

RELIGION IN
A NEW KEY
THIRD EDITION

RELIGION IN
A NEW KEY
THIRD EDITION

M. DARROL BRYANT

PUBLISHED BY PANDORA PRESS

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Bryant, M. Darrol, author

Religion in a new key / M. Darrol Bryant. -- Third edition.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-926599-52-6 (paperback)

1. Religions--Relations. I. Title.

BL410.B78 2015

201'.5

C2015-905996-8

RELIGION IN A NEW KEY THIRD EDITION

Copyright © 2015 by Pandora Press

ISBN-13: 978-1-926599-52-6

All rights reserved.

No translation or reproduction in any form is permitted
with-out the written consent of the copyright holder.

21 20 19 18 17 16 15

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Table of Contents

Preface to the Third Edition	7
Preface to the Second Edition	11
Preface to the First Edition	13

PART I Three Essays on Dialogue as a New Key in the Study of Religion

I From the Traditional to the Modern Through to the Post-Modern Study of Religion	19
II Dynamics of Interfaith Encounter and Dialogue	37
III Notes Towards the Symphony of Living Faiths	55

PART II Three Essays In the Dialogue of Religions

IV Inter-Religious Dialogue: The Problems and Prospects of Overcoming "History"	73
V Engaging One Another: A Christian at Eiheiji (Japan) and Kumsan-Sa (Korea)	95
VI The Kumbha Mela: A Festival and Sacred Place	113

PART III Four Essays on the Way of Dialogue into the Future

VII Muslim-Christian Dialogue after 9/11	135
VIII A Journey into the Great Traditions of China	153
IX Interreligious Dialogue in the Global Village	183
X The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Way and Wisdom of Dialogue and Civilization	207
Index	226

Preface

3rd Edition

When I began engagement with ecumenical dialogue in the late 1960s, I had no idea that it would lead me into interreligious dialogue in the late 1970s. A sabbatical in India in the mid-1980s led to a transformative encounter with Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees, Tibetan Buddhists and Indian Christians that has shaped my subsequent life. *Religion in a New Key* grew out of subsequent lectures at Jamia Hamdard in New Delhi and at the University of Madras during a second sabbatical in the early 1990s. Much has happened in the world since the 1999 publication of the second edition. Two events are especially important in relation to the world of inter- and intra-religious dialogue. The first was 9/11 and the second was the emergence of China as a global power. Each deserves further comment in relation to this third edition of *Religion in a New Key*.

The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon near Washington, D.C. were carried out by nineteen Arab criminals acting on behalf of al-Qaeda. Fifteen were citizens of Saudi Arabia, two from the United Arab Emirates, and one each from Egypt and Lebanon. They were all Muslims. On September 20, 2001, President George W. Bush declared a "War on Terror." Troops went into Afghanistan and later into Iraq. These and subsequent events branded Muslims across the globe as "terrorists" despite the fact that leaders within the Muslim world immediately condemned the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as did the leadership of the world's religious communities. This linking in the public mind of Muslims and Muslim terrorists cast a shadow over the dialogue with Islam. But it also underscored its necessity, since the criminal acts of a handful do not represent

nor reflect the lives of the second largest community of faith on the planet. Two of the new pieces in this edition of *Religion in a New Key* address the importance of dialogue and solidarity with Muslims in North America and across the world. The first was written shortly after 9/11 and revised and enlarged in 2014. The second was first presented as the keynote address for a conference on the Abrahamic traditions at the National Library in Peru.

