within the 21st century pastoral management of Pope Francis, which promotes an inclusive Catholic Church. 2. It provides a concrete paradigm on inter-religious dialogue that has been iterated by Vatican Council 2 and renewed by Pope Francis' Synod on Synodality. 3. It is a concrete paradigm for Catholics on how to be open to non-Catholic beliefs that promotes a perspective that is aligned with environmental ecology. 4. The study links metanoia and Ahimsa with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. 5. Finally, the study is an initial initiative to update traditional theology and explore a 3rd millennium quantum theology.

Theoretical and Research Paradigm

Figure 1.

Theoretical Framework: Metanoia and Ahimsa

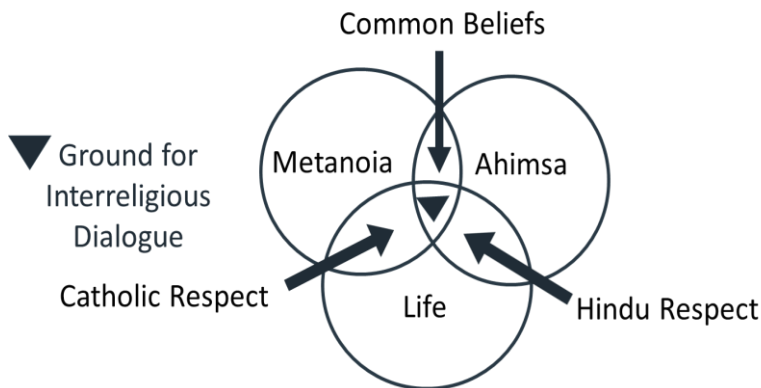


Figure 1 shows that the movement towards inter-religious dialogue may have been initiated through a relationship between Metanoia and Ahimsa, which is finding some commonality of certain ideas and beliefs. The Metanoia views life from a traditional Catholic perspective that is primarily respect for human life. On the other hand, Hindu Ahimsa also respects life and, more importantly, promotes non-violence towards life. The delta symbol represents the totality of the relationship between Metanoia and Ahimsa regarding life, setting a conceptual paradigm towards inter-religious dialogue based on the commonality of religious practices and ideas regarding life itself.

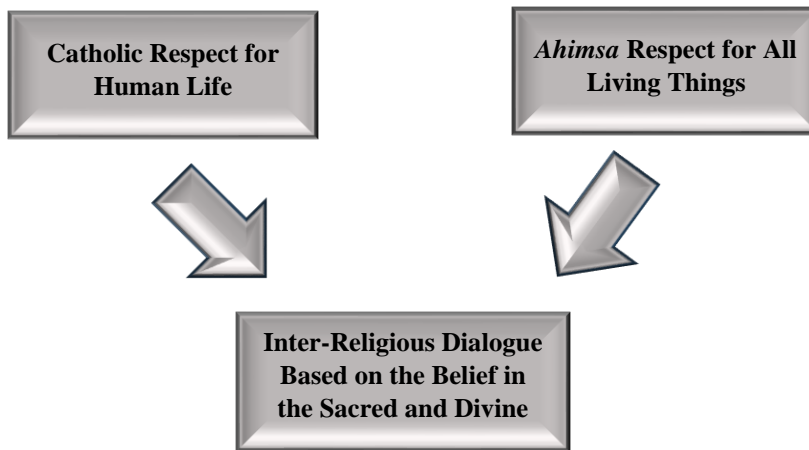
Figure 2.*Research Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue*

Figure 2 shows that the discussion on Catholic Metanoia regarding human life could lead to an inter-religious dialogue. The attributes of Metanoia have to be explored from a traditional theology and 21st century theology based on Pope Francis' inclusive pastoral theology and quantum theology under the ongoing-Synodality. Hindu *Ahimsa* must be understood and appreciated by Catholics to facilitate appreciation of Vedic philosophy and beliefs regarding life. These initial moves may lead to Metanoia, dispelling paranoia vis-à-vis non-Catholic teachings and beliefs.

Methodology

The research utilized Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) phenomenological tool of analysis in examining the inputs of *metanoia* and *ahimsa*. Husserl was a mathematician turned philosopher, and became the major proponent of phenomenology, a scientific method of analyzing phenomena or reality in the way it presents itself. It is a procedure of seeing things as they really are independent of prejudice (Husserl, 1964). In his work, *Experience and Judgment* (1973) which was published after his death, he developed the term "*epoche*" or a sort of quarantine or suspension of judgment. He termed this process, the bracketing of the natural attitude, which is an everyday way and look at ourselves to the determinant subject amid many objects around us (Husserl, 1964). There are three steps in Husserl's analytical tools, which are the *epoche* which is the bracketing or

suspension of judgment, *phenomenological eidetic reduction*, or the process of reducing the experience to essence, and the *phenomenological transcendental reduction*, which reduces the object to the very activity itself of one's consciousness.

Figure 3.

