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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, I, 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-

gion. The destiny of humankind depends on whether a genuine religiousness at once links (*religat*) people with the entire reality and safeguards their freedom (*ontonomy*). But the fate of the Earth is also at stake. Human wars not only kill people and their cultures, but also wreak havoc upon the natural world. Modern warfare is no longer merely a human concern. It is ecologically irresponsible to mobilize an army of thousands of soldiers and machines to defend the political or economic status quo. The justified alarms of ecology are today everywhere audible.

But mere *eco-logy* is not enough. A dialogue with the Earth is also required. I have called *ecosophy* this dialogical attitude.⁸ The Earth is not just an object, it is also a Thou for us, with whom we must also learn to enter into dialogue. In this way we would discover that *ecosophy* has a certain revelatory role. Our dialogue with the Earth can reveal how things are – for the future, for the Earth. If we listen, the Earth herself may reveal, in theistic terms, God's will regarding Man's task on this Earth. Or, to use the language of the History of Religions, the revelation of transcendence today comes to pass not only on Sinai, or Mt. Meru, Fuji-san, Kailasa, Kilimanjaro or Popocatepetl. The whole Earth tells us that our destiny is linked (*religatum*) with her.

If a truly religious encounter between ourselves and with the Earth does not take place, we shall end by annihilating life on this Earth. The dialogue of religions is not merely an academic subject matter or an ecclesial or an officially 'religious' affair, much less some

new vogue that has arisen because church services may have become dull or attendance fallen off. This dialogue is the field in which the historical destiny of humankind may be played out in a peaceful way.

Without such a dialogue, the world actually will collapse. Here praxis is decisive, and each of us must contribute to it. But the *urgency* of the task should not make us neglect the *importance* of other aspects of dialogue. Good will alone is indeed not enough.

Thus the dialogue of religions has to be:

2. *Open*

Openness belongs to the essence of dialogue. Dialogue is not instruction or teaching. Every dialogue has two poles, and neither pole can lay down the rules for dialogue on its own. This has a threefold implication:

a) *Nobody is excluded a priori*

Not only is every human being allowed to take part in this dialogue, but every ideology, worldview, and philosophy has the right to participate as well. So-called religions have no monopoly on religion.⁹ What is understood by religion needs to be spelled out in the dialogue. If it is to be a dialogue about the ultimate questions of life and death, then a marxist, a humanist, or a scientist has as much right to speak as any so-called religious person. If one party wants to end the dialogue, however, the other party can always stay open to continuing it. Dialogue keeps the doors open.

In this sense, the expression “encounter” or “dialogue” of “religions” should not be confused with the undertaking of any special group or closed-door assembly. Religion here entails *agora*, *kurukṣetra*, the place where human beings – together with the Earth below and the Sky above – gather to sincerely discuss what matters most to them, their ultimate (and ultimately common) concerns. All are invited, by right and with their own lights, to the feast of Life.

b) *Nothing is left out on principle*

The community of dialogue is not a professional society for experts. It has to do with the most deeply human concerns. Dialogue may implicitly aspire to certain answers, but cannot exclude any answer a priori. All possible questions should be allowed to arise and take whatever shape they wish within the dialogue itself.

Not everybody sees every problem in the same way. Dialogue has no set agenda, still less a hidden one. Everything may be called into question, even the appropriateness of dialogue, and of course the initial standpoints of the partners.

Dialogue undoubtedly represents a real risk. We could lose our own standpoint, we could even reverse our own position. Conversion is possible, but also confusion. Everything is at stake. So dialogue requires an enormous confidence in Man – and in that power, order or reality that lets Man be Man. One can easily understand, and even welcome, the warnings made by official institutions against the dangers of dia-

logue. It is also possible that people were indeed happier before they knew how to read and write, as the Pharaoh once complained and Socrates knew all too well. But once we have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there are paths that cannot be retraced.

I explicitly emphasize that neither God nor religion are necessary assumptions for dialogue. But we have somehow to name this dialogue, and old habits tend to bring such expressions to hand. Their use also hinges on the fact that initiatives for dialogue often come from such sources. But it is all a question basically of open dialogue between people concerning the ultimate questions of reality. Whether the language of dialogue will encourage a more secular idiom remains to be seen, and is of course part and parcel of the dialogue itself. These days, genuine religious dialogue more often than not centres on justice, peace, technocracy, and so on, rather than on hell, *nirvāṇa*, or God.

c) *It is constitutively open*

Dialogue is not some provisional device intended to help people reach unanimity. The goal of dialogue is not the removal of diverse opinions, or the uniformity of the world, or the creation of a single world religion – as if reality itself could or should be reduced to a single principle. This might be an unexpected outcome of the dialogue, but it cannot be an assumption. Something would be lost if the possible pluralistic constitution of truth were to be a priori banned. Truth can be reduced neither to unity nor to multiplicity – entertaining the opposite opinion, to be discussed, of course. Truth is always relation, con-

nection, and admits neither singularity nor plurality.¹⁰

Dialogue is an expression of this polarity, inherent to Man and reality as such. Truth itself does not have an exclusively objective structure, since the seeker also belongs to it – and there are different seekers. Truth is always relational. Every human being is an *ontonomous* source of self-understanding. The world cannot be completely seen and interpreted through any single window: We are not only *in* a world, we *are* world. Dialogue is a fruit of the experience of our contingency. No individual, no human group, not even all humanity living at any given time, can embody the absolute measure of truth. Contingency means that we touch (*tangere*) our limits, and that the unlimited touches us (*cum-tangere*) tangentially.

In other words, the open character of dialogue belongs to the very nature of reality. The polarity of reality is a feature of its liveliness. Dialogue is not aimed at the victory of one partner over the other; it is essentially an aspect of human life, of Life as a whole, and of Being itself.

3. Interior

Dialogue is not mere talk. It comes from a deeper and more internal source than stimulation by others. This source might be called silence, or maybe just the human thirst for truth. Without such a thirst, dialogue will be trapped in a superficial exchange of opinions. If dialogue is to be any more than manipulating ideas, it has to issue from the deepest recesses of our being. This means that *intrareligious* dialogue is a neces-

sary foundation for *interreligious* dialogue. This interiority is also threefold:

a) *Dialogue begins with an inner questioning*

The Buddhist tradition calls this attitude the Great Doubt, the Christian *compunctio cordis*, *pentos*, and *mumukṣutva* is the Hindu name. A philosophical notion that would serve is humility (*De-mut*), the courage (*der Mut*) to be the servant of a truth that does not belong to any of us in isolation.

If I do not question myself, if I do not feel that *quaestio mihi factus sum* (“I have become a question to myself”) of an Augustine; or if I lack a Shankara’s fervent longing for liberation; that is, if I am not ready to give up my security or lose my life, as the Gospel would say; if I do not cast myself down at the feet of the master, as in Vedānta; if I am not aware of my contingency or sinfulness, ignorance, or desires, and am not ready to trust with my whole heart and mind in a truth which is not my private possession, then I am not ready for a mature dialogue. Dialogue is nothing to trifle with. It requires discipline, maturity, humility.

Genuine dialogue begins with the sincere questioning of all my certainties – because I have realized, on the one hand, that I am a fragile vessel, and on the other, that there are in this world other vessels whose contents I can scarcely imagine. Dialogue is a basic human attitude. Its ultimate content is not just doctrine. Religion is neither objective doctrine nor subjective viewpoint. Religious dialogue is neither the comparison of two objective states of

affairs, nor the confrontation of two subjective opinions; neither scholarly exchange alone, nor solely ecclesiastical confession. It arises rather from the innermost core of our self, when we discover that we are neither absolute nor alone in this world. Dialogue begins within ourselves. In a certain sense it requires the loss of innocence, of the first (prereflective) innocence. No wonder dialogue presents itself as a way to salvation, transfiguration, enlightenment... We discover that it is not the work of our ego, since it is this very ego that is called into question.

