

JPJRS 3/2 (2000) 129-149

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4289826

Stable URL: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4289826>

Keywords: Religious Formation, Religious Leaders, Training of Religious Leaders, Formation vs Training

Abstract: See below

Formation or Training? An Intercultural Perspective

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There are two educations:
the one that teaches how to make a living
and the one that teaches how to live.¹

0. Formation and Training

The difference between formation and training is perhaps best illustrated through concrete examples.

Recently as I was awaiting my turn at one of the immigration counters at the Frankfurt airport I noticed two Africans before me. Being a bit sleepy I did not at first realize that something was amiss. As the two German officials who examined the passports began to raise their voices it dawned on me that the Africans were having visa-problems. But I could not say what exactly the problem was. I only heard the two German officials, a lady and a gentleman, shouting at the helpless Africans, "Go away, you do not have a visa!" As the two Africans were withdrawing from the counter the lady official shouted an obscenity in German at them.

Undoubtedly, the two officials only were doing their duty having undergone *training* in matters relating to their task of checking up and examining passports and visas of people coming from different cultures, but it is doubtful if they had any *formation* with

regard to encountering people of other cultures.

Now let us turn to the following story.

It intrigued the congregation to see their rabbi disappear each week on the eve of the Sabbath. They suspected he was secretly meeting the Almighty, so they deputed one of their number to follow him.

This is what the man saw: the rabbi disguised himself in peasant clothes and served a paralysed Gentile woman in her cottage, cleaning out the room and preparing a Sabbath meal for her.

When the spy got back the congregation asked,

"Where did the rabbi go? Did he ascend to heaven?"

"No," the man replied, "he went even higher."²

Clearly no amount of training could possibly prepare a rabbi for an intercultural commitment.

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Abstract

For far too long formation has been understood in a narrowly religious sense: formation of persons in a religious congregation. The purpose of this formation is the so-called charism of the congregation. Seen interculturally, this is just plain navel gazing. Formation has to have just the opposite goal, namely, of opening us up to the other, the other culture, the other religion. It is precisely the religious who have given up every-thing who are invited to be open to face any thing, any situation. That is why formation has to be understood in our times more comprehensively than in former times. In our global and inter-cultural village there is need of a formation that not only ensures and guarantees the existence of this village but also enables a harmonious living together of all peoples.

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This means that there is need of an intercultural consciousness. For the survival of the individual cultures there is need of the awareness of interculturality, which takes note of diverse cultures and sees to it that they are all able to survive. Today the goal of formation has to be broadened so that formation can move in the direction of deepening intercultural awareness. Such an awareness ensures intraculturality (being in touch with one's culture, religion and spirituality) by promoting interculturality where religions and cultures interact positively with one another.

0.1 An Open Horizon Of Understanding

Interculturality demands openness. An important question that needs to be raised right at the beginning is, what is our access to reality, to the world, to the world of humans? Whatever our re-

sponse to this question – obviously it depends on our understanding of reality – one thing is clear, there is need for openness towards reality, need for an open horizon on our part. The kind of openness that is operative in us determines the kind of access we have to reality.

Without some sort of openness no access is possible. An access is the concretization of a specific kind of openness. The validity of this statement is seen in the opposite case where there is lack of openness. For what do the many conflicts – whatever be their nature – of our times both in India as well as in the rest of the world tell us? Genuine interaction takes place even where a minimum of openness is operative. Thus our age is beginning to show an increasing openness towards the environment. This implies a new access to reality. Such an access means a mode of approach and conduct with regard to the environment.

The different accesses constitute in effect our life and life-style. They are expressed in our attitudes and values, in our traditions and our cultures. The latter comprise the area of our discussion in this paper because they manifest themselves in whatever our society, our nation and our world do, produce and proclaim.

An open horizon is open to a certain extent only because the very horizon determines the extent of the openness.³ This is so because such openness bears the characteristics of its horizon. It is open to the extent that its horizon is open. To generalize, traditions are open, each in its own unique manner.

The Buddhist traditions are, for example, open in a manner that is different from the Hindu or Christian or Muslim or Adivasi traditions. The Hindus, for instance, (just to make an arbitrary choice) have little or no difficulty in participating in the religious ceremonies of other traditions than, for instance, Christians. Or Christian women have little or no difficulty to become nurses than Hindu women from the higher castes.⁴ So too the Buddhist horizon of understanding in India is different in the case of Neo-Buddhists than in the case of Buddhists in Tibet or Sri Lanka or Thailand simply because of its different social background. Historical traditions are shaped and formed by different layers; that is why it is not always easy to characterize them in detail. Furthermore, a tradition is something dynamic because it is constantly changing.

1. Global Problems in a Global Village

No tradition enjoys a privileged access to reality. Every tradition has its positive and negative aspects. We moderns who are in great danger of contracting the ancient disease of “hybris” (overconfidence, the temptation to be like the gods) might entertain the pretension that we are more advanced than our ancestors.⁵ The facts of our situation, however, point in the opposite direction. Not only the environmental crisis but also the relationship of individual persons and nations to one another leaves no doubt that our progress has been a double-edged sword. In contrast, the so-called primitive peoples had a better and more genuine access to nature than we have today.

It is the insight of our times that humans form a community; this conviction is gaining momentum today. It has even taken the form of a structural institution called the United Nations. Granted its inefficacy and ineffectiveness, still it is a giant step in the history of humankind – a step in the right direction.

This common-sense idea receives support from the perspective of the sciences. Whatever be the explanation of the origin of the diverse races, one thing is sure: we all share in the same stuff, the atoms and the molecules, that make up creation. “Matter-relationship” is much thicker than blood-relationship. This is the insight that the “Geologist” Thomas Berry has been communicating in his various writings.⁶ Outside of “creation” there is “nothing”. Whatever exists is perceptible (directly or indirectly) in creation. The unity of creation – here the sciences do not seem to have any other alternative – is the ground for the unity of humans and their kind.

But take the ontological grounding for the unity of the human race. Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* draws our attention to the fact of humans “being-in-the-world”.⁷ “World” and “understanding” constitute the human.⁸ Human understanding is a “worldly” event. The “world” (not just the physical world but the world of meaning too) is constitutive of every happening of understanding. Understanding takes place “in the world” – this phrase indicates more than a locative case. Understanding is always about the world and so is always connected with it.⁹ Heidegger distinguishes this

kind of [primordial] understanding from “understanding that is merely one kind of understanding among [many] others” – like, for example, “explanation”. This derivative kind of understanding, where “that which is *explicitly* understood has the structure of *something as something*”.¹⁰ Though we can not go into details here, the point is important because it is not only individual persons who understand something *as* something but also the different cultures and traditions. In other words, all understanding is historical and therefore specific to the understanding person or culture. It is here that the specificity of a person or culture manifests itself. And the specific contribution of cultures and traditions is to be located in the way they understand the world, the way they-are-in-the-world.