Phenomenological Analytical Tool

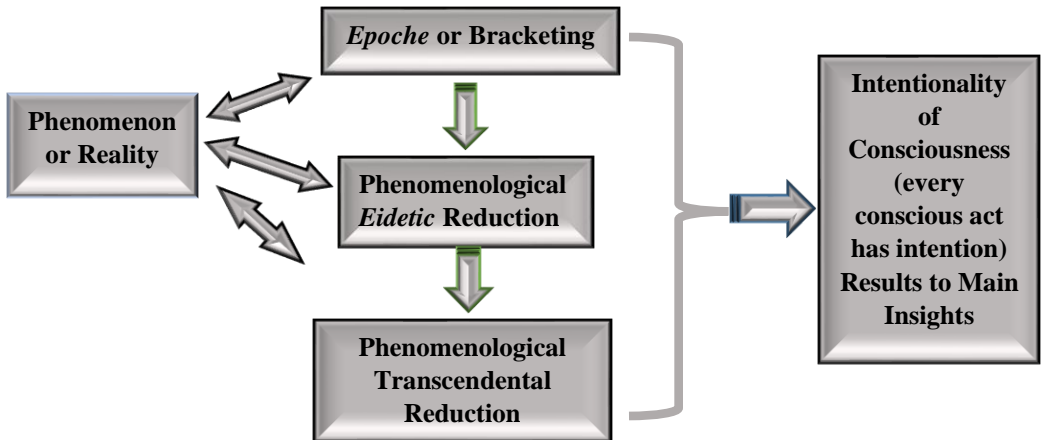
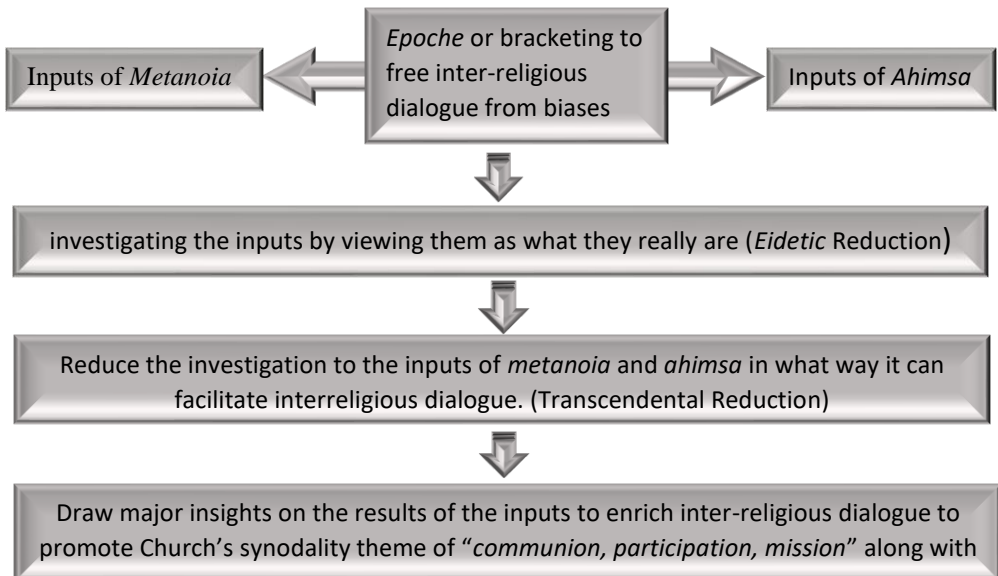


Figure 4.

Inputs of Metanoia and Ahimsa Toward Inter-Religious Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and Jainism



To proceed to inter-religious dialogue, the inputs on *metanoia* and *ahimsa* shall undergo *epoche* or bracketing. It means that any preconceived notions should be set aside, and judgments are suspended. Then it proceeds to *eidetic* reduction, which is investigating the inputs on *metanoia* and *ahimsa* by examining them as what they really are. This paves the way for listening to both sides with an open heart. Transcendental reduction follows, which is focused on the inputs of *metanoia* and *ahimsa* in what way they can facilitate inter-religious dialogue. The analysis shall be concluded with intentionality of consciousness that draws major insights on the results of the inputs to enrich inter-religious dialogue that promote themes of communion, mission, and participation along with UNSGs agenda for total well-being.

This is an explanatory and qualitative research project (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) to present *metanoia and ahimsa* as concepts towards inter-religious dialogue and collaboration by connecting common ideas. It relies on library, e-library works and discourse analysis on the inputs on *metanoia* and *ahimsa* through a research collaboration with Jainists' scholars. It utilized written primary sources and oral narratives from mutual exchanges of inputs and research cooperation to identify the inputs of *metanoia* and *ahimsa* that facilitate inter-religious dialogue. Jainists' expert opinions were taken through the exchange of correspondence with specialists from the International School for Jain Studies (ISJS) based in Pune, India. Using the triangulation method in validating data, ISJS senior administrators collaborated by reviewing and sharing materials on the scope of the study. With these cooperations, the study aimed to locate the meeting points of Jainism and Christianity and find the blending process that can be the basis in the conversation of the two religious strands. The study utilized the philosophical paradigm of Husserl's bracketing phenomenological techniques, which facilitated listening and solidarity, which coincided with the Church's synodality theme of communion, mission, and participation. Biases, preconceived notions, and judgments were quarantined using Husserl's *epoche* that made working together easier to achieve the desired end. Collaborative research work can be an expression of inter-religious dialogue where there is an encounter of exchanging concepts, views, perspectives, cultural traditions, and practices free from any form of bias or judgment. The discourses and mutual listening with the ears of the heart can be an immersive experience of phenomenology. Following Husserl's phenomenological framework cited above, the study unravels how to engage inter-religious dialogue that is grounded by respect to differences, and celebrating commonalities that can contribute to achieving a better world. This qualitative research underwent review from the Ethics Board,