If I have no doubts, if my opinion is already set, if I presume that I have already grasped the whole truth, then I will surely feel no need for dialogue. Dialogue requires such an inner awareness.

b) *It touches the innermost heart of the partners*

One can compare ideas much as one might play cards. One can have rewarding conversations much as one might make a profit in business. But none of this is dialogue. Genuine religious dialogue only sets in when one or the other partner feels concerned, threatened, encouraged, stimulated, provoked, deeply stirred. Nicodemus was no coward when he showed himself willing to go to the master by night for a secret dialogue. Didn't the apostles run away when Jesus began a dialogue with the Samaritan woman? I doubt that such life-transforming dialogues could take place on television. Dialogue is more confession than information.

Something happens in dialogue before the *logos* takes center stage. Ev-

ery genuine dialogue is preceded by a silent moment that lets the dialogue spontaneously emerge. Real dialogue is made possible by this mood, this atmosphere that conveys us to where thoughts have their source, where words take their power, where we meet each other as we truly are. All in all, one could say that a certain sympathy must be there. When I am deeply moved by a book, I wish I could know the living person. If I am stimulated only by the thoughts of a book, I might be curious to ask the author something further, but the desire to get to know the author would not arise. Dialogue can produce "under-standing" only when it "stands under" both grounds, as it were, letting the subterranean streams flow freely. Dialogue breaks new ground by journeying into both the background and the underground, the underworld. Not Hermes but Orpheus is its *devatā*.

c) *Dialogue takes place at the heart of reality*

There is more still. Modern westernized Man has become so anthropocentric and anthropomorphic that we need to be reminded that the hebrew *nefesh* means at once life, heart and nature, as the japanese *kokoro* means heart, soul, consciousness, and feeling – just to give two wholly independent examples. The *corpus Christi mysticum*, the *buddhakāya* and the *dharmakāya* could also be adduced here as examples of different worldviews that believe communication does not require computers, and that the transformation and renovation of reality follows other laws than those of propaganda and data processing.

A true contemplative, whether in her forest hut or in the midst of a big city, can undertake a dialogue with wider consequences than any news item, however exciting, which will probably be replaced tomorrow by a more exciting one. Śāntideva is still alive today and engages us in dialogue not just because of his dialectical power, but because he was a holy Man living at the heart of reality. Seen phenomenologically, holy and wise people are precisely those human beings who most offer the possibility of dialogue with us despite all the barriers of space and time. Nature and animals also figure in dialogues with a good number of holy people. Were they so idiotic as not to know what we all 'know,' that such beings have no human intelligence? Or have we, perhaps, forgotten that dialogue is more than an exchange of what has already been thought? Are *kāma*, *agapê*, *karuṇā*, and love only metaphors?

Dialogue has a mystical core not visible on the surface of human relationships. Something happens to the heart of each partner in dialogue, and something also happens at the inner core of the world. Dialogue lets loose a special *karman*, reaching into the mystical body of reality. When two wise people are talking, the world holds its breath, catching the spirit of this ancient truth.

4. *Linguistic*

Man is *homo loquens*. Language is our gift, and speaking our task. But human words are more than signals for our feelings or signs for our concepts. This world is a symbolic universe, and language the main human organ for partipating in the living symbolic real-

ity of that universe. Here, too, I make a threefold distinction.

a) *Dialogue is logos-freighted*

There is actually no word without the *quaternitas* of speaker, spoken to, spoken about, and spoken through – that is, without sender, receiver, message, and medium. A word is a sound uttered to a listener by somebody about something. One could also say: subject, object, content, and means; or: Man, consciousness, idea, and matter.¹¹ Here we want to concentrate on the intellectual side of the *logos*.

Dialogue is an activity of the human *logos*. It has to do with ideas, thoughts, interpretations, doctrines, views, and insights. Each of us is, consciously or unconsciously, the carrier of a whole tradition, conveying an entire world. Dialogue makes this explicit. We do not say only what we guess or what occurs to us. Genuine dialogue is freighted with the burden and the dignity of the speaker's tradition. In dialogue I express my thoughts; but these thoughts, though thought by me, reveal a past and an environment of which I am scarcely aware. The partner discovers that I live and speak with tacit presuppositions. And our speech also reveals the unspoken. When the village elder closes his address in the *palaver* of an african village, the headman says: "We understand both what you have said and what you have not said!" Here we should strongly emphasize that in no genuine religious dialogue can the *Anstrengung des Begriffes* ("struggle with concepts") be avoided. We are dealing with states of affairs whose in-

telligibility cannot be sacrificed. It would be irresponsible to involve oneself in dialogue about some religious view without being thoroughly versed in it. There cannot, for instance, be much fruitful dialogue about God, hell, *karman*, or *śūnyatā*, if we subscribe only to ridiculous caricatures of such notions. We speak words, but words have their own sense – and even their own power. No responsible speaker can ignore this sense or neglect this power. Awe before the word is the gateway to its contents.

Man speaks about something but what is said does not completely ‘cover’ this something. The ‘something’ itself has more than an only rational core. Man is not only reason, or only reasonable, but without reason humanness is not possible. Reason itself is a participation in a supraindividual *nomos*.

b) *Dialogue is also duologue*

Dialogue requires the encounter, and may even demand the confrontation, of two *logoi*. ‘Duologue’ does not mean two monologues, but entrusting to the other (without condescension) ideas, thoughts, insights, experiences – lives – that really meet, although they derive from distant sources and may even clash. This requires that the dialogue go both ways from the outset. Wanting to understand the other makes up only half the platform for a genuine dialogue. I myself have to be ready *to be understood* by the partner, and also prepared for possible misunderstanding. And the same goes for the other side. The other “side” is neither a wall nor a projection of myself. She is a real ‘I’ –

that is, an autonomous source of self-consciousness, which reacts simultaneously to me in a mutual I-Thou and Thou-I relationship. But in order to recognize the other as a Thou, many an adventure must come to pass *between* us. “True dialogue is not a monologue of the lonely thinker with himself,” wrote Feuerbach, in forging a place for the Thou.¹²

The Vedantic tradition speaks of *śravaṇa* (listening), *manana* (reflection), and *nididhyāsana* (active contemplation) as a threefold method for dialogue. The Christian may ask the Buddhist why he does not acknowledge any God, but should also let himself be asked why he does not acknowledge any *śūnyatā* (emptiness). The Hindu may ask the muslim how he can avoid theocracy, but he in turn must allow himself to be asked how he can overcome anarchy, especially moral anarchy. In other words: dialogue actually has to run in two directions. It has to be intercultural and interreligious. Duologue is not aimed at eliciting correct answers to a given set of questions. Questions are also addressed to us, which may not be our own original queries.

The word *duologue* also contains another important and often forgotten meaning. Note that I say ‘duologue’ and not ‘multilogue.’ A duologue is possible when a common field can be established in which the discussion is meaningful. Each language is dialogical because it is directed to a listener – or to those who understand that language. The Hindu-Christian dialogue, for instance, builds a language that is not suitable for a Jewish-Christian dialogue. Here we have to

withstand the modern temptation, originating in the natural sciences, of wanting to arrive at universal laws by reducing all phenomena to fit scientific parameters. People and cultures are qualitatively different and simply do not allow themselves to be reduced to any common (even if qualitative) denominator.

c) *Dialogue means bilingualism*

To believe that through a single language we should have access to universal thinking and to human experience as a whole, is yet one more remnant of a (generally unconscious) colonialistic attitude. A genuine dialogue not only requires that each partner express herself, but that each speak her own language. Not everything can be said in English – leaving aside the fact that only ten per cent of humankind thinks in this language. Not even Indo-European languages are the measure of all things. Syntax belongs to human ways of reaching intelligibility. The simple fact of changing the disposition of a sentence already betrays another structure of thinking. The word *religion* has a dozen homeomorphic equivalents in the Indic languages, just as the word *dharma* has scores of English equivalents.

Languages do not easily let themselves be dismembered into words. Each language is a way of living, a way of being in the world, and reflects an entire worldview. For all people to speak only a so-called *lingua universalis* would be a devastating cultural and human impoverishment. It is staggering to realize that the world today is losing about a hundred languages a year; these are cultural genocides! Dialogue, I re-

peat, requires at least two languages to take part. No authentic dialogue can come about if the Thou does not show herself in it. Dialogue happens between people and not between ideas, still less between answering machines. But to discover the Thou one has to go to the very source of the dialogue. One has to really know the partner, not just hear what she says. Textual hermeneutics is not enough; one has to understand, which implies real communication, sympathy and also love. We need to know the context and be aware of the pretext of which texts are the expressions.