Thus every tradition and community has an access to reality that is specific to it. This specificity shows itself both in specific cultural communities and in the values specific to them. The Indian traditions, for instance, stress *ahimsā* (= non-violence) whereas the Christian traditions lay stress on “love of neighbour”. This, however, does not imply that the Indian traditions do not witness to “love of neighbour” or that the Christian traditions have no antenna for *ahimsā*. The specificity of a community is built on the specificity of its “foundational experience” and the plurality of traditions is to be traced back to the plurality of “foundational experiences”.

It is precisely the plurality of “foundational experiences” that will serve as the cornerstone of the follow-

ing reflections. No tradition alone is in a position to mediate the richness of reality exhaustively. The problem in earlier times was perhaps simpler where traditions could find meaning without getting in touch with one another. Today, however, traditions are in touch with one another and so the problem of meaning can no more be solved singly by the traditions. We are in need of complementarity, correction and qualification, from all the traditions in as much as they open up a genuine access to reality. In the final analysis, it is by the richness of their access to reality that the different traditions contribute their mite to the human community,

The core of any [cultural] community is without doubt religion. Religion is the community’s search for [and discovery of] meaning. Whereas on the one hand our world has shrunk to a global village, our problems have on the other hand taken on global proportions. Our problems are no more confined to “nations” or religious communities; they affect the whole world. This is obvious in the case of the environmental problems, atomic weapons and their production, the arms industry, rapid militarization of countries, especially the economically poorer countries, the political and economic world-order that is tilted in favour of some countries to the disadvantage of the rest of the world and the consequent north-south polarization.

All this has consequences as grave as massive poverty and hunger, inhuman conditions of life, the exploitation of women and of those who eke out an existence on the lowest rung of the social ladder, violence and imprisonment,

the drug cartel, etc., etc. to say nothing of the increasing devastation of our planet. The final consequence is the objectification of the world and therefore a world that is fundamentally unjust.

The signs of our times point to the objectification of the world by a Zeitgeist that has been struck by “hybris”. The relation of humans to their world is that of a tyrannical Subject which in the knowing process “oppresses” its object. The pretension of humans is that they will sooner or later work out the mathematical formula of the world.¹¹

Understandably, then, the question of meaning in life has become more acute than ever. But God and mystery are no more part of the realm of meaning. Indeed to a great extent they appear to have become irrelevant.

2. Religion as the Quest for and the Discovery of Meaning

God and mystery may not be part of the realm of meaning as far as some of our contemporaries are concerned. But this does not mean that religion has disappeared from the face of the earth. It only means that the force of attraction of the traditional religions is becoming weaker and that their message has little or nothing to say to (some of) our contemporaries. But as we hinted earlier, the quest for meaning is coming increasingly to the fore. The widespread meaninglessness of life can be so interpreted that the traditional religions have not grasped today’s search for meaning and so have been unable to respond to it satisfactorily. The question of meaning remains a quest for mean-

ing and so in fact remains a religious quest since religion is ultimately the search for meaning.

Religion as the search for meaning does not of course deny the other side, namely, the discovery of meaning. The discovery of meaning is really the specific characteristic of a religion. What is common to all – humans and religions – is the quest for meaning. The specific discovery of meaning contains elements which constitute the differences in the religions. What is more, the quest for meaning has primarily to do with human initiative. The discovery of meaning, however, refers to the transcendental (i.e. revelation) aspect of religion.¹² In a comprehensive perspective religion is both a search for and the discovery of meaning.

The question of meaning affects all areas of life. But life is becoming more and more fragmented into Sunday and the routine of every day, into science and religion; into God and the world, etc. Religion appears to have little to do with the areas which touch humans deeply. There is here a dichotomy between God, world and humans. These are the areas which lay claims on us but they are areas without any integration. The three remain separate: the human as Subject, the world as object and God, if at all, as an otherworldly being. Such a God is either so very transcendent or so very immanent that humans are unable to discover God and the world is incapable of revealing God. The paradox, however, is that the question of meaning has to be solved at the very junction where God, humans and their world meet.

Now authentic religion has to do both with the Sundays and the everydays of life. A relevant religion must see to it that it answers the question of meaning as moderns formulate it from their specific perspective. Life itself offers the content but religion has to show the direction of meaning of this content. A religion that is incapable of doing this is like salt that has lost its saltiness.

Someone may object here that religion as quest for meaning does not take into account the actual religions; furthermore such an understanding appears to be too elitist. It must be admitted that this formulation does not take into account the specificity of the different religions. But this is done on purpose. The question is whether the formulation excludes it. The intention of the formulation is to make it broad enough so that every religion finds its core reflected in it. Religions have to ask themselves if whatever they consider constitutes the core of their religion addresses the question of meaning.

The Hindu traditions have an expression which hits the nail on the head: *paramārtha* (= *parama+artha*) which means the Ultimate Being or Ultimate Meaning which is used of the Divine Mystery. *Paramārtha* could be used homologically by all religions, even by Buddhism. It is hard to imagine a religion that would refuse to acknowledge that its core message has to do with the search for Ultimate Meaning. If it really has nothing to do with Ultimate Meaning it would be at best irrelevant and at worst dangerous.

3. Quest for Meaning as the Interface between Religions

It is high time that the religious traditions of the world do away with their blinkers (i.e. their prejudices, lack of information or plain disinterest) and start establishing links with each other and with all those traditions which purport to search for and mediate meaning. This is the first step for religions and cultures to live harmoniously with one another in spite of their diverse value-systems. What is common to them all is their search for meaning.

Against this background we can now state that the first contribution of religions is in the line of what I would like to call interculturalism. It consists in the fact that each religion has to take serious note of the existence of other religions and positively accept their role as mediators of Ultimate Meaning. This is important. In the spectrum that constitutes the search for meaning religions are the different colours. Like the rainbow colours they affect and influence each other. None can remain outside the circle of meaning and none can reject the search for meaning. In the context of our global village none remains unaffected by the other traditions. Interculturalism is the awareness of the fact that there are traditions other than my own, that they all constitute the spectrum of meaning and that they all influence one other. Recognition of this fact is interculturalism.

This however does not imply that everything is all right with whatever in its history a particular religious tradition proclaimed as its meaning. The point here is that religion first and fore-

most is a search. The history of a particular religion itself often discloses things from which its own adherents distance themselves.¹³

Now what does it mean to say that the existence of other religions has to be taken seriously? Firstly, one has to accept and respect them as traditions that are searching for and mediating meaning. Secondly, one has to make efforts to come to know them better, and for this, to begin a process of sharing and dialogue with them. *Interculturation* is the acknowledgement that cultures influence each other when they come into *real* contact with one another, that is, when they really come to *know* each other, and not just come to *know about* each other. A simple example can throw light on this. The different colours of the rainbow are different but they touch each other in such a manner that it is impossible to locate where exactly a colour begins and where it ends, or where one ends and the other begins. Similarly though religious traditions are different there is a symbiotic relationship between them. Furthermore, their mutual influence determines even the specific nature of each of the traditions. *The change that is brought about in a tradition by this symbiotic relationship of interculturation of traditions is inculturation.* Inculturation or the change that interculturation brings about has to be part and parcel of the self-understanding of a religion.¹⁴

4. Formation and Intercultural Encounter

Arguably our illustration does not explain the relationship between cul-

tures in a way that would satisfy everyone. The symbiotic relationship between cultures can and should serve as springboard for correcting and complementing each other. What such mutual contact can achieve is best seen in the operation of two principles of presence and absence.