who had given this paper the seal of approval confirming that proper protocols were followed, there was no conflict of interest, and there were no human subjects violated during the study. It is hoped that the results of the research may raise the level of awareness and commitment to the value of mutual exchange and cooperation that can bring people to realize the aspiration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG). In the larger scheme, may this study help in the promotion of peace, harmony, and well-being where people walk together transcending their differences and working for the global common good.

Results and Discussion

What is Metanoia

The ancient Greek word for metanoia is *μετάνοια*, which means "changing one's mind," and in psychology, it is the process of experiencing a psychotic breakdown and subsequent experience of a positive psychological re-building or healing. The Catechism for Filipino Catholics (2002) defines metanoia as conversion, which is a change of heart by turning away from sin and turning to God and the following of Christ in his kingdom (Cf. Mk. 1: 15; Mt. 4: 17). Rausch (1996) links metanoia with discipleship, arguing that "Jesus' call to discipleship demands a radical change of heart (metanoia) a religious conversion often symbolized by leaving behind one's possession...for the sake of the kingdom (Matt. 19:11-12).

Metanoia in the context of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church means "solidarity, respect, and affection for the whole human family by engaging in dialogue with it about many problems." Gaudien et Spes, 1966) cited in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. In support of this dialogue with the world and other religions, O'Murchu (2004) links metanoia with paranoia in connection with other great religions. He says, "Metanoia (conversion), a word with several parallels in the great religions, is the opposite of paranoia (fear)...the call to conversion is an invitation to outgrow our fears and trust ourselves to the unfolding process of the fundamentally benign and benevolent, then we begin to realize the profound meaning of the words: "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4: 18). (O'Murchu, 2004, p. 206).

Converging Points of Metanoia and Ahimsa

Meeting Point of Metanoia to Ahimsa in the Conversion of Heart and Repentance.

Metanoia and *Ahimsa* are foundational concepts of Christianity and Jainism, respectively. Christianity (circa. 1CE) is based on Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God, who challenged people to change their ways (*metanoia*). *Metanoia* is a Greek word that means conversion of the heart and repentance. This is an essential part in His proclamation of the Good News, where Jesus declared, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*" (Mk. 1:15). Clearly, the reference to the Kingdom of God is the heart that chooses to do good and love for others. Jesus' death on Calvary and resurrection from the dead punctuated the proclamation of this Good News. Jesus' preaching about the Kingdom of God is through non-violent means. In His *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt. 5:1-12), Jesus taught His disciples that blessed are those who have a pure heart and work for peace, for they shall inherit the Kingdom of God. (Mt. 12: 8-9). This is what Christians called the Beatitudes, which highlight Jesus' teachings on non-violence to achieve well-being. It calls for a "*be attitude*" or proper disposition on the way a person looks at things. When one uses one's heart with all humility, non-violence works in the person. Jesus contradicted the Code of Hammurabi that states, "*eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth*" (Mt. 5:38-48) in His teachings about non-violence, where He claimed, "*But I tell you this: do not oppose evil with evil; if someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn and offer the other*" (5:39). To punctuate His point on non-violence, he even made a radical stand to love one's enemy.

The gospel narrates how Jesus not only emphasized to not oppose evil with evil, but also exclaimed to pray for your enemy and those who persecute you (Mt. 5:43-44). Prayer is a form of purification that sends our actions to God and, at the same time, creates an atmosphere of calmness even in the worst troublesome times. Even during the time when Jesus was executed to death, He showed non-violence by His prayers to God to forgive His tormentors. Jesus' death on the cross culminated His message of love to bring the Good News for all, which is people are saved in the giving of His life (John 3:16). Followers of Jesus are called to do the same to take up one's cross and follow Him (Mk. 8:34). This means that anyone can achieve spiritual liberation in the sacrifice for others, a non-violent approach that prepares a person to ultimate union with God, where salvation lies. On the other hand, Jainism traces its origins in the 6th-5th BCE where Mahavira, the final of the 24 *tirthankaras* taught the Jain religion. Jain is from the Sanskrit

word “*conqueror*” which based its teachings from the 24 ford-makers or *tirthankaras* who achieved the *moksha* or liberation, from the cycle of *karma* and *samsara* (rebirth). They conquered the passionate world of senses and became exalted blessed individuals serving as inspiration in the spiritual quests. They show how to achieve this goal of liberation by one’s perfection of the *ahimsa* or non-violence (Miller, 2020). *Moksha* is attained through mastering the *ahimsa* or non-violence, in all forms of life, along with *anekanta* (multiplicity of viewpoints) and *aparigraha* (non-possession) as lifestyle.