For each Man to speak his own language does not mean simply that each uses his own grammar or brings in his own feelings about the world. It also means that each Man is to be considered a unique source of self-understanding. The vital space for human dialogue and encounter lies exactly between sheer subjectivity and pure objectivity. Man is Man in encounter.

5. *Political*

In many countries of the world today, academics and churches enjoy freedom provided they do not threaten the status quo of the State. Institutionalized religions can go on relatively undisturbed, so long as they acknowledge the unquestionable sovereignty of the State – although, depending on the State, the scope of their freedom may vary drastically. Nevertheless, real religious dialogue cannot be satisfied with this. It cannot acknowledge the political status quo as something absolutely untouchable. Paradoxically enough, nothing enmeshed in space and time can be ultimate for the religious spirit. Religious

dialogue is also political, and therefore neither politically neutral nor universal. Socrates was a religious sage, Jesus a religious Man, Al-Hallaj a religious mystic. All three were engaged in dialogue. And all three were (politically) sentenced to death.

Here also we may stress three points:

a) *Dialogue is not a private affair*

Religion cannot be a private matter, because Man is not a mere individual and religion is a holistic human affair. Religion cannot be separated from politics. This refers not only to religious institutions, necessarily political structures, but also to religion as an anthropological dimension. Even if somebody wants to defend the idea of religion as purely an interior affair, religious dialogue about it will belong to the community and display a political character. It belongs to the *polis* (as public life), in both direct and indirect ways.¹³

Dialogue changes the self-perception of the participants and so of the religions concerned, which in turn (together with other factors) shape the life of the *polis*. But dialogue is also a political activity in more direct ways. Dialogue may have its roots in the human heart, but its fruits are visible and ready to be harvested in the *agora*. We need not think only of India, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Palestina, Cuba, Ethiopia, the Vatican, and so forth, where religious dialogue is obviously political. We mean, rather, that in principle every interreligious encounter touches on human issues that directly influence the

life of the *polis*. Trinity also implicates social relations; death requires disposal of the corpses; sacraments have equally to do with initiation, health, and weddings; God implies social authority; justification (righteousness) includes justice; and so on. All this belongs to public, political life.

In the final analysis, religion is not a private matter because Man himself is not a private 'thing', and indeed not only morally, insofar as we bear social responsibilities, but ontologically, insofar as the human condition is not the private property of any individual. What is whispered in the ear is soon shouted from the rooftops. All the personal pronouns belong to each other: There is no I without Thou – and without all the other pronouns in the masculine, feminine, neuter, dual, and plural – and also viceversa. Dialogue is a public activity of such a kind that it is related to the very foundations of any political action. To bar dialogue on political problems would render politics entirely barren and irrelevant. It would not only mean accepting the political status quo, but holding it in higher regard than any religion. The Big 7 (or 8), Sudan, India, and many other States are not only geopolitical entities, they are also multireligious realities. The mistake of Christian missionaries in Asia, for example, was to suppose that they might have a Christian dialogue with Asian religions without taking into account the fact of the colonial domination. By the same token, a Hindu-Muslim dialogue won't bear much fruit if it is uprooted from the current sociopolitical situation.¹⁴

b) *Dialogue is a theory-laden praxis that produces new theories*

The dialectic of theory and praxis is superseded in dialogue. Dialogue is a praxis stemming from a theory and leading to another praxis, which will in turn serve as the basis for a new theory. Theories are tested and appraised on the grounds of dialogical praxis, which in turn lets new theories arise. Dialogue is a praxis that not only deepens and transforms ideas, but also transforms actions and attitudes. The place of dialogue is not reduced to the lecture room or the temple, but embraces the *polis*. Every dialogue, as an encounter of real people and not just a confrontation of concepts, has a political character. Every discussion between people engages the power and the life of the *polis*. The religious dialogue is, moreover, political to a higher degree. It calls into question not merely minor means to minor ends, but the very foundations of human existence, on which political life is also based.

As a constitutive human activity dialogue corrects the neoplatonic ideal of the purely theoretical life as an end in itself, superior to practical life, which was considered to be merely a means directed toward a goal. The goal then was pure theory. It stood above politics. It goes without saying that such a view of theoretical versus practical life would consider dialogue merely another means for preaching the truth, that is, for converting the partner. When Christianity, for instance, began to call for dialogue in the so-called mission lands, non-Christians suspected this was merely a

new strategy for the old proselytism. It must be clearly stated that such an attitude is remote from any truly dialogical spirit. Dialogue is not a technique in the hands of either partner. This is not to say anything against the primacy of contemplation. To the contrary, it means that contemplation is not pure theory. *Contemplatio* is indeed an action so penetrated by theory that they both, theory as well as praxis, converge in a nondualistic harmony – namely, the harmony of being what Being itself is: an act.

Dialogue in this sense means, on the one hand, that no single person can possess the whole truth and, on the other hand, that truth itself is not any purely objective ‘thing’.¹⁵

In other words, human confrontation in the struggle for truth belongs to the human *polis*. Politics does not mean just applying the most effective means, but also the disclosure, realization, conquest, and discussion of the aim of human life.

c) *The contents of religious dialogues also have a political context*

If an uncritical mixing of religion and politics leads to totalitarian structures on either the religious side (theocracy) or the political side (State totalitarianism), their separation leads to otherworldly religion (purely abstract doctrines) and decadent party-politics (mere debate over means and power). The solution to the dilemma lies in a nondualistic view of both.¹⁶ It is a fact that the most burning religious dilemmas of our time have political contents.

No religious dialogue can bypass the meaning of 'salvation' for Man, letting 'salvation' stand here for the ultimate meaning of life. No dialogue on righteousness, for example, can leave aside the issue of justice, and no consideration of justice can overlook the sociopolitical-economic problems of the world. To discuss peace without considering the *pax civilis* is no longer acceptable, just as talks about *jihad* and 'just war' cannot ignore the existing political situation.¹⁷

It is equally true to say that the political problems of the world also have a religious character. The dialogue of religions is not solely within the purview of religious institutions. The religious dimension of Man permeates each and every political activity. To claim, for instance, that the priests of the Catholic Church or the *mullahs* of Islām or the Buddhist *bhikkus* should not involve themselves in politics is already a political decision regarding religion. Problems of health, education, and human welfare have a religious character as well, and are never solely technical functions for bureaucracies to solve. To go back to the controversy between Galileo Galilei and Roberto Bellarmino: the movements of the heavens which Galileo first calculated and the existential reality of heaven in which both believed can neither be totally split off from one another, nor can they remain wholly undifferentiated. There is no theology without some cosmological basis, just as there is no entirely untheological cosmology. Autonomy is as unsatisfactory as heteronomy. The healthy connection is *ontonomic*.¹⁸ The relationship is nondualistic.

It should be evident, therefore, that the dialogue of religions is not walled up in the enclosures of 'religious' institutions. It stands or falls in the midst of life. It is not some special area of competence solely for so-called theologians or religious 'leaders', much less for academic 'experts'. Shutting out religion from the public forum is as lethal as conceding the political dominion of the clergy. The genuine dialogue of religions liberates Man from human fragmentation and hyperspecialization. Expertise in delimited fields is justified and necessary, but in the domain of the religious dialogue humanness itself is at stake.