It is through interaction with others that a person's sense of identity is deepened; such an interaction discloses factors that one could not have discovered by oneself. For most of my life I did not have a computer and I did not know about it. Only when I saw a computer for the first time, did I realize that I did not have one. This is how the principle of absence functions. Similarly with the principle of presence. When I first saw a blind person I realized that I had eyes.

Admittedly the way the encounter of cultures functions is much more complex than an encounter between persons (though such encounter has always to do with persons). However the dynamics are similar. Such an encounter brings to the fore both those elements, those that are at work but not thematized and those that are absent. In a dialogical encounter there is a process of complementing and correcting that takes place. All traditions have blind spots. It is only through such encounters that they are discovered and overcome. It is in some such way that the encounter between North and South can reveal both the prejudices that are operative and the unequal relationship that obtains between them.

Speaking concretely: Down the centuries the beliefs of Christians in In-

dia had little or no place for the world (= creation). The world as God's creation had as such hardly any role to play in their daily life. Now in certain Hindu traditions the Cosmos is believed to be the "Body of God".¹⁵ For centuries Christians and Hindus have lived like oil and water, without a real encounter taking place. But in recent times the process of a real encounter has begun.¹⁶ Christian theologians in India are waking up to the fact that the Cosmos plays an important role in the history of salvation.¹⁷

Another example: Indian history gives us examples of individual persons who have spoken out against the caste-system of the Hindu traditions. There have been even protest-movements against the caste-system like that of Basvanna in the twelfth century C.E.¹⁸ But it is only since the 18th century when the number of foreign "missionaries" and Christians increased substantially and these began to polemicize against the caste-system that gradually a spirit critical of the caste-system began to emerge among the Hindus themselves. Even if today prejudices against the lower castes and the casteless are still wide-spread, public expression or defence of such prejudices is visibly decreasing. It is true that the caste-system is still operative but this practice is no more defended as blatantly in public as before. The religious leaders of the Hindus will no more publicly defend untouchability as they would have done in former times. Not only because untouchability is constitutionally forbidden but also because the social consciousness of the upper castes is undergoing change. Only the hard-core fun-

damentalists would defend the caste-system lock, stock and barrel. And contrary to appearances, their numbers are not directly proportional to their volume.

The process of change in the social consciousness of India has to be understood against the background of the process of the encounter of religions. Whereas for the Christians a new salvation history access to the Cosmos has been made available through their encounter with the Hindu traditions, the Hindus are experiencing as a consequence of the historical contacts with Christianity a revision of their understanding of the caste-system. On both sides the process is a laborious one but the fact is that it has emerged from their encounter and it can be preserved only through such an encounter.¹⁹

4.1 Formation Through Intercultural Encounters

Formation implies a widening of horizons,²⁰ that is to say, the deconstruction of existing boundaries and the appropriation of a new horizon. Obviously formation takes place in different ways but ideally through the encounter of cultures,²¹ for it is through the encounter of cultures that an optimal widening of horizons can occur.

Let us take the example of Thomas Babington Macaulay²² who worked out the British Government's policy of education for Indians and who was supposed to be one of the most brilliant Englishmen of his times. See what he says about "native literature":

"I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what

I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalist themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education...It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative portion of the two nations is nearly the same.”²³

What does this example prove? That Macaulay was not educated? Certainly not! It only highlights the fact that his formation had taken place only within the well of his own culture. It is impossible to eliminate cultural blind spots from within; this can take place only through the meeting of cultures. In Macaulay’s case we encounter the dark side of his formation. His encounter with the cultures of the Indian subcontinent were superficial; they only expose the lacunae in his formation. This only reinforces our thesis: formation today has to be an intercultural exercise. How strange indeed do Macaulay’s words sound today! Certainly this was perceived differently in his time. Today we are struck by their extreme one-sidedness.

The potential of widening one’s horizon from within one’s culture is extremely limited when seen from the vantage point of the global village. One’s culture surely offers plenty of opportunities to widen one’s horizon but that is qualitatively different. Today’s problems whether ecological or economic are world-problems. Whether we like it or not the diverse cultures of the world are getting in touch with one another and there are signs that the contacts are going to be more intensive and more extensive. That is why there is need of a formation that widens one’s horizon as comprehensively as possible, certainly more comprehensive than before. The aim is to understand our multicultural global village. Today it is not enough that we are Indians or Pakistanis or French or Germans. Only world-citizens can tackle world-problems. However one does not become a world-citizen by getting a world-passport that allows entry into all the countries but through a formation that opens one up to other cultures.²⁴

Formation takes places whenever and wherever one enters a new horizon. This happens especially through intercultural encounters which open up different aspects of reality. The more open one becomes the deeper and broader is one’s formation. This is necessary since every culture can contribute something specific towards such a formation.

A story like the following could not have been born in our Indian culture. A western Christian missionary had worked for long years among an African tribe. From the very beginning he had tried to persuade his flock to wear

clothes, a thing which they sedulously refused to do because they did not for a moment understand what all this fuss was about. In the end the missionary lost his proverbial patience and said to them, "Don't you see that you are naked?" They looked at each other unconvinced of the missionary's argument. The chief of the tribe spoke for all of them when he exclaimed, "But your face too is naked!" "That is only my face," the missionary replied. "Ah!", said the chief, "That's the point! We are face *all over*!" Does this wise approach not help us to broaden our horizon a bit, a broadening which our culture probably would be incapable of effecting?

The South African writer Laurens van der Post highlights in his books the unique talent of the Bush-people, whom his ancestors have decimated because they believed that they were not full human beings.²⁵ Reading van der Post's books one is struck by the extraordinary talents of the Bush-people where familiarity with nature is concerned – a talent that is totally missing in our technocratic age. They could read nature like none of us can ever dream of doing. We may be literate in one or other area, but when it comes to reading nature we are the illiterates ones. That is the tragedy of our times where progress has come to mean mastery of nature (and nations).²⁶

Only recently are we beginning to speak differently of the primal peoples.²⁷ But there are enough people who still speak condescendingly of the "primitives".²⁸ Our understanding of formation within our own culture may appear to be relevant, but as long as we

show no respect for and openness to other cultures it will prove itself to be very deficient.²⁹ For formation is not to be understood univocally or uniformly. Neither is formation to be reduced to expertise; it shows its real worth vis à vis openness to the "stranger", the other.³⁰

5. Intercultural and Inter-religious Encounters in India

Because of the encounter with Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, the Adivasi traditions and Zoroastrianism, Christianity in India is facing challenges that she has never faced before. Generally speaking, all these religions have lived for centuries in harmony with each other. However, the situation today has changed dramatically; the disharmony that is entering the scene has socio-economic (and therefore political) causes, and the religious reason that is being put forward is only a facade.