In the conversation with Jainist scholars, Dr. Pandey, and the guru, Dr. Sulekh Jain, in the 2023 International School for Jain Studies online winter program *Fundamentals of Jainism* where the lead author of the study attended, they shared that in Jainist’s thought, all living beings are equal, as each has a similar independent pure soul with qualities assigned to God. This resonates with Christian belief in the Kingdom of God to be within. Pandey and Sulekh further elaborated that each living being is different due to its *karma* (actions), past and present. *Karma* is the term that refers to one’s action or the result of his or her actions that includes thought, speech, and deed recorded on the soul, a kind of material stain upon this luminous soul (Miller 2020). One can achieve the status of the pure soul by striving for a life based on the three Jainist’s pillars for spiritual liberation (*moksha*): *ahimsa*, *anekanta* and *aparigraha*. These Jainist’s teachings can intersect with Christian’s tenet of *metanoia* which is a change of heart experience. *Metanoia* is an encounter of someone living a sinful life and changed his or her paths in accordance with Jesus’ call to repent and believe the Good News. *Metanoia* occurs in listening and commitment to shift ways for the better. This is a total transformation of the entire person where his or her whole self has been directed to leave attachments to anything that leads to sin, from material priorities, power, popularity, and obsession to wealth and prestige.

Metanoia is a pre-requisite in Jesus’ teachings on the Kingdom of God. Sacrifice and giving one’s life for others start in the change of heart, and the conversion experience. Lonergan classified *metanoia* in three senses: intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. Intellectual conversion is a radical clarification to allow new learning not from abstract ideas but on concrete matters that allows a person to reflect his or her purpose. It is a paradigm shift from general to, and from mere acquisition of knowledge to transformative insights. Moral conversion is anchored on values that transcend the self. It is not just knowing what is right, but it is a concrete engagement of an authentic self-acting the right thing.

Religious conversion is the most profound since it directs every human being to permanent and total surrender. In the language of Aquinas, it is “*operative grace where the heart of stone is replaced by the heart of flesh.*” (Fallon and Riley, 1987, pp. 261-276) The categorization method is a major challenge that hinders conversion and dialogue. This is brought about by the influence of the Graeco-Roman Hellenistic tradition in Christianity where realities are classified and dichotomized. This facilitates division and discrimination. It was fortified by the dualistic thinking where there are plays of opposites shown in Plato’s theory of forms (399 BCE - 387 BCE) to St. Augustine’s City of God (426 CE).

However, categorization also paved the way for segregation, and it becomes a convenient tool for judgments using categories like white or black, rich, or poor, Christians and non-Christian, etc. It gradually became a barrier to dialogue since it created biases and preconceived notions. To break the walls shaped by categorization, suspension of any form of judgments and biases is needed. This is significant to enter listening and dialogue with people of different views and traditions. In this study, Husserl’s *epoche* facilitated the identification of converging points between Christianity and Jainism since it allows an open heart and collaboration for an exchange of beliefs and insights. In *epoche*, there is bracketing of categorization, and there is a paradigm shift from animosities to encounters of persons where the commonalities are used to collaborate for the global common good.

Meeting Point of Ahimsa to Metanoia in Pratikramana

The research embarked on the key concepts and beliefs of Jainism, which have direct links and harmony with Christian teachings. The equivalent term for *metanoia* in Jainism is the practice of *Pratikramana* or correction after fall/mistake practiced by Jains almost daily and at greater measure annually during their holy festival of *Paryuṣaṇa* which means “*abiding together*” or “*coming together.*” This is usually celebrated on the first week of September. This year, it will be from August 31, 2024, to September 7, 2024. *Paryuṣaṇa* celebrated fasting or the Tapa (तप), atonement or Prayashchitta (*Prāyaścita* – प्रायश्चित्त) and forgiveness or Kshamapana (*Kṣamāpanā* – क्षमापना). *Paryushana* is based on the observance of mind and soul over the body (Sha, 2024) in their pursuit of spiritual liberation. Jain communities during the period recite the phrase *micchāmi dukkaḍam*, which means, “*May my misdeeds be in vain,*” that is,

fruitless. This is the time of the year where the spirit of forgiveness is intense (Clines, 2023).

Ahimsa is the foundation of the Jainists' tradition in the practice of *Pratikramaṇa*. Thus, it has the meeting point of Christian *metanoia* since both practices are anchored in the well-being of the community and the release of the individual person from all forms of enslavement to spiritual freedom. Non-violence is the key point of *ahimsa*, and Mahavira showed his disciples how to eliminate hurting all living beings by staying in a place separated from towns and villages and practicing extreme penance. (Arihanta, 2024). Williams (1963) examined *pratikramaṇa* to be a product of self-reflection, meditation, and request for pardon. He stated that this is best articulated in this verse: “*khāmemi savva-jīve, save jive khamantu me | metti me savva-bhūesu, veraṃ majjha na keṇavi*” or simply “*I ask pardon of all living creatures; may all of them pardon me. May I have friendship with all beings and enmity with none.*” Prayerful meditation is a key action in *pratikramaṇa* since it purifies the karmic movements in the mind, the actions of the body and pervades in the entire relations of human beings within himself or herself, others, and the universe. Like Christianity, prayer in Jainism is a non-violent method of bringing wholeness into one's existence. *Ahimsa* is doing no harm, killing, injury, or violence to all living beings. Jainist scholars in the International School for Jainist Studies presented a taxonomy of life forms in an order based on senses, from the foundational sense of touch to the complete five senses. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Jainist Taxonomy of Life Forms