6. *Mythical*

A *dia-logos* not only means proceeding via the *logos*, dealing with the *logos* alone; it also means breaking through the *logos* – *dia ton logon*, ferrying across the *logos* – to the *mythos*. Maybe the weakest pillar of the so-called Enlightenment, held from Descartes to Bultmann via Kant and the modern natural sciences, is the naive belief that in principle everything can be cleared up through reason, human or divine. Many people still dream of a *mathesis universalis*, holding to the theoretical possibility of grasping reality with mathematical language, as if reality could be apprehended by a supercomputer. Reason is the critical power of Man that lets us be self-conscious. Tellingly enough, Kant spoke in an unconsciously self-defeating way about 'pure' reason, which, to begin with, is so pure that it stays above and beyond every critique.¹⁹ Reason is assumed from the start; it stands as a

mythical *Gestalt*. One always forgets or overlooks one's own *mythos*. And, after all, *mythos* and *logos* belong together. The dialogue of religions, if it is at all alive, cannot leave the *mythos* outside the dialogue.²⁰ Here, too, three aspects of this process may be stressed:

a) ***Dialogue pierces through the logos and leaves the mythos open***

Concepts are important, even necessary, but they are never enough to bring about an integral encounter between people or between religious traditions. A dialogue with concepts alone remains merely dialectics. Dialogical dialogue is more – not less – than debate or rational discussions. In the dialogical dialogue, we are conscious that the concepts we use spring from a deeper source. I not only let the other know me but I come to know my own *mythos* better through the critiques and disclosures of my partner. Dialogical dialogue strives neither for victory in the contest of ideas, nor for an agreement that would suppress real diversity of opinions. Rather, dialogical dialogue seeks to expand the field of understanding altogether, by each partner deepening his or her own field and opening up a possible place for the not (yet?) understood. This is not the scandal it was for Descartes, because neither party absolutizes its own standpoint.

Every religion lives out of its own *mythos*, the cauldron of magma from which the *logos* bubbles up to congeal in conceptual structures and doctrines. This *mythos* as a starting point is not a logical postulate. Rather, it undergirds

the tacit presuppositions that form each tradition's horizon of intelligibility, over against which its ideas are seen to make sense.

A dialogue of religions that doesn't take into account this disparity of horizons would find itself permanently enmired in misunderstandings, and would never reach the ground out of which each tradition takes its own self-understanding. What this means is that the encounter of religions cannot be reduced to a comparison of doctrines. Each religion is like a galaxy, simultaneously shaping its own criteria of thinking and its own criteria of truth and reality as well. In order, therefore, to draw valid comparisons, one must come to acknowledge what I call 'homeomorphic equivalents'.²¹

Strictly speaking, there can be no comparative science of religions, nor even a comparative philosophy.²² There is no neutral (a-religious or a-philosophical) standpoint.²³ All this opens us to the *mythos*. But myths in this sense cannot be compared; they are literally incomparable. They are that which makes every comparison possible, by offering the horizon within which any comparison would have to be carried out. Of course, concepts and doctrines can be compared, but only over against the backdrop of a previously accepted standpoint.

This is why encounters not directly aimed at scholarly or dogmatic ends are so important. *Satsangs*, festivals, shared meals and meetings of all kinds, collaborations and contributions to joint projects, hospitality and the simplest acts of sociability often turn out to be

the most important and empowering instances of dialogue.

b) *Dialogue between religions strives to participate in their respective pisteumata*

The life of religions, whether manifest in articulated dogmas, general insights, interpreted experiences, performed rites or applied symbols, may be summarized in a single word: belief. Religion is a matter of belief. Belief is the overarching *mythos* that makes possible the various manifestations that constitute religion. The *mythos* could in fact be considered the aggregate of the tacit conditions of possibility (and thus credibility) of any given state of affairs. Consequently, the dialogue of religions must be a *dialogue of beliefs*. To understand a religion, you have to know its beliefs. Dialogue arises from belief and is about belief. But how is such a dialogue to be sustained? Can one make sense of belief statements without partaking in the belief?

Stimulated by Husserl's phenomenology, which speaks of the *noêma* as the pure content of an eidetic intuition, I have ventured to introduce the notion of *pisteuma*. We think (*noein*) the thought (*noêma*) through the act of thinking (*noêsis*); that is, through the operation of *noêsis* we reach the *noêma* as the pure intentional content of our consciousness; but the *noêma* does not allow us to attribute any objective truth or existential reality to itself. Parallelizing this, the belief (*pistis*) is also really a *sui generis* awareness, pointing to the *pisteuma* of the believer – that which the believer takes to be the case. But the

pisteuma of the believer will appear to the outsider as the *noêma* of the believer which is not shared by the external observer. In other words, the nonbeliever can perceive what the believer says (for instance: "Tārā is the merciful divine mother who should be worshipped"), but the nonbeliever cannot understand, that is, carry out that belief. The nonbeliever in Tārā will not perceive the *pisteuma* of the believer. If at all one will reach a certain *noêma* different from the *pisteuma*. One cannot therefore speak meaningfully about the *pisteuma* if one does not share in it. What one can describe is the contents of one's own consciousness, namely the *noêma*, but not the *pisteuma* of the believer.

What the believer believes is not a rational *noêma* that can be mediated (by the outsider's understanding), but the believer's own *pisteuma*, which is what the believer believes. If I do not penetrate into this *pisteuma*, I cannot describe what the believer believes but only what I, from my viewpoint, suppose the believer holds to be true. But I cannot reach the *pisteuma qua pisteuma* if I do not believe what the believer believes.

Should this mean that every treasure of belief (*thesaurum fidei*), as some religions themselves express it, will remain unmediated and incomprehensible? Not at all! It means only that without dialogue the way will be blocked. To reach the *pisteuma* of the other I must somehow hold that *pisteuma* to be true, that is, I also need to believe what the other believes. In other words, the belief of the believer belongs essentially to that which the believer believes. If I

do not partake in this belief, we shall end up speaking at cross purposes from two incompatible platforms: my representation and the other's belief; my *noêma* and the other's *pisteuma*. The *noêmata* of religious phenomenology are in fact *pisteumata*.

I said that I must somehow partake in the belief of the partner if I really wish to meet her. This "somehow" means that I have to have access to her *mythos*.²⁴ Dialogue is the way to a new and truly religious phenomenology. Only in this way can many of the misunderstandings that have so often vexed the history of religions be cleared up. It leads not only to religious tolerance, but to a new interpretation of religion altogether.

Here the distinction between faith and belief becomes paramount. Belief expresses itself in statements. Faith manifests itself in life. Faith is a constitutive human dimension. Belief is a particular formulation of that faith. In this sense, the fact that people can honestly express their faith in different statements of belief is but a natural manifestation of the diversity of cultures and religions.

c) *Sharing in the same mythos sets the limits of dialogue*

Genuine and deep dialogue with one another is not always possible. The partners have to share the same myth, standing at least partially under the same horizon of intelligibility. Certainly, this common myth must emerge slowly in the encounter itself, but as long as it is not shared religious communication will not be possible. A tree is always a tree so long as people find it in the field of

their sensory perception; but no deep understanding will come about if for one person the tree is just a vegetable computer and for the other it is a body inhabited by a spirit. If they were to say they do not understand one another, they would come far closer to communicating than when one stigmatizes the other for 'talking nonsense,' or when one reduces the other to one's own categories. When they are aware that they do not understand each other, and then try again to find a new basis for possible understanding, this is a dialogical lesson. Success is never guaranteed, but the *attempt* itself is dialogue.

Modernity generates intercultural myths. For instance, the *humanum*, democracy, peace, secularity and so forth are myths that have a certain interreligious validity. Only insofar as we share such a myth can we really communicate with one another. On the other hand, a common myth tends to make doctrinal differences all the more acute. Neighboring religions, for instance, have often developed opposing attitudes that – despite similarities at the mythic level – make understanding particularly difficult, while it sometimes comes more easily for distant religions where a certain reciprocal sympathy has been cultivated. As a single example, Christians and Jews are often victims of mutual antipathies in spite of the basic similarities of many of their beliefs.