The emergence of China as a global power has led to unease in many quarters. Canada, however, was one of the first Western nations to recognize the People's Republic of China; it did so under Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1970. China has been a member of the United Nations since 1971. It is the world's most populous state and also one of its oldest civilizations. From China have come the great traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism, especially Chan (Zen in Japan) and Pure Land Buddhism. In 2011 I visited China with my colleague Yan Li, Director of the Confucius Institute at the University of Waterloo. It was a surprising encounter for me and not at all what I expected. It also led to an invitation to return to China for the Nishan Forum that focuses on the global meeting of cultures. More than 200 scholars from 55 nations participated in this remarkable event. As a scholar of the world's religions, I was especially interested to learn something of what was happening in the great spiritual/cultural traditions of China. I visited mosques for Friday prayers (Muslims have been in China since c. 700s), Buddhist (since 1st century) and Daoist (since 2nd century BCE) temples and historic sites, Confucian shrines and temples (since 2nd century BCE), and on Sunday, Christian churches (since Tang Dynasty 618-907), Catholic and Protestant while I was in China. This edition includes a partial account of my surprising encounter with the spiritual/cultural traditions of China as well as my contribution to the Nishan Forum. I came away from these two visits to China persuaded of the importance of dialogue with China and especially with its great spiritual traditions. I also encountered great interest among the Chinese people in being engaged in what has become the global dialogue of peoples.

PREFACE

The two essays dealing with China grew out of my travels in China in 2011 and the invitation to participate in the Nishan Forum in Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, in 2012.

Together these four essays/pieces are my contributions to the global dialogue and way to the future.

January 28, 2015, Feast Day of St. Thomas Aquinas

Preface

Second Edition

In the fall of 2000, fifteen students, mostly from the University of Waterloo, went with me to India for a Study Term Abroad. I had named the course “An Encounter with the Living Religions of India.” Over three months, we travelled as far north as Dharamsala to visit the Tibet Buddhist community in exile and as far south as the Hindu temple city of Madurai. We also visited the Muslim community in New Delhi, the Sikhs and the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Hindu Lingayat community in Bangalore and Sirigere, and the Christian community in Kerala. In Vrindaban, a pilgrimage city devoted to Krishna and Radha, we celebrated Diwale. In Karnataka in South India, we visited Bylakuppe and saw Tibet’s great Sera Monastery being reborn. We learned that it now has nearly 6,000 monks. We walked up the stone hill at Sravanabelagola to see the granite image of the Jain Bahubali.

In the ashram city of Rishikesh in northern India, I wandered into a bookstore and found a copy of the first edition of *Religion in a New Key*. It then occurred to me that it was still a useful text but that I had done a great deal in the area of the dialogue of religions since 1987—indeed, this course was part of the approach to the study of religion that I had written about in 1987.

It was only in 2001 that I was able to return to the project of revising and supplementing the earlier edition of this little volume. The original three essays have been slightly revised and, in a few places, updated. They remain as Part I of the volume. The substantial change is the addition of three new essays that deal with the themes of encounter and dialogue, themes central to the original lectures. They are found here as Part II of this volume. A few comments about the additional essays will

help to establish their context and relate them to the purposes of *Religion in a New Key*.

In *Religion in a New Key*, I argue that the dialogue of men and women of different faiths provides the context for a new approach to the study of religion. The essays added here contribute to that proposal. The first explores some of the problems—as well as the promise—of the dialogue of religions. It argues that we must “overcome history” if the dialogue of people of different faiths is to realize its promise. It focuses on dialogue with Muslims, Hindus, and Christians and was first presented at the Iranian Embassy in New Delhi. The second essay deals with an encounter with Buddhists in Korea and Japan. In the mid-nineties, I was able to visit the monasteries of Kumsan-sa and Shimwon-am in Korea and Eiheiji in Japan.

Here, the dialogue of religions moves beyond the exchange of ideas and moves into sharing in another’s life and practice. In these settings, I was able to participate in the prayers and meditation of the Chogye Buddhists in Korea and the Soto Zen Buddhists of Japan, as well as discuss their Buddhist practice and ideas. The third essay deals with the world’s largest religious event, the Kumbha Mela. The maha-Kumbha Melas, the great festivals of the pitcher/pot, occur every eleven or twelve years at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers outside Allahabad (Prayag) in northern India and attract millions of pilgrims. In 1989, there were an estimated 15 million people, and in 2001 an estimated 20 million. I was able to attend both of these Festivals, thanks to the kind invitation of Srivatsa Goswami of Vrindaban. The essay is a report on my experience of the Kumbha Mela and my efforts to understand this remarkable event.