Number of Senses	Senses	Life Forms
One-Sensed	Touch	Plants, microorganisms, life forms present in earth, water, fire, air
Two-Sensed	Touch and Taste	worms, leeches, snails
Three-Sensed	Touch, Taste and Smell	minibeasts such as ants, fleas, plant-lice, cotton-seed insects, termites, and centipedes
Four-Sensed	Touch, Taste, Smell and Sight	some minibeasts such as wasps, fly, mosquitos, butterfly, scorpions etc
Five-Sensed	Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight and Hearing	human being, big animals such as elephants, whale fish, birds, etc

This explains why Jainists are strictly vegetarians because it is based on *ahimsa* or non-violence. It means that their diet consists only of green leafy vegetables, lentils, beans, grains, and fruits. They avoid plants that have higher microorganisms, and uprooting them may cause harm and violence, such as radish, potatoes, garlic, onions, and carrots. The killing of life, be it in any form, cannot bring a person to *moksha*. Even honey is not to be eaten since its process may kill many bees. Their dietary practice also involved *choviar*, or eating before sunset for healthy reasons and to avoid bugs that awaken in the evening to fall into their soup. Animal by products and gelatins are avoided since they are not vegetarians too (Pinkis, 2024).

Ahimsa is applied to the mental, physical, and verbal actions of a person towards all living creatures. Any form of *himsa* or killing can bring negative karma, and hence cannot help an individual to *moksha*. Jainist monks cover their mouths to show reverence for life. This is also a precaution to avoid stepping on and injuring insects or any form of microorganism. *Himsa* for Jainists are acts of violence that are performed due to passions of anger, arrogance, deceit, and greed. The ways to commit can be in the self, to others, and the approving of the acts of violence of others. The channels for committing it are in the activity in the mind, speech, and body. Indeed, the fundamental structure of *ahimsa* is built on the belief that each life form has a soul, which is stuck in the *samsara* or cycle of death and rebirth through reincarnation. The aim is to break out of this cycle and achieve spiritual liberation, or *moksha* (Sims, 2015). This means that the soul is stained, and unless it becomes pure again, it cannot get out of that cycle. Aside from *himsa*, the other sources that taint the soul are attachment (*raga*), lying (*asatya*), hatred (*dyesa*), Deceit (*māyā*), theft (*adattādana*), focus on possessions (*parigraha*), unchastity (*abrahma*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), pride (*māna*), disputation (*kalaha*), false belief (*mithyātva*), deceitful speech (*māyā-mṛṣā*), emotional swings (*arati-rati*), denigration (*parivāda*), false accusation (*abhyākhyāna*), malicious gossip (*paśūnya*) (Clines, 2023). *Pratikramaṇa* can bring back to positive karma, and help attained the pure soul to *moksha*. Jains' sacred book, *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* reveals that in the practice of *pratikramaṇa* and *ahimsa*, Mahavira exerted righteousness to liberate from the never-ending cycle of rebirth and re-death. *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* is where we find the words of Mahavira who taught them that to perform *pratikramaṇa* one needs to confess his or her sins to the guru and to beg for forgiveness. Mahāvīra stated: “By confession of sins, one gets rid of the thorns of deceit, mis-applied austerities, and wrong belief, which obstructs the way to final liberation and causes the endless migration of the soul.” (*Uttaradhyāyana* 29.5, pg. 162). In *pratikramaṇa*, an individual must repent within and then

express it to the *guru*. Such action leads to humility and praiseworthy gestures (*Uttaradhyāyana* 29.6-7, 163). Mahavira emphasized the importance of “*begging for forgiveness*” since it brings happiness of mind and positive disposition to all living things. It shows freedom from fear and pure character (*Uttaradhyāyana* 29.17, pg. 164f). In Christianity, Jesus’ teachings about forgiveness go along with *metanoia* and the Kingdom of God. Like Jainist’s concepts, the aim is to purify oneself and avoid poisoning the heart, thereby attaining well-being and happiness. When Jesus was asked about how many times I will have to forgive my brother, he responded, “*not seven times, but seventy times seven*” (Mt. 18:22). In context, seven in the mind of the Jews stand for perfection. To forgive is to be “*perfect like the Heavenly Father in heaven is perfect*” (Mt. 5:48). Like Jainists who tell their misdeeds to the *guru*,

Catholics confess their sins to the priest, who shall give them atonement for their sins and give them penance for its forgiveness. The experience of confession is not just curing the physical body but healing the entire person from all forms of guilt, stress, and emotional burden that prevent them from establishing a closer relationship with God and neighbors. This similarity of achieving spiritual liberation through forgiveness is a meeting point of the two religious strands that share commonalities to achieve Christian salvation and everlasting life, and Jain’s *moksha*.