7. *Religious*

The winds of dialogue today blowing ever stronger, even as new and higher walls are erected against it, represents far more than a new fashion or a

new strategy on the part of some old religious traditions to pull themselves out of a certain stagnation. It has itself a religious spirit. Dialogue in itself is an authentic manifestation of religiosity. Even the fear of the arch-conservatives, who see in dialogue only danger for the established religions, bear witness to the revolutionary character of dialogue. The dialogue of religions in fact pulls down the walls of religious 'nationalisms.' In spite of latter-day changes, the old saying, *cuius regio eius religio*, is all too often still valid: Religion follows after whoever holds power. The dialogue of religions frees spiritualities from rigid doctrinal frames and creates new connections that vault over all the boundaries that have been so finely drawn between religions. For too long religions, while claiming to connect (*religio*) us to the divine (infinite, transcendence or mystery), have tended to neglect the human connections. One all too easily forgets the "religion of Man."²⁵ Religion has to do not only with God, but also and preeminently with "Man." This opens up the way for a new religiosity whose forms are yet to be found. By no means does this demean the genuine religious spirit, as the three following considerations should demonstrate.

a) *An ultimate source of dialogue is the experience of one's own inadequacy*

I have already mentioned the experience of contingency – that is, our touching (*cum-tangere*) of boundaries – the experience of our own inability to know the human condition fully. This does not mean that an individual can-

not find its own salvation in its own, relatively isolated tradition. Not everybody is obliged to explicitly undertake dialogue. But since the traditions themselves are the fruits of past dialogues, the roots of religious dialogue reach down to the very origins of humankind itself.

What I am saying is that the mature or contemplative person renounces any absolute claims. The religion of one's neighbor becomes a personal matter, the diversity of religions a philosophical (or theological) problem, the situation of the world something that deeply concerns us all. Salvation, liberation, bliss, realization, enlightenment, redemption – as well as justice, peace, human fulfillment, or whatever – are not just individual problems. They require collaboration, solidarity, a growing awareness of human and cosmic *interdependence*. Dialogue is the way to overcome solipsisms and egoisms of every kind. We realize our own selves insofar as we actively participate in the fate of the entire cosmos. Is this not a religious matter?

b) *The new dialogue contributes to the purification of religions*

The history of religions shows, without exception to my knowledge, that not only have the most sublime achievements of the human spirit been accomplished in the name of religion, but the darkest deviations from human dignity as well. Fanaticism is a well-known religious weed. The dialogue of religions today offers a medication and represents a purification. Institutionalized religions have too often been hin-

drances to peace and given their blessings to wars – even in our own lifetimes. The dialogue of religions does not seek to abolish religions. It does not intend to reduce all religions to the lowest common denominator or to establish some generalized and superficial religiosity. It opens up a middle way between, on one side, all the well-guarded religious fortresses waging war with one another from their high hills – where every castle claims that salvation lies solely within its walls – and, on the other, a tedious stay in the shallow valleys of human indolence and indecision where every religion loses its identity and specific values. This middle way avoids war, hot or cold, open or treacherous, and at the same time avoids indifference, as if all religions amounted to the same or said the same things. Dialogue opens wide the way of conversation – precisely because religions are different, and often seem to be opposed and incompatible. It smooths out the ways, and may also build bridges over the trenches that separate the various religious castles. It invites new people into the common life of the human family, without uprooting them from the native soil of their own traditions. It weaves a net of connections that relates and transforms the world of religions. And this open character of the dialogue belongs to the dynamic of the religious spirit altogether.

c) *Dialogue is itself a religious act*

When we engage ourselves in the dialogue of religions we are also undoubtedly striving for the salvation – the healing, making whole – of the entire world. Love for one's fellows, patience, humility, gentleness, forgiveness, asceti-

cism, renunciation, belief, trust, honesty – the list is endless – are essential virtues for authentic religious dialogue. Is this in itself not enough to demonstrate its religious character?

In this sense, dialogue has its own meaning and it is impossible to turn it awry or misuse it as some sort of strategy for proselytism. Dialogue requires itself a kind of inner conversion and cannot be a means for winning the other over to our point of view. I strive for truth and may even believe that I have found the truth in my religion. But I am not the only seeker of truth. If I am humble in my seeking – that is to say, honest – I will not only feel respect for the search of others, but would even like to join them – not just because more eyes see better than two, but for a deeper reason: The others are not only seekers of truth, but sources of knowledge. Man is not just an object or a bare subject looking for objectivity, but also a microcosm and a *microtheos*, *brahman* itself (although with qualifications), a temple of the Holy Spirit, a vessel able to give and receive, a contributor to the shaping of reality. Man's nature includes self-understanding and this self-understanding is not only my individual privilege. Therefore, I will not fully understand myself without somehow understanding others – which is impossible without a certain dialogue. I am not interested in others out of idle curiosity, their pilgrimage crosses my own path and, therefore, concerns me. The search for truth is not about stalking an object, it is about letting oneself be possessed by truth and, as far as possible, partaking in the fate of all the others. This is certainly a religious activity.

Today especially for many people bringing about peace among the religions and promoting mutual trust amounts to a genuine religious activity, undisturbed by the fact of one's belonging to a particular tradition. To be sure, it is not irrelevant whether the highest name be *tao*, *kami*, *śūnyatā*, God, Śiva, Allah, Yahweh, Truth, Justice, Freedom or Humanity; it is important and helps us keep our identity. But it is no less important to avoid invoking those names that bring people to hate, to fight, and to slaughter one another. It is no less important to relativize our respective Absolutes – which does not mean that they cease to be Absolutes *for us*. Relativity is not relativism. Besides this, many people today do not feel capable of sorting out all those names and may fall prey to an indifference that is not always healthy. But one thing is sure: all this bickering between religions is not salutary, and peace and harmony are human imperatives of the highest order. Maybe this represents a new myth *in statu nascendi*: the myth that makes us see religions as factors of peace, and the striving for peace as a manifestly religious activity.

8. *Whole*

It should be clear from what I have said that the encounter of religions is not merely a task for specialists. The praxis of dialogue is a way of being religious, a religious activity, and this also applies to reflections on the theory of dialogue. In our day, when so many human concerns have been hyperspecialized, this needs special emphasis. Again, three headings will suffice:

a) *Dialogue is a holistic activity*

Nobody is an expert at dialogue, because each dialogue is unique. One cannot specialize in religious dialogue, it belongs to religious life in the present. It is the whole Man, precisely as Man (*anthrôpos*), who is engaged in it. In a genuine dialogue, we do not defend ideologies or orthodoxies, but stand there, naked and vulnerable, without preconditions or hidden agendas. To truly love the neighbour implies (requires) to know the neighbour. As people encountering other people, we express our deepest convictions and try to adapt ourselves sufficiently to the worldview of the other to make ourselves understood and to overcome our solipsism. We may even tremble at the prospect of such a dialogue, or maybe bow out if the challenge seems too great or too risky – just as some prophets took fright at their own calling. The dialogue of religions is not a parliament where party discipline is the rule and members speak for their own party or coalition. Something more important – indeed everything – is at stake. The stage of dialogue is life, and life with its own risks and surprises. All the rest is playacting, psychological or sociological role-playing – if not mere careerism. Whoever balks before these dangers should not be entering the *agora* of dialogue.

Of course none of these considerations preclude establishing a certain order or selecting a topic for a given dialogue. But the business of sticking to the topic should be voluntary on both sides, so that a partner might well depart from the topic if it seems appropriate to do so. More important, although

the topic may be very specific, every participant comes to the dialogue as a whole person.

How often one embarks on a purely scholarly dialogue and ends up in politics or in the personal! But this is all to the good. It demonstrates that dialogue cannot be artificially limited. The preparation for dialogue must be practical and theoretical, but also personal. Dialogue pervades the whole Man.

b) *Dialogue has a liturgical nature*

Modern western desacralized languages do not have a proper word for this point. If I were to say that dialogue should be a rite or represent a cultic act, I should still have to explain what I mean by 'rite' or 'cult.' I prefer to speak of a liturgical act, fully aware that this word also requires explanation.²⁶ Liturgy, properly understood, means the work (*ergon*) of the people (*laos*), where this work is inspired by the Spirit. It is a synergy that gathers all the "three worlds" – the cosmic, the human, and the divine.

The dialogue of religions as a liturgical act manifests the nonduality of theory and praxis, of individual and community, politics and religion, the divine and the human. Dialogue is not a new religion. It is a liturgy to which everybody and everything is invited, aiming to transform all things while retaining the identity of all the parts and participants. Every liturgy is a process of transformation, a transfiguration.

Religions enter dialogue as they would a liturgy, to celebrate – each in its own way – the wonder of life (or whatever each religion would call it).