Be that as it may, it can hardly be denied that Christianity in India has been enormously enriched through the pluralistic religious situation. It is this enrichment and not just some Church documents that have convinced the Church in India that the dialogue of religions is indispensable, not only for a harmonious living together of all but also for an integral understanding of salvation history. Not just the theologians (who always are much ahead of the officials of the Church) but also the bishops of India are today insisting that dialogue is an integral part of evangelization³¹, that it is essential for the life of the Church³², and that it is an authen-

tic expression of the Church's evangelizing enterprise.³³

This is not any more surprising since for the Church in India, influenced as she is by the faith of the Hindus, faith is not first and foremost an *assensus intellectus*, but an experience.³⁴ In this connection, I suggest, following Raimon Panikkar, a distinction between faith, faith-experience and faith-expression or belief. Faith, for Panikkar, is existential openness.³⁵ This openness is a certain ability with respect to the transcendent mystery.³⁶ But this ability alone does not suffice; it must be activated and actualized. When this faith-ability is activated we have an experience of faith which then finds an expression, expression of faith or belief.³⁷ Panikkar has felicitously called the unity of faith and the plurality of beliefs the universe of faith and the pluriverse of belief.³⁸

Panikkar's differentiation gives religious pluralism a convincing foundation. Religious traditions meet in the universe of faith but they reach there through the pluriverse of their respective beliefs. Accordingly, for Indian Theology religious pluralism is no more a problem. The difference between the universe of faith and the pluriverse of belief has contributed substantially to this insight. On the same basis a pluralistic Christology is in the process of being born in India.³⁹ In the same way, Liturgy in the Church in India is becoming diversified, because in the light of what has been said the "nigrics" (as Panikkar calls them) are as important as the "rubrics".⁴⁰ "Nigrics" refer to texts that are printed in black and "ru-

brics" to the prescriptions that are printed in red and which prescribe how the liturgical actions are to be done. According to Panikkar, rubrics and nigrics complement and determine each other. Neither the prescriptions nor the actions are meaningful alone and by themselves. Meaning emerges when they encounter each other and mutually determine and complement one another. The liturgical action is meaningful only in a definite context and the prescriptions may not overlook the context.

6. Religious Formation and the Ability to Respond Interculturally

It appears that the dialogue of life⁴¹ that Christians in India have been engaged in for some time with people of other faith-traditions is gradually bearing fruits. Christians themselves are today showing a critical sense as regards their consciousness of their minority-status. They want to be part of the mainstream of national life. They do not wish to highlight their minority-status; they want to be Indian in the full sense of the word.

In addition, there is something that is completely new in the history of India and of the Church in India: a positive attitude towards other faith-traditions. One sees this in the attitude of dialogue among the Asian theologians in general and the Indian theologians in particular, ⁴² as also in the dialogue meetings of the diverse faith groups.⁴³

Furthermore, formerly Christians used to engage themselves in "Christian" projects where people of other faith too would be employed. But to-

day we see how this is increasingly changing. Christians are working *together with* people of other faith traditions for social justice, in environmental programmes, in the women's movements, etc. Some of the projects are no more "Christian" or led by Christians; they are so to say "secular" projects where people of good will have come together in order to work together.⁴⁴

Obviously, this should not create the impression that the Catholic Church as such or the other Churches are officially part of this movement. What is meant is that the movement of intercultural action has at last begun and it appears that it has come to stay and that it will gain momentum.

A good proof (if that is a suitable expression in this context) for this is the response of the Indian people (at least in the English language papers and magazines) in connection with assaults by fundamentalists on Christians in different parts of the country. It has been believers from other traditions that have come to the defence of the Christians. And protests and demonstrations have not been restricted only to Christians but have brought together people of good will.

The ability to respond that is being discussed here shows itself in the happening of history rather than in its thematization. Thematization is always secondary and derivative, and therefore it is a matter of time before it arrives on the scene. The ability to respond that is born of authentic religious formation manifests itself first and foremost in the happening of history. It takes time to thematize this happening. We first have

the experience and only then do we begin to speak of it. Heidegger says in this regard that "what is explicitly understood has the structure of *something* [understood] *as something*."⁴⁵ When we speak of what we have understood we recognize the ability to respond interculturally. Language lays bare not only the interculturality of what is understood: in this laying bare is contained the ability to respond. There are here therefore two elements: to understand something as something interculturally and to respond interculturally.

7. The Vision of Religious Formation in a Rainbow World

It is important to maintain the distinction between formation and training; formation has to do with vision and training with strategies. Formation demands creativity; training imitates procedures and copies methods. There are no recipes for acquiring a vision; on the other hand, what concerns training new programmes are put forward and tried out. One of the lacunae of our times is that our planning has concentrated so much on training that the appropriation of a vision, which is specific to formation, has been largely neglected. World politics and world religions put in so little effort where vision is concerned that it is not surprising that the question of meaning in life is not satisfactorily answered. The question of meaning is one of the most important facets of life and culture. But more than the quest for meaning of individuals and their cultures it has to do today with the meaning of the human community and their world. More still: it has to do with a vi-

sion. Formation, especially religious formation, has to mediate a vision that comprehends the human (not just any ethnic, linguistic, national or religious) community.

A vision has to do not only with the unity of humans but also with the unity of the whole of reality, i.e. God, world and humans.⁴⁶ This is so to say the context of the quest for meaning. Everything appears meaningful only in the light of a vision. Fragmentation disappears and there is no more objectification. Body and soul, spirit and matter, subject and object, action and contemplation, wisdom and science all belong together because everything hangs together.

7.1 A Cosmotheandric Formation

Through his cosmotheandric intuition Raimon Panikkar has suggested the direction of such a unity.⁴⁷ To be able to understand this, we have first of all to recall that our starting-point is fragmented. Our being and consciousness are bedeviled by a severe separation between God, world and humans. Panikkar perceives this differently. God, world and humans are not so much substantives as primal adjectives. They are the main dimensions which constitute reality. The depth-dimension, the cosmic dimension and the human dimension are reality's constituents. The Cosmic is not an object but the perceptible dimension of reality; the human dimension is the dimension of consciousness, and the depth-dimension is the divine dimension.