Converging Points Between Christianity and Jainists’ in Their End and Means

The converging points of Christianity and Jainism are both in their end and means. The ultimate purpose of the two religions is to achieve spiritual liberation. For Christians, the final goal is salvation in Christ, and one with Him in heaven. When a person dies, Christians believe that they participate in the resurrection of Christ, where they enjoy life’s fullness. The person’s destiny is based on his or her actions in the past life. The means to salvation are the acts of love and non-violence to merit a person’s place in the Kingdom of God where there is everlasting life (CCC 1021-1022). Like Christianity, Jainism’s greatest goal is achieving spiritual liberation. It may sound different since for them it is a break from the cycle of *samsara*.

The Christian worldview is linear, where life is like a pilgrim to the Kingdom of God. Death is a gateway to the next life. In Catholic eschatology, there are four last things, which are death, judgment, heaven, and hell (CCC 1021). This is determined by the kind of life a person lived

before he died. Heaven is where we find salvation, where one is in union with God, enjoying the fullness of everlasting life. Hell is the opposite, where there is separation from loved ones and the state of existence is that of never-ending pain and suffering. Jainism way of looking at realities is cyclical. Their teachings reveal how one can move around in the circle of birth, death, rebirth, and unless an individual is released from this cycle, he or she cannot attain the moksha or spiritual liberation. However, a closer look shows that amidst the different trajectories,

Christianity and Jainism share one thing in common. They both aspire for well-being even in a life after death where there is tranquility, peace, and harmony. Jainist and Catholic religious strands speak for purification through forgiveness and change of heart. These are non-violent ways to achieve a pure soul that has been corrupted by sins or a destructive lifestyle brought about by *himsa* or violence. Sins destroyed the quest for liberation. In Jainist language, it stains the pure soul, and the karmic elements are chained to the continuing cycle, obstructing it from being freed. Jainists have positive *karma* or actions that may gradually erase this stain. These include the practice of their three pillars, the *ahimsa*, *anekanta* and *aparigraha*. Christians, on their part, are bound to obey the ten commandments, and follow the golden rule stated by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount, “*in everything do to others what you would have them do to you*” (Mt. 7:12). This summarized Jesus’ teaching on non-violence, love, and compassion.

Meeting the Three Pillars of Jainism: Ahimsa, Anekanta, Aparigraha to Christian Metanoia

To achieve the status of pure soul, Dr. Pandey and Dr. Sulekh argued that *ahimsa* should also go with *anekanta* or multiplicity of viewpoints, and respect for differences. By subscribing to this belief, a person acquires *intellectual ahimsa* where he realizes that he or she has no monopoly of truth. *Anekanta* is a respect to various perspectives to promote interrelations and mutual listening, free from all forms of *himsa* or violence in the form of insistence that one’s view is right and the other wrong and creating hostility due to intolerance and absolutist view. There are essential principles of *anekanta* that strengthen *ahimsa*. These are relativity, reconciliation, and co-existence (Mishra, 2014). An absolutist viewpoint can end in conflict, which is a form of violence. This can be avoided if interrelations begin with respect to the relativity of each human being’s unique character and traits. An eye to appreciate the beauty of everyone can

make a change where, regardless of differences, each person is endowed with honor and dignity, and the manner in which they present themselves should be treated with outmost reverence. In Christian teachings, it traced back its basis on its relationship to *metanoia* in Genesis 1:27 where it states, “*humans are created in God’s image.*” This means we are sharing the honor with God that makes us His children worthy to be given value and worth. Reconciliation is *anekanta’s* second principle by acknowledging the interrelatedness of everything. The balance in the cosmos is attributed to seeing the connections of one part to another, and thereby living a life of non-violence (*ahimsa*) friendliness and brotherhood/sisterhood. This is interwoven with *anekanta’s* third principle which is co-existence aimed at avoiding *himsa* or killing, hostility, and animosity, which happen if we follow the absolutist trajectory. (Mishra, 2014). In coexistence, we raise the level of tolerance and the freedom of thought. People should be allowed to express themselves free from all forms of fear. However, there is also responsible freedom since we need to be careful in our thoughts or actions that can harm others and create negative karma. *Anekanta’s* principles meet the Christian concept of *ephatha* or listening from the ears of your heart (Mk. 7:34). It basically means “*be opened.*”

Many positive possibilities can come in when there is openness and listening. Peace and harmony occur, and one belongs to the kingdom of God having these qualities. Jesus showed how he listens to different kinds of people from all walks of life. This is what makes Him a universal figure where everyone can relate to. In the gospel, he speaks with sinners (shown in Matthew 9:10-17, Mark 2:15-22 and Luke 5:29-39), prostitutes (Luke 7:37– 50), poor (Luke 6:20 as example), sick (like the one shown in Matthew: 8), women (Luke 10) and children (Mark 10:13-16). Jesus even tolerated and spoke with his critics, the Pharisees and the Jewish authorities who questioned His teachings. The Pharisees represented a kind of mindset that interpreted up to the last letter of the law. They impose their ideas and become self-righteous. It is in their arrogance that Jesus challenged them to respect the views of others (Matthew 12: 1-8). Later on, they condemned them sin for their being close minded (Matthew 23), and called them hypocrites (Matthew 23;13) for their more concern of showing off their rituals rather than respecting and showing love to people. Like the Jainist’s *anekanta*, Jesus’ preaching on inclusiveness and listening to the plight of the last, the lost, the little, and the least of society is also what He demanded from His followers. Christians should have an open heart and mind to appreciate the beauty in every human being. Regardless of their status in life, gender, beliefs, traditions, and practices, every human being deserves respect and gives worth to their dignity as a child of God.