Each religion may believe to represent the highest truth and to play the leading role, but each is also ready to listen to the other and to let the play of life play itself out, without violence or cunning. Something happens in dialogue that is not controllable from any one side. The risk is endured because there is confidence. Many slanders and suspicions are extinguished by themselves.

I have been insisting for some time that every dialogue is a *communicatio in sacris*, a holy communion, without which no human community can truly be.²⁷

b) *Dialogical play takes on a cosmic role*

What is the encounter of religions really all about? Is it about my encounter, as an individual hindu, with Islām? About all those beautifully printed books on the various religious worldviews? About a fad for young people or a crisis for their elders? It is much more – not less – than this.

The recent divorce of epistemology and ontology, stemming from the so-called Enlightenment, makes it difficult for modern westernized people to understand that the encounter of religions means something more than merely an encounter of ideas, systems, or, at most, individuals. It is all of this, of course, but it is also an encounter *of* religions, in the sense of the subjective genitive (muted in contemporary English). Religions themselves encounter one another as historical and cosmic forms. The encounter belongs essentially to religion. Each religion is an encounter. Religions are powerful forces

in human history and the cosmos at large. The encounter of religions is like the encounter of galaxies; and it represents, similarly, an astrological event. The history of the world is touched by it; the very destiny of the world may be influenced by this encounter. Otherwise, there is a disaster – a *dis-astrum*: a collision of stars!

If we take religions seriously, as they took themselves in their heydays, if we consider that every religion brings along its corresponding worldview, if we do not take the myth of history for the only valid myth, then the encounter of religions is also a cosmic act for our times; it is an event which occurs with our cooperation – but only *co-operation*. It belongs to the *kairos* of our world, to the destiny of this *kalpa*, to the challenge of contemporary history. It is not that some clever individuals have discovered we cannot go on like this as before. It is rather that some people have uncovered something already written in the stars, felt the freshening spirit of a new dawn about to shine, discovered that the growth of Man demands something like a turning point, that religions themselves are opening up and aspiring to take together this new step into the depths and heights of reality. Indeed, something is moving in those spheres, something that belongs to the very dynamism of Being. After all, human history and the life story of the Earth are both incomprehensible without religions. What an array of changes have come about in the Islamic world, the Christian world, and the world of animistic traditions! And this is not the work of any single caliph or pope or

chieftain, it is the achievement of what we call religion.

Each culture will use different ways of speaking. The main thing is not to absolutize any single cosmology. As I have said, the encounter of religions is more than small talk here and there, or a gratifying increase of tolerance between this or that group of people. It may be hard for some to believe but what is happening before our eyes has cosmic proportions. Do we need to cite here the metaphor of the “butterfly effect,” so widely reported by modern “chaos” theory in the sciences?

9. *Unfinished*

The encounter of religions is an ongoing process. It is always on the way. Its goal is not to arrive at complete unanimity, or to mix up all the religions, but rather communication, sympathy, love, polar complementarity. Life wants to live and not slip away into death. Being is a verb. Reality is polar, dynamic – trinitarian, I would add. The strongest harmony, as Heraklitos said, is the hidden one: *harmonia aphanês phanerês kreittôn*.

Here, too, I pursue a *triloka*:

a) *Dialogue remains always provisional, a continuous process*

Because dialogue represents an end in itself, the goal is not to complete it – and therefore render it, at some time or other, superfluous. The completion of dialogue is not a finale, but a continuous performance. This constitutive provisionality does not imply relativism, but relativity; nor does it mean that dia-

logue does not or cannot provide specific answers to particular questions. What it means is that every answer is relative to its question, and that the question itself only appears as a question in relation to a given state of affairs. Dialogue does not give definitive answers, because there are no definitive questions.

Dialogue is also provisional in the sense that there is never a completed dialogue. Not only does dialogue never finish, but it is never exhausted. This openness not only vouches for its dynamism, its tolerance, and novelty, but also reveals the impossibility of absolutes. Answers are never definitive; there is always room for supplements, corrections, continuations. Dialogue is continuous. It remains ever unfinished, and yet, any actual dialogue has itself a genuine completeness – an end in itself. Perhaps it is useful to recall here the scientific metaphor of a self-expanding and self-organizing universe.

b) Dialogue is trinitarian

This provisionality reflects the human situation. It is not properly a weakness of dialogue as such. The dialogue we are talking about is not dialectical but dialogical, as we have stated. The dialectical dialogue sets thesis over against antithesis and aims at a synthesis. It is dualistic. The dialogical dialogue is a never-ending process, it belongs to the very life of Man. The relationship itself remains constitutively open, properly displaying a triadic structure. This is not because there may be three *logoi* but because the process itself brings the two participating *logoi* into an open space which will not permit the dialogue to collapse entirely or

be utterly extinguished. There is *pneuma*, spirit behind any *logos*. A classical word for this openness is transcendence. And transcendence experienced in the ordinary course of dialogue. No single participant, nor even all the participants together, have the whole of reality at their disposal. We dialogue about something that transcends us, something we cannot dispose of at will. There is always something that lets the dialogue arise. This 'something' lies beyond the power of any participant. One could say that both partners are transcended by a third, whether called God, Truth, *Logos*, *karma*, mercy, compassion, or whatever. This 'third,' around which the dialogue flares up, thwarts any manipulation from either side. We are not the absolute rulers of religious dialogue. And the situation is all the more striking in that any judge coming from the outside is out of the question. Dialogue is not a ceremonial dispute in front of judges.

A scientific discussion can and properly should clarify whatever postulates it requires. We can speak about speed, spin, entropy, or whatever, once we have defined our terms. We may then discuss laws, relationships, and mathematical structures, or empirical confirmations of hypotheses. But when our dialogue turns to the good, God, human destiny, justice, or liberation, then my opinion is no more than an invitation to hear a corresponding opinion from the other side. And this makes it possible to begin the dialogue without having in hand the positive criterion of an independent judge. Logical contradiction may be a negative criterion. In a rational dialogue we cannot allow anything

totally contradictory in itself. But religious dialogue is not bound to be only rational, even though it cannot be irrational, if it is to be truly *dia-logos*.

This 'third' dimension may be quite inaccessible to our thought, in as much as we cannot with our thoughts infringe the laws of thinking. The 'third' element is not bound by our ways of thinking. Nevertheless, we raise the claim to have this 'third' in the dialogue because we are aware of our limits – of our contingency. Some partners may claim, even if only through reason, to have access to a revelation, but every partner stops at an ultimate horizon over against which our words make sense. *Anagkê stênai!*, said the Greeks: "We have to stop somewhere." This 'somewhere' is the mystery, the myth. Only by expressing our differences while attentive to this third is dialogue realized. In other words, Heaven and Earth also take part in the dialogue, and bear witness to all that we human beings have to say to one another.

It is this trinitarian structure that vouches for the openness and continuous process of dialogue. The invisible third partner is not necessarily a self-subsistent, immutable Essence or an all-knowing 'God'. The partners should not be bound to platonic or theistic foundations. But this third element of dialogue is nonetheless there: A Spirit that breathes where, when, and however she will.

c) *The ultimate character of dialogue is its imperfection*

The human constitution is dialogical. Polarity belongs to the essence of

Man and reality alike. Religious dialogue brings up our deepest humanness.

I am speaking about the ultimate structure of dialogue, since at other levels dialogue may well dispel many human errors, deepen all sorts of insights, and replace unconvincing opinions with better ones. Religions may purify themselves and discard unpleasant rites, moribund symbols, outdated dogmas, and so forth. Through dialogue, insights are deepened and convictions transformed.

But here I wish to get at something else. Each actual dialogue, I said, is complete in itself because it is not a means for something else outside the dialogue itself. And yet, paradoxically, it is not perfect (*perficere*), finished (*teleios*), as if nothing else could be added. Dialogue belongs to human life, and life is constant novelty. We go on engaged in dialogue as we proceed living in symbiosis with heaven and earth without ever exhausting the fullness of life. The dialogical activity belongs to that level.