Everything is constituted by these three dimensions. Paradoxically the per-

ceptible dimension of the Cosmic and the perceiving dimension of the Human reveal a certain endlessness. Neither the perceptible can be perceived exhaustively nor the perceiving dimension can perceive exhaustively. There is always something more that remains to be perceived. And perception can never be final and definitive. Both these dimensions reveal a certain infinity as it were, a depth-dimension. Each of these dimensions has its specific dynamics; though none is reducible to the others, all are interdependent and interconnected. The cosmotheandric intuition is not a programme but a direction in which we have to appropriate any vision.⁴⁸ It is the intercultural direction in which any religious formation has to be appropriated and imparted.⁴⁹

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision does not intend either to replace religion or to propose a new religion that replaces all the religions. But he does suggest a number of things.

The foremost concern is the wholeness of reality. The cosmotheandric vision points to the fact that reality consists of relationships, of a totality of relationships. Everything is related to every thing, because everything hangs together. Vice versa something is not real which is in itself and for itself. Interculture and interreligion have their ultimate foundation in the unity of everything.

Secondly, our understanding of reality determines our understanding of religion, especially the understanding of our own religious tradition. If the Ultimate is understood cosmotheandrically then the respective religion will have a

cosmotheandric self-understanding. This will make them lead their adherents to listen to the cosmotheandric harmony of reality. Besides this, they will so express their religious experience that they will be understood interreligiously and interculturally. Understanding means to be differently in-the-world, to have a different relationship to the world.⁵⁰ Intercultural understanding would then mean to be in an intercultural relationship to the world.

Finally neither religion nor culture can any more be merely religion or culture. Today religion *is* Interreligion and culture *is* Interculture. One of the few countries to have realized the political implication of this is the Republic of South Africa which has understood itself as a rainbow republic. Humankind has taken long to grasp that our world is in fact a rainbow world.

Formation concerns can no more be centred merely around the charism of our founders and the legacy of the constitutions they have left behind them. Our concern is the wholeness vis à vis the fragmentation of reality. Wholeness is the realm of religion; but we are per-

vaded by fragmentation on all sides. Interreligion and Interculture are important steps towards the retrieval of this wholeness of reality. A piece of music cannot simply be reduced to sound waves. It can and has to be studied from different perspectives. The diverse disciplines and professions from anthropology to psychology to theology and religion can and must contribute to the understanding of music.

But the historical aspect, important as it is, alone cannot constitute the whole of the real; the transhistorical is equally important. History holds within itself salvation history. It is true that salvation history shows itself as if in a mirror and piecemeal. This, however, should not discourage us. Where through the encounter of cultures genuine interculturalization and inculturation occur, history is transformed into salvation history. That is to say, when understanding becomes intercultural understanding and action becomes intercultural action, the vision of wholeness gradually becomes a reality. It is here that interculturality and formation will have to pass their real test.

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*This article is a reworking of the original German version presented at the 12th Symposium "Religiöse Bildung im Horizont interkultureller Handlungskompetenz" organized by Theologie Interkulturell of the Faculty of Theology, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, 22 – 23 Oktober 1999.

Notes

1. Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog*. Vol. 2. p.7
2. Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog*. Vol. I. p.228.
3. R. Panikkar, Religion and Tolerance, in: *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies*.
4. Isn't it striking that we hardly have any Brahmin nurses!
5. The ancestors of the South African Author Laurens van der Post took the Bush-people to be something less than human and so they decimated them. In his *The Lost World of the Kalahari* he writes p. 56 : "The older I grew the more concerned I became over the part my own family must have had in the extermination of the Bushman. That it was considerable I had no doubt." And again on p. 41: "Ominously from the start, there was nothing too bad to be said about the Bushman. He was, for instance, not even a savage, he was no better than a wild animal and he used such intelligence as he possessed merely to make himself a more dangerous and efficient animal. He was dirty even beyond the bounds of savagery.... However, it is enough to say here that over and over again I found this reproach of physical dirt used as a smoke screen to hide the naked humanity of the little hunter from the hearts of those about to crush him with their own inhumanity."
6. Thomas Berry writes in his *The Dream of the Earth* p. 132:
 "The story of the universe is the story of the emergence of a galactic system in which each new level of expression emerges through the urgency of self-transcendence. Hydrogen in the presence of some millions of degrees of heat emerges into helium. After the stars take shape as oceans of fire in the heavens, they go through a sequence of transformations. Some eventually explode into the stardust out of which the solar system and the earth take shape. Earth gives unique expression of itself in its rock and crystalline structures and in the variety and splendor of living forms, until humans appear as the moment in which the unfolding universe becomes conscious of itself. The human emerges not only as an earthling, but also as a worldling. We bear the universe in our beings as the universe bears us in its being. The two have a total presence to each other and to that deeper mystery out of which both the universe and ourselves have emerged."
7. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 78ff.
8. It is characteristic that Heidegger sub-title runs thus: "Being-there as Understanding". Ibid. p. 182. But Heidegger's "understanding" is not the understanding of everyday language.
9. Ibid. p. 182.
10. Ibid. p. 189.
11. See Paul Davies, *The Mind of God. The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*.
12. This assertion too must be taken *grano salis* because it is the unambiguous opinion of Christian traditions that even the search for God is of Divine origin.

13. Which theologian would today accept the following statement of Pope Boniface VIII from his encyclical *Unam Sanctam*, “*Porro subesse Romano Pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus, dicimus, diffinimus omnino esse de necessitate salutis.*” Denzinger-Schönmetzer 875 ?
14. See *Proclaiming Jesus in India Today. Challenges and Perspective*. Ed. Thomas Manjaly (CCBI Commission for Proclamation: New Delhi 2000): “At the same time, we have to admit the fact that inculturation is a two-way process, according to which there is also the need of inter-culturation, which is the awareness of the existence of a plurality of cultures and of their mutual influence.” (p.26) “For the seed of mission (i.e. the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus) has to be sown in the soil of dialogue, nourished in the waters of interculturalization, and cared for by the process of inculturation in order to bring forth the fruit of proclamation.” (p. 27). “It is through inculturation one recognizes the enriching or dehumanizing elements that are operative in the cultures. Inculturation then is the process through which the Spirit guides us to discern the chaff of false values from the wheat of genuine growth.” (Ibid.)
15. Cfr the Bhagavadgita 11:13, 15ff.
16. Compared to the size of the Christian community the number of Christians who have devoted themselves to the study of the Hindu traditions and Scriptures is considerable. As regards environmental consciousness, see e.g., the statement of the Indian Theological Association 1997.
17. See Soares-Prabhu, *The Sacred in the Secular. Reflections on a Johannine Sutra: “The Word Was Made Flesh and Dwelt among Us”* pp. 210-211.
18. See A.K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Śiva*. pp19ff.
19. Interculturality does not mean that cultures are just there physically as it were one next to the other; it implies an organic and symbiotic living together where unity is concretized in diversity. The unity is the unity of being-in-the-world. Not only that we find ourselves in the same world but that our being and understanding are characterized by this phenomenon of being-in-the-world. And the diversity consists in the fact that being-in-the-world is of a pluralistic, not univocal nature.
20. In contrast to formation, training consists of learning practical steps for achieving a concrete objective. It is not said that training does not at all contribute towards a widening of one’s horizons. What is said is that training concentrates more on skills than on widening horizons. It rather makes one familiar with one’s world in a practical way. Training makes one familiar with what is offered by one’s culture so that it can be explicitly assimilated.
21. A good example of confrontation, not of encounter of cultures is brilliantly portrayed by James Clavell in his novel *Shogun*.
22. To highlight the brilliance and versatility of Macaulay I quote here fully the article on him in the *Microsoft Encarta 1997 Encyclopedia Deluxe edition, Thomas Babington, 1st Baron Macaulay* (1800-59), British historian, essayist, and statesman, best remembered for his five-volume *History of England*.