Aparigraha strengthens *ahimsa* since it is about non-possession as lifestyle. This is a virtue of non-attachment to worldly pleasures and desires and non-greediness. The call of *aparigraha* is to refrain in being materialist and consumed by worldly wants, which can stain the pure soul since putting the earthly goods a priority leads to negative karma. Based on the sharing of the scholars from the International School for Jain Studies in the conversation of the lead author of the study through his attendance in the series of subjects under Fundamentals of Jainism, and exchange of correspondence through e-mails and actual online meetings, they claimed that along with *anekanta* and *aparigraha* practicing *ahimsa* is basically to restrict activities from what is wrong, and the vigilance or carefulness in performing what is right. Thus, there are Jain ways of life or vows for the monks and nuns, and to the laity or ordinary people. The major vows (*mahāvratā*) for the ascetics are the complete renunciation from the material world, family, and possessions. The minor vows (*aṇuvratā*) are partial renunciation, which is required for householders. Householders are simply those lay or ordinary Jains living with their families and practicing the given way of life. They practiced the following minor vows: *ahimsa* or no violence or minimizing it, *satya* (truth) - abstaining from disagreeable, sinful and unpleasant speech, *asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmacarya* / *Sva-dāra-santoṣa* (Celibacy) *Aparigraha* / *Icchā-parimāṇa* / *Parigrahaparimāṇa* (limiting possessions / limiting desires). To reiterate, *ahimsā* (non-violence) served as the foundational principle for the way of life where they refrain injuring living beings by mental, vocal, and physical activities, by way of doing, by getting it done by others, and by approving others' injurious acts. Laymen should avoid intentional violence, which is an act that is knowingly done with full consent that can injure any life form. However, there are situations where violence may happen beyond one's control. These are occupational, defensive, or domestic violence. For Jains, there are occupations that should be avoided because they involve wholesale destruction of life. These are fishermen, butchers, gunmakers, wine-merchants, and brewers. This also includes cutting trees, clearing jungles, and drying up lakes or rivers where lifeforms are destroyed (Mahapragya, 2024). There are Jains who joined military forces for self-defense. The purpose is to defend life, and with it such practice is tolerated. In their day-to-day living, domestic violence can happen if they use materials in their dress or decorations that have injured or harmed their lives. This is where domestic violence lies where they are asked to refrain from wearing plumes and furs that came from the tortures of death of their owners. Jains are asked to check if the leathers used are taken from dead animals and not from the slaughtered ones (Mahapragya, 2024). With these

demands of vows in their way of life, Jains are divided into two sects, the Digambara or “*sky-clad*” and the Svetambara or “white-clad.” The Digambara monks wander naked. They are not having nuns since they believe women cannot achieve liberation. They must reincarnate as men to achieve *moksha*. The Svetambara, on the other hand, has a different set of beliefs where their nuns and monks wear white clothing. The ISJS scholars engaged in the study belong to the Svetambaras.

In one of their conversations with the lead author of the study, they explain how they lived their vows showing its simplicity as a concrete way of following their vows. Jainist’s monks and nuns practice the major vow which is complete renunciation of worldly affairs. The ascetics’ (monks and njuns) minor vows include minimizing violence (*ahimsa*), abstaining from disagreeable, sinful and unpleasant speech (*satya*), non-stealing or *asteya*, celibacy or *brahmacharya* / *Sva-dāra-santoṣa*, limiting possessions / limiting desires or *aparigraha* / *Ichhā-parimāṇa* / *Parigrahaparimāṇa*. Ordinary Jains or laity live a household and lesser vows way of life highlighted by minimizing violence or *ahimsa*. Several Jainist laymen are successful businessmen and professionals who practiced philanthropic acts in the hope to acquire *punya* or meritorious karma that they will be reborn in another *samsara* and take monastic vows to attain spiritual liberation. (Miller, 2020).

Like Jainism, Catholicism has ordained ministers, religious brothers, and sisters. The ordained deacons, priest or bishops practiced the vows of celibacy, and obedience, which included poverty if they are religious clergy or monks. Catholic religious nuns and monks give up everything in the name of Christ, and embrace a life of poverty where they share everything in common. Lay people follow the Ten Commandments and precepts of the church that has the spirit in the promotion of life. These laws include fasting, no killing and faithfulness in the relationship with God and others. There are two essential parts of Christian Decalogue which is to love God with your heart, and loving one’s neighbor as yourself. Christianity found intersection in Jain’s *aparigraha* in Jesus’ teachings on total surrender where in one of His teachings He mentioned how it is difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God (Mk. 10:17-31). This narrative is a forceful message that wealth and all forms of material attachments are obstacles to salvation. In Jesus’ words, “*it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!*” (Mk. 10:23). The requirement is a detachment to it that can bring us to nothingness. *Metanoia* and nothingness, or *kenosis* in Greek, are closely intertwined. When a person experiences *metanoia* there is an encounter with nothingness since it has arrived at the level of no

attachments to any form of worldly passion. It has transcended the self, and to any form of categorization that discriminates and judges people. In Jainism, it is only in nothingness that an individual can proceed to spiritual quests. This meets the Christian view that spiritual union and liberation happen when there are no more attachments to worldly desires. Jains have *tirthankaras* who are their inspiration for spiritual quests.