Here lies the deeper anthropological and cosmic structure of dialogue. Its foundation lies in the fact that no human being can properly claim to have access to the whole truth of the human race. An angel, as the only individual of its species, might not need any inter-angelic dialogue. No so with Man. Even though *a* Man or *a* People may receive a particular divine revelation, the human vessel of this revelation will always be bound by human contingency: The echo of the Absolute is no longer absolute.

We not only have to maintain a sense of (human) proportion, but also

to think realistically: We may have the best of intentions and may welcome all the positive steps toward tolerance and understanding made in dialogue, but human nature, though not immutable, has never shown itself to be particularly peaceful or pure of heart. Dialogue is the manifest human path, but it can be blocked or deliberately obstructed. And there can also be deserts, seas, and mountains standing in the way. Sometimes dialogue falls apart or just does not come about.

Another word appropriate to the ultimate dialogical constitution of Man is pluralism. Pluralism is the human attitude we adopt when it dawns upon us

that it is impossible, without lethal reductionisms, to bring the whole of human experience into an unqualified unity. In other words, through dialogue we cultivate our humanness. Religious dialogue is the expression of this quest. In it, we partake so deeply of the *Logos* in the Spirit that we come to drink from the same source as the *Logos*: Silence.

The *unavoidable dialogue* is not just a social imperative, a historical duty; it is the awareness that in order to be ourselves, simply to be, we need to enter into communion with the Earth below, the Humans at our side and the Heavens above.

Notes

1. It should be obvious that the two translations are not literal.
2. A German version of it was the inaugural article of a new journal *Dialog der Religionen* Nr. 1, München 1991, pp. 9-39. Jordi Pigem prepared the first English draft, Scott Eastham put it in correct English, Joseph Cunneen edited the present version and I interfered in all the texts, so that while expressing my gratitude to the three friends all imperfections are mine. The self-references are for brevity's sake. The word Man stands for *anthrôpos* and neither for the male nor for a member or a species of a particular kind of 'beings' of a zoological classification.
3. I have set forth a typology of the relationships between religions in *Religionen und die Religion*, München (Hueber) 1965; "Un mythe naissant," préface to J. Langlais, *Le Bouddha et les deux bouddhismes*, Montréal (Fides) 1975, pp. 9-15; "Autoconciencia cristiana y religiones," in the vol. 26 of a collective work, *Fe cristiana y sociedad moderna*, Madrid (Ediciones sm) 1989, pp. 199-267.
4. Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Dialogical Dialogue," in F. Whaling (ed.), *The World's Religious Traditions*, Edinburgh, 1984, pp. 201-221, for the philosophical background of this study.
5. Cf. H.H. Schrey, *Dialogisches Denken*, Stuttgart (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft) 1983, for an overview of some of these currents.
6. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Singularity and Individuality: The Double Principle of Individuation," in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, vol. 29, 1-2, 1975, pp. 141-146.
7. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Der Mensch – Ein trinitarisches Mysterium," in R. Panikkar and W. Strolz (eds.), *Die Verantwortung des Menschen für eine bewohnbare Welt im Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus*, Freiburg (Herder) 1985, pp. 147-190.

8. Cf. *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (edited with introduction by Scott Eastham), Maryknoll (Orbis) 1993, specially its Epilogue, and *Ecosofia: la nuova saggezza – per una spiritualità della terra*, Assisi (Cittadella) 1993.
9. Cf. my short essay “Have Religions the Monopoly on Religion?” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11:3, 1974, pp. 515-17.
10. Cf. my book *Invisible Harmony*, Minneapolis (Fortress) 1995.
11. Cf. my essay “Words and Terms,” in M. M. Olivetti (ed.), *Esistenza, mito, ermeneutica*, in *Archivio de Filosofia*, vol. 51, 1980, pp. 117-13.
12. L. Feuerbach, *Sämtliche Werke*, W. Bolin & F. Jodl (eds.), vol. 2, Stuttgart, 1959, p. 319.
13. Cf. my book *El espíritu de la política*, Barcelona (Península) 1999.
14. Cf. J. D’Arcy May, “Integral Ecumenism,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 25, 4, 1988, pp. 573-91: “Any breakdown of communication between or within communities of faith constitutes an ecumenical problem.” (577) I would interpret “communities of faith” in the widest sense as natural human communities, because in the final analysis, religion is the soul of culture.
15. Cf. R. Panikkar, “The Existential Phenomenology of Truth,” *Philosophy Today*, 2, 1958, ¼, pp. 13-21.
16. Cf. R. Panikkar, “Non-Dualistic Relation between Religion and Politics,” *Religion and Society*, Bangalore, 25, 3, 1978, pp. 53-63.
17. Cf. my book, *Cultural Disarmament. The Way to Peace*, Louisville (Westminster/Knox) 1995.
18. By *ontonomy* I understand the intrinsic link of an entity in relation to the totality of Being, the constitutive order (*nomos*) of any being qua Being (*on*), that harmony which allows space for the inter-in-dependence of all things. Cf. the description of this notion in my essay, “Le concept d’ontonomie,” *Actes du XI Congrès International de Philosophie*, Louvain (Nauwelaerts) 1953.
19. Cf. the far-reaching critique of M. Tanabe, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, Berkeley (U.C. Press), 1986: “As far as the critique of pure reason is concerned, reason as the criticizing subject always remains in a safety zone where it preserves its own security without having to criticize the possibility of critique itself. Yet precisely because reason cannot thereby avoid self-disruption, the reason that does the criticizing and the reason that is to be criticized must inevitably be separated from each other... Reason must recognize that it lacks the capacity for critique; otherwise the criticizing reason can only be distinguished from the reason to be criticized. In either case, there is no avoiding the final self-disruption of reason. In other words, reason that tries to establish its own competence by means of self-criticism must finally, contrary to its own intentions, recognize its absolute self-disruption.” (43)
20. Cf. my book, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, New York (Paulist) 1979; as well as my article, “Mythos und Logos. Mythologische und rationale Weltsichten,” in M. P. Dürr/W. Zimmerli (eds.), *Geist und Natur*, Bern (Scherz), 1989, pp. 206-220.
21. By *homeomorphic equivalent* I understand a third degree analogy which uncovers corresponding functions in the respective systems. Cf. *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, New York (Paulist) 2, 1999, p. 18 ff.

22. Cf. R. Panikkar, "What is Comparative Religion Comparing?" in G. J. Larson/E. Deutsch (eds.), *Interpreting Across Boundaries. New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Princeton (University Press) 1988, 116-36.
23. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion," in *Man and World*, Nr. 13, 34, pp. 357-83.
24. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Verstehen als Überzeugtsein," in H.G. Gadamer/P. Vogler (eds.), *Neue Anthropologie*, Nr. 7, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, Teil 2, Stuttgart (Thieme) 1975, pp. 132-67.
25. Cf. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, New York (Macmillan) 1931. "The idea of the humanity of our God, or the divinity of Man, the Eternal, is the main subject of this book" (p. 15).
26. Cf. *Le mystère du culte dans l'hindouisme et le Christianisme*, Paris (Cerf) 1970 and *Culto y secularización*, Madrid (Marova) 1979.
27. Cf. P. Puthanangady (ed.), *Sharing Worship. Communicatio in sacris*, Bangalore (CBCLC) 1988.

Book Reviews

1

The Christian Programme: A Theological and Pastoral Study of the Sermon on the Mount, by Joseph Pathrapankal, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1999 (pp. xii + 380; US \$ 19).

Dr. J. Pathrapankal CMI seeks an adequate response to two interconnected questions: (1) What is the essence of a healthy Christian spirituality? (2) How to distinguish a true Christian spirituality from spurious ones? (cf. p. ix). In answering these two very important and extremely relevant questions, Pathrapankal (= P.) has recourse to the Bible, particularly the teachings of Jesus (cf. p. x). Among Jesus' various teachings, the Sermon on the Mount has a unique place "because it presents a basic and radical programme of life to all the followers of Jesus who want to hold on to an authentic source of Christian spirituality" (p. xi).

The purpose of the work, as the subtitle indicates, is theological and pastoral. In realizing this purpose P. employs three steps in his study: (1) a brief investigation into the Old Testament background of the text; (2) a detailed study of the Matthean text (when required other New Testament writings are also taken into consideration); and (3) the teachings of the Church, notably that of Vat. II.