Macaulay was born on October 25, 1800, at Rothley Temple, Leicestershire, and educated at the University of Cambridge. His father was the philanthropist Zachary Macaulay, noted for his opposition to the slave trade. A precocious child and literary prodigy, he began to write poetry and a world history before he was ten years of age. In college he became known as a debater, a conversationalist, and a classical scholar. His essay on the English poet John Milton was published (1825) in the *Edinburgh Review*, one of the most notable literary magazines of the period, and Macaulay was thereafter one of

the best-known and most popular contributors to that publication. Called to the bar in 1826, he practiced little, preferring to follow literary pursuits and politics. In 1830 Macaulay entered the House of Commons, where he became a leading figure, noted especially for his oratory, in the Whig Party, later the Liberal Party. Following the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832 and a Whig victory, he was appointed a commissioner of the Board of Control of Indian Affairs. Two years later he became a member of the Supreme Council of India, created by the India Act of 1834; he spent four years in India, devoting his time chiefly to reforming the criminal code of the colony and to instituting an educational system based on that of Great Britain. In 1839, a year after his return to England, Macaulay resumed his political career and was again elected to Parliament; he also served as secretary of war from 1839 to 1841.

Macaulay wrote continually during his period of political service. In 1842 he completed *Lays of Ancient Rome*, a collection of poems in ballad form, retelling legends of the beginning of the Roman Republic; he subsequently published *Essays* (1843), in three volumes. For the next three years he worked on a comprehensive history of England from the accession of King James II. Macaulay devoted much of his time, as a member of Parliament, to aiding the Liberal Party, which was then in the minority.

With the return to power of the Liberals in 1846, Macaulay was appointed paymaster general for the armed forces. A year later he lost his seat in Parliament and afterward concentrated on writing. The first two volumes of the *History of England from the Accession of James the Second* were finished in 1848 and at once achieved a huge success. In 1852 Macaulay was again voted into Parliament, but because of a weak heart he took little part in political activity and continued to spend most of his time writing. The third and fourth volumes of his history were published in 1855, with an even greater success than the first two. The writer was created Baron Macaulay of Rothley in 1857. He died on December 28, 1859, in London and was buried in Westminster Abbey. The last completed volume of his history, relating events until 1702, was published posthumously in 1861.

Macaulay was a minor poet but a brilliant essayist. His *History of England* has been criticized for its Protestant and Whig bias, but his vast wealth of material, his use of vivid details, and his brilliant, rhetorical, narrative style combined to make it one of the greatest literary works of the 19th century.

23. Quoted by Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.17. Said has taken the quotation from Philip D. Curtin (1971) p. 182. In his book, *Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen* p. 34f Albert Schweitzer says something similar about Brahmanism and Buddhism: "Aber diese Religiösität ist arm. Ihr Gott ist reine, inhaltslose Geistigkeit. Ihr letzter Bescheid an den Menschen ist absolute Welt- und Lebensverneinung. Ihr ethischer Gehalt ist gering. Sie sind Mystik, die den Menschen in einem toten Gotte ersterben läßt."
24. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.15: "To seek one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being is only return to itself from what is other. Hence all theoretical Bildung, even the acquisition of foreign languages and conceptual worlds, is merely the continuation of a process of Bildung which begins much earlier."

25. See his two books *The Lost World of the Kalahari* and *The Heart of the Hunter* which document his search for the Bushpeople in the Kalahari desert commissioned by the British Broadcasting Corporation. (England) The dedication of the first book is characteristic of van der Post: "To the memory of Klara who had a Bushman mother and nursed me from birth". In the first chapter 'The Vanished People' van der Post speaks of the unusual qualities of the Bushpeople.
26. See Francis X. D'Sa, *Discovering our Communion with God's Creation*.
27. The saying "The strength of a chain is directly proportionate to its weakest member" is relevant in our context. Accordingly authentic interculturality gives attention to the weakest members. That implies that the focus of intercultural action is on the revision of the political and economic order of the world. In the context of such a revision intercultural formation sees to it that none of the different cultures is oppressed or downgraded and that on the contrary efforts are made to encourage their specificity.
28. See, for example the impossible attitude of the Nazis to the Jews as narrated by Sally Perel, *Ich war Hitlerjunge Salomon* p. 104: "Sie sagen, auch die Juden seien nach dem Ebenbild Gottes geschaffen worden. Wir antworten darauf, daß auch blutsaugendes Ungeziefer und Zecken, die Krankheiten übertragen, von der Natur geschaffen wurden. Zum Schutz der menschlichen Gesundheit haben wir aber die Pflicht, sie mit Stumpf und Stiel auszurotten."
29. Gadamer refers in his *Truth and Method* pp. 12-13 to Wilhelm von Humboldt's distinction between culture and Bildung. "Bildung here no longer means 'culture' ie the development of capacities and talents. The rise of the word Bildung calls rather on the ancient mystical tradition, according to which man carries in his soul the image of God after whom he is fashioned and must cultivate it in himself. The Latin equivalent for Bildung is *formatio*, and accordingly in other languages, eg in English (Shaftesbury), 'form' and 'formation'. In German also the corresponding derivations of the idea of *forma*, eg *Formierung* and *Formation*, have long vied with the word Bildung." A little later on Gadamer goes on to say (p. 12): "In accordance with the frequent carry-over from becoming to being, Bildung (as also the contemporary use of 'formation') describes more the result of this process of becoming than the process itself. The carry-over is especially clear here because the result of Bildung is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of the inner process of formation and cultivation and therefore remains in a constant state of further continued Bildung."
30. Unfortunately expertise for all its worth is not a helpful concept in formation because it brings in the idea of specialization which in its turn evokes onesidedness. Experts who make us aware of the (apparently) positive side of their discoveries but who do not care for the side-effects of their discoveries are signs of real danger for our times.
31. Painadath, *Theological Perspectives of FABC [Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences] on Interreligious Dialogue* p. 281. These expressions, the author says, reinforce the words of Pope Paul VI: "Dialogue is the new way of being Church" and of Pope John Paul II: "...interreligious dialogue is a work desired by God".
32. Ibid..
33. Ibid.
34. "God-experience", is a recurrent and popular expression of the Hindus, and is gaining currency also among Indian Christian theologians.
35. See Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, pp. 187-229 and *Religion and Tolerance*, pp. 1-23.
36. Bhagavadgita 18:3 stresses the structural aspect of faith: "Faith constitutes the very

being of man: therefore, whatever the nature of his faith that verily he is.” (Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