I trust that together, these three additions to the volume will further clarify and deepen the reader’s understanding of the approach to the study of religion I outlined in the first edition of this volume.

October 30, All Saints Day, 2001

Preface

First Edition

The first three essays in this volume were first given as lectures in 1986-87 at the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies in New Delhi and the Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Studies in Philosophy at the University of Madras. I wish to thank Dr. S.A. Ali, Director of the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies, and Dr. R. Balasubramaniam, Director of the Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Studies in Philosophy at the University of Madras, for their invitations to deliver these lectures. They provided me with the opportunity to reflect upon where we are in the study of religion and to sketch a possible new direction arising from the experience of dialogue between men and women of different faiths.

It is the experience of dialogue that constitutes the “new key” that is explored here. Thus it seems fitting that these lectures should have been offered in the context of my sabbatical in India. It was my presence in India that gave me the opportunity to further my own dialogue with a number of Indian colleagues and believers from different traditions.

Though they are a silent presence in these lectures, they were never far from my awareness as I worked on these explorations.

In addition to Dr. Ali and Dr. Balasubramaniam and their families, I think especially of Sri Shrivatsa Goswami and his family who welcomed me and my family to Vrindaban, sharing with us the Festival of Dance devoted to Krishna and Radha and later the Festival of Diwali. He and his family gave us a glimpse of the depth of devotion that makes Vrindaban such a remarkable city of pilgrimage. Our pilgrimage around Vrindaban will be long remembered, as will our later time together in Benares. It was Shrivatsa Goswami and his family that began to open the Hindu world to me at a level beyond books and

studies.

I also remember with appreciation the friendship of the Venerable Doboomb Tulku who paved the way for several remarkable encounters with Tibetan Buddhists in Dharamsala, and the Director of the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Lob-sang Gyatso, who shared with us the wisdom of his tradition and its meditation.

I am grateful to Dr. Mohinder Singh, Director of the Guru Nanak Institute, who was my guide into the Sikh world, and his family with whom we shared meals and conversation. I learned a new face of the Christian tradition through my conversations with the Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, a Syrian Orthodox Bishop, who taught me something of Indian Christianity in those luminous days together in New Delhi and the Old Seminary in Kottayam, Kerala.

I appreciated the experience of learning about dialogue at the grassroots from Father Albert Nambiaparambil, pioneering figure among Roman Catholics in India, at his Satsung Centre in Thodupuzda in Kerala.

I was deeply grateful for the opportunity to visit Shantivanam and to meet Dom Bede Griffiths and, later, Sister Vandana Mataji at Jeevan Dhara, and to become aware of their remarkable experiments in dialogue. Dr. Homi Dhalla and his family were extraordinarily generous to us and gave us a glimpse into the Zoroastrian world in Bombay and shared their home with us in Pune. I appreciated the opportunity for discussions with Dr. Freny Mehta, a Zoroastrian psychiatrist, at her home at Land's End. I would be remiss if I failed to mention the conversations with Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, now President of Lady Sri Ram College in the University of Delhi, and her husband Rajiv Meerohtra, a maker of beautiful films. Together they have moved across boundaries that often separate the Hindu and Buddhist worlds, and I profited from their experience.

I also remember with appreciation the times with Dr. T. S. Devadoss and his family in Madras. I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with the Venerable Samdhong Rimpoche at the Central Institute for of Higher Tibetan Studies at Sarnath

and the opportunity to meditate on the grounds where Lord Buddha gave his first sermon.

I was honoured by the invitation to visit and lecture at the Indian Institute for Advanced Studies in Simla and remember with pleasure the vistas and conversations with Dr. Margaret Chatterjee, then its Director.

