Anglican Interreligious Relations in *Generous Love*: Indebted to and Moving from Vatican II

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*Generous Love*, ‘an Anglican theology of inter faith relations’,¹ was published by the Anglican Communion Inter Faith Network in February 2008 and discussed at the Lambeth Conference later that year. It is the culmination of a series of official Anglican documents on interfaith issues and was ‘an attempt to provide a statement that was as definitive as possible.’² *Generous Love* was received by the Anglican Communion of bishops at the Lambeth Conference and then by the General Synod of the Church of England in January 2009. As the Anglican Communion has no formal Magisterium, the authority of such a document consists in its status as ‘a teaching resource’ and ‘agreed reference point for Anglican teaching on inter faith relations’.³ *Generous Love* is thus a significant guide to contemporary Anglican understandings of inter faith relations. This essay will analyse what Frederick Quinn describes as the ‘lineage of the Vatican landmark document, *Nostra Aetate* (1965)’⁴ evident in *Generous Love*, noting both its indebtedness to *Nostra Aetate*, and its departures in the light of more recent theological and political developments. Before so doing, *Generous Love* will be situated in the context of previous Anglican documents on interfaith issues since *Nostra Aetate*, in particular, *The Way of Dialogue* of 1988.

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About a century prior to 1988, the Lambeth Conference of 1897 had framed relations with Jews and Muslims in the context of ‘preaching His Gospel to the world’ as ‘one great religious body, which holds the truth in part not in its fullness, the Jews; with another which holds fragments of the truth embedded in a mass of falsehood’. The engagement with other faiths is seen through the prism of the desire to evangelise, and correct misunderstanding and error (Islam), or to complete a partial knowledge of the gospel (Judaism). Seventy years later, in the Lambeth Conference of 1968 and in the wake of Vatican II, there is another reference to inter faith relations, but for the first time this includes the mandate to foster dialogue. Thus, the language of dialogue becomes apparent with a resolution that encourages ‘positive relationship to the different religions of men’ to ‘set forward the common unity of mankind and a common participation in its present history’. In the Lambeth Conference of 1978, a resolution was determined which affirms the mission of the Gospel again, but this time it is opened out to embrace ‘the obligation to open exchange of thought and experience with people of other faiths’. This resolution offers a tentative theological basis for dialogue by suggestively noting the need for ‘sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit among them’. It is in the 1988 Lambeth Conference that a more substantive theology of dialogue is presented following the positive steps taken in the post-Vatican II era of Lambeth Conferences in 1968 and 1978.

This backdrop of a gradual opening out of relations with other faiths to include the imperative to dialogue following Vatican II, and the publication of *Jews, Christians, and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* in 1988 is an important context to *Generous Love*. Alongside *The Way of Dialogue*, the 1988 Lambeth Conference endorsed the ‘Four Principles of Dialogue’ that had been formulated by the British Council of Churches together with the World Council of Churches:

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8 Ibid.