37. See Panikkar, Religion and Tolerance, pp. 1-23.
38. For Panikkar the distinction between faith and belief is foundational. But for fundamentalists who do not draw this distinction faith is identical with belief. Not surprisingly they are intolerant of other faith traditions.
39. See Soares-Prabhu, The Jesus of Faith: A Christological Contribution to an Ecumenical Third World Spirituality, pp. 139-164 and Kuzhuvelil, Jesus Christ the Sanatana, pp. 336-347 as also Indian Theological Association, The Significance of Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism in India.
40. In his *Worship and Secular Man* pp. 69-70 Panikkar explains ‘rubrics’ and ‘nigrics’ in the following manner: “In the parlance of Western Europe from the XIV century onwards, but which was generalized only in the XVII, the so-called ‘rubrics’ (because they were written in red), stand for the external acts accompanying the internal acts of the divine service. Set alongside the rubrics is the proper text of worship, which because it was generally written in black, I here call the nigrics. The history of the development of worship in any religion shows an almost constant pattern, which I may be permitted to sum up like this: at the beginning rubrics and nigrics were regarded indiscriminately. Their forms and contents were not separable and were barely distinguished, the external act having as much importance as the internal one, if not more. Any sacramental theology could offer us examples and reflections illustrating how the sacramental act is a special blending of internal and external action. In a fascinating process in which the whole of human consciousness is involved, rituals are gradually interiorized until eventually, intention, which is often termed faith, gains the upper hand, to such an extent indeed that it endangers the material, external aspect of the act. A compromise then occurs and there is a certain balance, not always easy to keep, between the nigrics and the rubrics. The history of cult shows that sometimes it has been the rubrics which have in some way created the nigrics, i.e. the external actions have often conditioned the prayers and attitudes of worship. At other times it has been the nigrics, the intention and the conscious effort, which have sought for ways of expression. To say that the nigrics have to create the rubrics would be to approach the question too intellectually and theoretically as if the creative force of man resides in his mind alone, but it is equally one-sided to maintain that the rubrics have the initiative and that the nigrics have only to fill up, as it were, the spaces created by the external and spontaneous manifestations of worship.”
41. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (1991), n. 42.
42. *Asia Focus*. A Weekly from the Union of Catholic Asian News 15:35 (1999) brought two reports: one on the international Congress of Jesuit Ecumenists in Kottayam, India (pp.1 & 6) and the other on the Meeting of Asian Theologians in Bangalore, India (p. 6) Both make a plea for a pluralistic theology.
43. What Panikkar has put forward in his new book *Gott, Mensch und Welt. Die Drei-Einheit der Wirklichkeit* pp.27-28, is the fruit of his intercultural consciousness:
 “Was der Hinduismus vom Christentum lernen könnte:
 - die raumzeitlichen Strukturen der Welt ernster zu nehmen, so daß das Politische auch für das religiöse Leben seine Bedeutung erhält;
 - die soziale Ordnung der menschlichen Gesellschaft muß sich nach einer immanenten unmittelbaren Gerechtigkeit richten und nicht nur nach einem transzendenten Grund und langfristiger Gerechtigkeit als Folge der Geburten;
 - die Geschichtlichkeit ist auch ein Bestandteil des menschlichen Bemühens um Erlösung.
 Was das Christentum vom Hinduismus lernen könnte:

- der Sinn des Lebens besitzt einen Faktor, der von sozialen und politischen Begebenheiten unabhängig ist, so daß das menschliche Heil nicht von solchen geschichtlichen Tatsachen allein abhängt. Auch in einer ungerechten gesellschaftlichen Ordnung kann man glücklich sein;

- die Wirklichkeit hat Schichten und Grade, die das gewöhnliche Bewußtsein übersteigen, so daß Konzentration, Meditation oder wie immer dieses Eindringen in die unsichtbare Sphäre der Wirklichkeit genannt wird, wichtiger ist als die Fähigkeit, zu lesen und zu schreiben;

- der Mensch ist mehr als Geschichte, er ist auch kosmische Wandlung. Er ist mehr, nicht weniger als ein Individuum. Er ist ein Bestandteil der kosmischen Entfaltung der Wirklichkeit, Mitglied des Ganzen.

All dies will nicht sagen, daß solche und ähnliche Punkte in den anderen Traditionen nicht vorhanden wären – es will nur heißen, daß aus verschiedenen Gründen jene Punkte nicht in den Vordergrund traten und des Ansporns von außen bedürfen, um wieder wirksam zu werden.

In einem Wort: Das Verhältnis zwischen Christentum und Hinduismus ist heute ein Verhältnis von Geschwistern, die sich nach Jahrtausenden wieder treffen, die sich ihre Erfahrungen mitzuteilen versuchen und zusammen in die gegenwärtige Situation des Menschen treten. Die Christen werden es vielleicht die Zukunft nennen – die Hindus die Anwesenheit, beiden den wahren und vollen Menschen.”

44. A living together seeks the welfare of all, not just one's own welfare. It is here that the ability to respond interculturally has its place. For as long as such an ability does not function for the welfare of all there cannot be a real intercultural living together. This is indeed the criterion for an effective interculturality.
45. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 189. The quotation continues thus: “The circumspective question as to what this particular thing that is ready-to-hand may be, receives the circumspectively interpretative answer that it is for such and such a purpose [es ist zum...]. If we tell what it is for [des Wozu], we are not simply designating something; but that which is designated is understood *as* that *as* which we are to take the thing in question. That which is disclosed in understanding – that which is understood – is already accessible in such a way that its ‘as which’ can be made to stand out explicitly. The ‘as’ makes the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood. It constitutes the interpretation.”
46. Panikkar expresses this in his inimitable style: “God, Man and World are three artificially substantivized forms of the three primordial adjectives which describe Reality.” *Philosophy as Life-Style*, p 206.
47. See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience* and *Gott, Mensch und Welt. Die Drei-Einheit der Wirklichkeit*.
48. Panikkar, *Is History the Measure of Man? Three Kairological Moments of Human Consciousness*, p.45: “Historical consciousness is coming to an end. Man is embarking upon a new venture... about which we know only that we shall act the more freely the more we allow the *internal dynamism of our deepest being* to express itself, without projecting beforehand what we are about to do and to be. *We are consciously participating in the very existence of the cosmotheandric reality.*”
49. See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience* and *Gott, Mensch und Welt. Die Drei-Einheit der Wirklichkeit*.
50. Heidegger, *Being and Time* p. 184: “*Understanding is the existential Being of Dasein's own potentiality-for-Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of*” On p.186 Heidegger continues: “*Because understanding, in every case, pertains rather to Dasein's full disclosedness as Being-in-the-world, this diversion of the understanding is an existential modification of projection as a whole.*”