Dr. Pandey and Dr. Sulekh (2022) stated that Mahavira, the latest Jain ford-maker (*Tirthankara*), always used to walk to listen and observe people and then talk to them. In fact, Jain ascetics are barred from using any form of transport and from staying in one place for long. Similarly, Jain householders, (like Dr. Pandey and Dr. Sulekh) are called *Śrāvakas* or listeners. Jainism places a lot of emphasis on listening and speaking the truth in a non-violent way to enhance their own wellness as well as contribute to others. Jain's greeting is *Jai Jinendra* or honor to the Supreme *Jinas* (*Tirthankaras*) and praise the qualities of the *Jinas* (conquerors). Catholics have saints and mystics as their version of *tirthankaras*. They are icons in achieving the level of nothingness where their union with God is everything. Like them, the aim of Christianity is nothingness that ends in the cross, where there is triumph in loving without condition.

Conclusion

In recent years, the Catholic Church has carried the Synod for a Synodal Church (2021-2024) which promotes inter-religious dialogue with a theme of "*communion, mission, and participation.*" This is a historical landmark in including everyone to speak how to preserve life and promote relationships that are geared towards well-being. Synodality enables Catholics to walk together in communion with all life forms to bring Good News of salvation which is at hand.

For Jainism, synodality is like *Parasparopragaho Jīvanām'* or living beings helping each other. The goal of dialogue is to achieve complete silence and nothingness. There are no more differences because it has reached the level of suspending judgment and transcended the level of dualistic thinking where people are categorized. In dialogue, there is harmony in working together for the common good. This can be realized in various ways.

A research collaboration that is grounded on the UNSDGs and how to achieve them together are small steps to concretize reflected actions that consider the value of life in all forms of development. Most often than not, the environment has been a victim in the goals for progress. The inputs of

metanoia and *ahimsa* are guiding tools for these initiatives, where the values adhered by these religions on non-violence raise the level of consciousness of how important it is to preserve and promote life. Integral Ecology and Green Movements shall further be enriched in the wisdom of non-violence in *ahimsa* and *metanoia*. If and when a Catholic is converted to adopt an *Ahimsa* attitude towards all living things, then the concept that humans have dominion over all other created beings and the ecology-centric perspective of Jainists becomes a new sustainability paradigm, aligned to the sustainable developmental goals of the United Nations.

The inputs of *metanoia* and *ahimsa* facilitate dialogue for peacebuilding since it thrives on non-violence and nothingness. Their converging points promote inclusivity and help realize the value of listening to transcend differences. An authentic inter-religious dialogue comes in when those involved did a dialogue first to their inner selves. *Metanoia* facilitates non-violence in mind and body and such manner brings solidarity with others. This same principle applies to Jainist's *ahimsa* which has taught people about the value of non-violence, and along with *anekanta* (respect for different viewpoints) and *aparigraha* (non-possession) leads to a lifestyle towards liberation. Listening comes in when these essential values are integrated into any form of encounter and conversation. The inputs of *metanoia* and *ahimsa* deepen the engagements to work together for the good of everyone. The inputs of *metanoia* and *ahimsa* provide strategic points of entry to working for the global common good, which are stipulated in UNSDG. There are several possibilities that can be taken for future studies including the use of these inputs to diplomatic relations between countries when frictions happen due to issues of sovereign rights. Green technology for earth, our common home, can also be a relevant topic with its integration into Pope Francis' agenda for integral ecology.

Finally, in the grand scheme of things, life grows in love. Non-violence is a language of love. Humanity can live a life of peace and assured of its wellbeing and existence when there is no injury and harm to be done to all life forms. Jainism and Christianity share the same language to achieve spiritual liberation ranging from forgiveness, non-possession, respect for differences in viewpoints, and most of all, nothingness and union with God. St. Paul beautifully captured this experience of mystical union and nothingness where he exclaimed: "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*" (Gal 2:20). The last Jainist ford-maker Mahavira on the other hand exclaims, "*Detachment is not that you own nothing, but that nothing owns you*" (Agam Sutra, 100 CE).

Recommendation

1. For those who have experienced metanoia, to follow Pope Francis' Synodality in promoting an inclusive perspective towards non-Catholic believers, like those of the Jainists. Inclusivity is an essential character of the UNSDG.
2. At a personal level, Catholics are encouraged to explore a spirituality that is open to the theology, philosophy, and metaphysical beliefs of non-Catholic religious as an initial preparation for an inter-religious dialogue of non-Christian denominations.
3. For theological and religious education scholars to continue to research on the common elements of religious beliefs and practices between Catholics and Jains for an enlightened inter-religious dialogue.
4. Further research on inter-religious dialogue, using quantum theology as a framework that defines God as the Ultimate Energy, affirming Jainist view of divine and sacred presence in all of creation.
5. Continue to research the commonality between the Catholic faith and the Hindu/Vedic beliefs.

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