The work consists of a lengthy introduction (pp. 1-34) and ten chapters — the last chapter is some sort of a conclusion in the context of a pluralistic world.

The introduction commences with the question: "What does it mean to be a Christian in our times?" (p. 1). The relevance of this question is brought to light by focusing on threefold challenges: (1) challenges of the world religions; (2) problems emerging from secular humanism; and (3) the proposal of a "religionless Christianity". A study of the Sermon on the Mount, P. claims, would offer an adequate response to these threefold challenges.

As a preamble to the study P. establishes that discourses form an integral part of the scriptures of all major world religions. In the Gospel of Matthew there are five discourses; of these the Sermon on the Mount is the most important one in which the evangelist spells out the Christian programme.

Having offered the Matthean rationale for the study in the second chapter, P. focuses on the inner dispositions Jesus demanded from his disciples (Mt 5:3-16) in the third chapter. In the fourth chapter, probably the most important one too, P. dwells upon Mt 5:17-20 in which Jesus unequivocally affirms that he has come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil them.

In the fifth chapter the attention is centered on various dimensions of the dharma in the form of six antitheses (5:21-42) while in the sixth chapter the focus is "the faithful practice of the three major religious exercises of Judaism, known as the 'Three Pillars', on which the good and pious life of a Jew was to be based" (p. 213).

In the seventh chapter P. spells out the attitudes required in the practice of the new dharma (Mt 6:19-7:12). The general principle that controls this section (= 6:19-7:12), P. opines, is "the sound eye" in 6:22-23 by which is meant the correct vision of life (cf. pp. 253-259).

In the eighth chapter P. focuses on Mt 7:13-23 from an eschatological perspective while in the ninth chapter the last two pericopes (7:24-27 and 7:28-29) are studied. The

first is a short but evocative parable whereas the second highlights Jesus' extraordinary authority in his teaching.

The last chapter sheds light on the significance of the Sermon on the Mount in a pluralistic world. Pluralistic perspectives are discernible in the Old Testament as well as in the New. This chapter is concluded by extending an invitation to people of all religions to personally experience God as the loving Parent and to respect and love all humans as one's brothers and sisters, for all are children of God, the ever loving Parent.

As far as I know the first Indian exegete to interpret the Sermon on the Mount as Dharma of Jesus was the late Prof. George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ (1929-1995). He published the article, "The Dharma of Jesus: An Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount", Bible Bhashyam 6 (1980), 358-381. Since then he published at least four articles and studies on this theme. Those who are sufficiently familiar with the writings of G. M. Soares-Prabhu on Dharma of Jesus and related topics will find the content of this book repetitious to some extent. This reviewer considers the following as the merits of this work. (1) There are some personal insights into the Matthean text (5:1-7:29); (2) an extensive treatment of the Old Testament background of the Matthean text is provided; (3) one does find a healthy dialogue with some of the key problems of the world in which we live; and (4) in particular, the thoughts of the Matthean text is further developed in the light of the documents of Vat. II.

Yet I do find some drawbacks (a few of them major ones) in P.'s work: (1) the format of the book fails to have international standard; (2) lack of precision and accuracy in languages whether classical languages (Sanskrit, Hebrew or Greek) or English (in the use of orthographic signs, grammar and spelling); (3) because the thought-pattern is on the whole very abstract and some of the sentences too long, the reading (and understanding too) becomes rather difficult; and (4) there are mistakes in biblical references.

A few points in the content are seriously questionable: (a) according to the Marcan usage, "disciples' are exclusively the inner group of the Twelve who had left all things and followed Jesus" (p. 91). This is true of Matthew (cf. 10:1-4) but not applicable to Mark, for according to Mark Jesus appoints the Twelve from those whom he wanted (cf. 3:13-14); so Levi whom Jesus had called to be his disciple (2:14) does not figure in the list of the Twelve (cf. 3:16-19). (b) Parables of Salt and Light (pp. 130-138): these are not parables but metaphors. (c) I am of the opinion that a Christian programme, according to Matthew, should include other discourses as well, particularly, the Community Discourse (ch. 18).

Finally, the question of readership: Is the book meant for biblical scholars? If 'yes', they may not find many new and striking ideas or seminal insights in it. Is it meant for educated lay persons? Certain technical aspects (for instance, the two source theory that is presupposed, foreign expressions like *Redaktionsgeschichte* [p. 55], abundant use of Greek script, etc.) may confuse and confound an average reader.

Scaria Kuthirakkattel SVD

History of the Pondicherry Mission: An Outline Jean Lafranez mep English version by P.A. Sampathkumar & André Carof mep.

The volume under review is the English version of the *Précis d'histoire de la mission de Pondichéry* by Jean Lafranez, 1953. It was a summary of Fr. Launay's famous 4 volume *Histoire des Missions de l'Inde* (*The History of the Missions of India: Pondicherry-Mysore-Coimbatore*) published from 1895-1998 and some additions of his own. An English translation of it was prepared for private use and the present volume is a revised and

reedited text of the same, prepared by P.A. Sampathkumar and Andre Carof mep published by the Department of Christian Studies, Chennai.

Historical studies have never been the strength of the Indian Churches. If such studies were undertaken at all, they were done mostly by foreign missionaries. So for example, most of the historical records we have about the indigenous Thomas Christian community have been those left behind by the Portuguese missionaries. Only in 1972, was the first serious attempt to write an ecumenical history of Christianity in India undertaken which fortunately has done an outstanding work by publishing three solid volumes of history and two part-volumes. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned this history is complete with E.R. Hambey's volume on the 18th century having been released recently, and Hugald Grafe's volume on the 19th and 20th centuries published already in 1990. Of course both authors have referred to the volumes of Launay and Lafranez but as can be expected, it is a very sketchy reference. Therefore, works such as these are always a welcome addition and as a historian one is pleased to see that such attempts are being made. At a time in our country history is being written to serve the purpose of the majority community or the ruling class and a lot of falsehood is being circulated in the name of history, attempts to show the past with as much objectivity as possible is an urgent task.

As the title indicates, the book deals with an outline of the Pondicherry mission with a short note on the situation before 1776, and the transition from the Jesuits to the MEP missionaries (1773-76). From chapter III onwards it traces the situation of the mission under the MEP missionaries under its outstanding leaders such as Pierre Brigot, Champenois, Hébert, Bonnand, Godelle, bishop Laouenan, archbishop Gandy, archbishop Morel etc., and concludes with an epilogue by archbishop Colas. There is a chronology of events from 1673 to 1992, a few maps, a bibliography, and, fortunately, an index. Although the book covers primarily the period of the MEP missionaries, the story of the Pondicherry mission begins with the Jesuits and the famous Carnatic mission. The book provides valuable information, about people, places, and events. For example, it mentions the arrival of the Ursulines in Pondicherry in 1738, the first foreign women missionaries to arrive in India, and their unsuccessful attempt to settle down in India because of the unsympathetic attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities (In 1827 the sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, the next group of foreign women missionaries did manage to set foot in India, in Pondicherry). There are references to the Malabar Rites controversy, the *Padroado*-Propaganda muddle and the clashes over jurisdiction in general, the wars between the French and the British, the growth and division of the Pondicherry mission and the formation of different ecclesiastical units, the efforts at bringing up a native clergy, the famous synod of Pondicherry of 1844, etc. A number of persons and places come alive in the detailed descriptions in the book. Each chapter has a structure which unfolds the history in systematic way, giving attention to all the important activities of the missionaries.

Some of the details in the book are obviously wrong like the date 1592 which is given as the date of the arrival of the Portuguese. I do not know what the author has in mind. The Portuguese arrived at the western coast of India much earlier. Another historically wrong date is the one on page 4 where it is said: "Father Aries de Sa SJ died in 1613 at Tranquebar before the Lutherans could arrive there in 1618." The traditional date for the arrival of the Lutherans in India is 1706. I haven't examined all the dates. Hopefully they are more accurate. In spite of such mistakes, I consider the book valuable for the information it contains. The only way to write a complete history of Christianity in India is to begin with regional histories and this book is a good beginning in this.

Isaac Padinjarekuttu

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