The Encounter of Religions The Unavoidable Dialogue

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mê phylax tou adelphou mou eimi ego?
Are we perhaps responsible for our brethren?
(Genesis 4:9)

Tat tu samamvayāt.
Yes! Due to the mysterious and all-embracing harmony.
(Brahma Sūtra, 1, 1, 4)¹

This article is a condensed summary of the author's ideas or rather his life experience.²

Although "religion" is an old Latin word its present-day concept is relatively modern and one-sided. Human beings have always known something like religion. Man is *homo religiosus*, insofar as the human race has always been concerned with ultimate questions. Such questions bring about the deepest communication between people, and questions always aspire to dialogue – and are fruit of a prior calling.

A typology of the encounters between religions would point up the following *kairological* moments:³

1. Isolation and ignorance
2. Indifference and contempt
3. Rejection and conquest
4. Coexistence and communication
5. Appropriation and dialogue

To be fruitful, the 'dialogue of religions' must be a genuine dialogue.⁴ The following *sūtra*, which portray several qualities necessary for such a dialogue, are like nine threads (*sūtra*) woven into a single garland (*mālā*), that ought to be taken as a whole.

The Dialogue of Religions is:

1. A vital necessity

Of course the religions of the world do encounter one another, sometimes peacefully, though more often in confrontation and conflict. Such encounters are generally due to political and economic activities. Wars, migrations, trade, as well as the personal encounters of travelers, slaves, merchants and missionaries, have all contributed to the reciprocal influences of religions upon one another. The meeting of religions is so vital that in fact nearly all of today's great religions are the fruits of such encounters. What would Christianity be

today without the deep syncretism stemming from its Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Germanic religious roots? What would what we call Hinduism be without the contributions of the numerous religions of the indic subcontinent?

However, what formerly took place through slow assimilation, osmosis and reactions to spontaneous or consciously sought encounters, has radically accelerated. Today dialogue is not a luxury or a side-issue. The ubiquity of modern science and technology, of world markets, international organizations and transnational corporations, as well as the countless migrations of workers and the flight of millions of refugees – not to mention tourists – makes the meeting of cultures and religions both unavoidable and indispensable. Our current problems of justice, ecology and peace require a mutual understanding of the peoples of the world that is impossible without dialogue.

This vital necessity takes place at three distinct levels:

a) *At personal level*

Modern individualism which, especially in western countries, has seeped slowly and unobtrusively into human consciousness to become an essential ingredient of the modern myth, is gradually giving way – in the West itself – to what has been called dialogical philosophy.⁵ “*Esse est co-esse*,” “*Sein ist Dasein*,” “I and Thou are essentially interrelated,” “*Mensch ist Mitmensch*,” “*Welt ist Umwelt*,” “*Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia*,” “Ecology is ecosophy,” “Thinking is dialogical thinking,” “Man is androgynous,” “Freedom grows with

recognition of necessity,” “There is no private language,” “Reality is cosmotheandric” – these are just a few brief formulations that point to the recovery of an ancient consciousness, although on a new level.

Perhaps one could summarize our problematic in a phrase: Man is not an individual, a monad, but rather a person, a bundle of relationships. And human relationships require dialogue.

In brief, without dialogue, without a dialogical life, Man cannot attain a full humanity. Man is *animal loquens*. But linguisticity is not only external communication; it is most of all inner communion.

Dialogue cannot be confined to an individual exchange of ideas with one's neighbors. Man cannot be reduced to an individual. The principle of individuation must be distinguished from the principle of singularity.⁶ An unfragmented anthropology would show that Man *is* (and not only *has*) body (*sôma*), soul (*psychê*), community (*polis*), and world (*aiôn*), to which we would still add spirit (*pneuma*).⁷

Nor can dialogue be limited to minor topics. The ultimate questions of human existence demand more than polling the options of others; they require us to enter deeply into the very mystery of reality. Meditation implies listening, and as such it entails dialogue. In a word: Man is a dialogical being. Dialogue is a necessity for being human. To be sure, this does not mean just empty chatter, but genuine religious dialogue – difficult without an authentic liturgical life.

b) *At the level of religious traditions*

Today the 'Berlin Walls' of individualistic religious postures are collapsing, along with the apartheid of exclusivistic belief systems. It is not just from a sociological point of view that we can observe people living in a 'supermarket' of ethnic 'groups,' religious 'ways,' and lifestyle 'options.' From an anthropological viewpoint as well, people can no longer lock themselves up behind their safe pillars of orthodoxy. In the school, at the office, in the family, even on the Internet, the most divergent religious (and antireligious) positions come into close contact – which can be unsettling.

We might prefer things to be otherwise, but modern life challenges each of us in the religious depths of our being. To maintain a superficial peace of mind, of course, religious questions are often banished, and religion is too often excluded from the school, the office, the parliament, and the marketplace – in a word, from public life. The religious urge then seeks outlets elsewhere and not always in the best ways.

But this is never enough, never satisfactory. We must learn to handle our religious impulse in other ways.

Has the desacralized West not yet understood from the sustained protest of Islām anything about the price of obliging everybody to fit into the same flat pattern of modern life?

Religions as institutions, no matter how loose and flexible their structures, simply cannot escape the irrepressible winds of ecumenism.

There arise on every level all sorts of mutual influences, bound up with the resulting eclecticism, syncretisms, inculturations and fundamentalisms of every stripe. All such phenomena stem from these unavoidable encounters.

There have always been mutual influences. But now the winds are blowing not only from the most diverse corners, and often in opposing directions, but they are redoubling their force to the extent that no single compass can be relied upon for guidance.

In short: Traditional religions are headed for shipwreck if they batten down their hatches and try to ride out the storm alone in these conflicting currents. Yet by the same token, they will lose their anchors and their very identity, if they try to avoid the dangers of life on the open sea by seeking safe harbour in the past. One might say that the time of religious 'party politics' is gone. But sweeping away all traditions and uprooting every deep-seated custom will not free humanity from further religious wars, and dubious new brands of religion could emerge from the chaos.

Dialogue takes the middle way between the old and the new and makes possible a creative transformation of historical traditions. Without dialogue, religions become tangled up in themselves or slip their moorings altogether. Indeed, one sees more and more clearly today that no tradition has sufficient power within itself to fulfil its own self-proclaimed role. Either they open up to one another, or they degenerate.

c) *At the historical level*

Man cannot live, in the deepest and widest sense of the word, without reli-