The warmth of Dr. Indira Rothermund and our conversations at the Centre for Development Studies and Education in Pune were also appreciated, especially the opportunity to visit some villages in the area. There I saw some of the village consequences of the conversion of "untouchables" to neo-Buddhism. To all of these people and to many others unnamed here, I want express my thanks for inviting us into your homes, your lives, your traditions, and your faiths. It was this human context that made for us the experience of dialogue in India so rich, rewarding, transforming and memorable.

A special mention must be made again of Dr. and Mrs. S.A. Ali and their daughters Lena and Muna. With them we shared meals and life, as well as conversation, almost daily for over two months. It was such a sustained privilege to come to know this remarkable family and to learn from them while we shared our daily bread. We cannot adequately say what that meant to all of us. But our stay with the Ali family was the grace note for our time in India.

These essays have been slightly revised since they were given, but I have tried to incorporate the criticisms and suggestions that arose in the conversations that followed their delivery in New Delhi and Madras. The press of other events has delayed my attention to their revision, but I have been encouraged by others who have read them, especially my colleague and friend Dr. Stanley Johannesen, to proceed with their publication in this largely unaltered state. Something of the immediate context in which they were written and delivered still comes through, and I believe that is appropriate. For, as I argue in these essays, we need strive not so much for an empty neutrality in the study of religion as for a shared insight and process that can be acknowledged across tradition and culture. It is my hope that these essays meet that standard and can be a

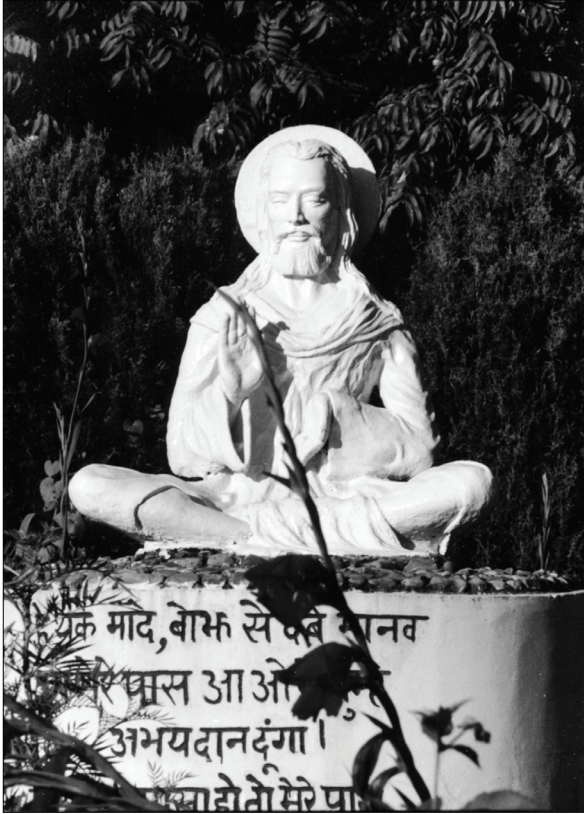
RELIGION IN A NEW KEY

slight token of the gratitude that I continue to feel towards my colleagues and friends in India. They taught me that the living dialogue emerging in our time is a suitable and vibrant key not only for living our respective faiths and lives, but also for the study of the religious heritage of humankind.

Easter Week, 1990

PART I

Three Essays on Dialogue as a New Key in the Study of Religion



Jesus of the Living Water, Jevan Dhara Ashram,
Jaiharikal, Himalayas

I

From the Traditional to the Modern Through to the Post-Modern Study of Religion

In this essay I would like to share with you some of my reflections on where we are in the study of religion. The central thesis that lies at the heart of these reflections is this: the encounter between men and women of the great religious traditions, whether in the centres of learning, the crossroads of cities, the byways of villages, or the inwardness of human hearts, requires a reorientation in the study of religion. That reorientation will build on the real achievements of the past centuries of scholarship but also introduces a new dimension arising from our awareness of being part of an emerging planetary consciousness. In that emerging planetary consciousness—perhaps best symbolized by the image of our blue planet hurtling through space against the backdrop of infinite mystery—we will have to come to understand ourselves anew. And in that renewed understanding, we will come to see the religious pathways of humankind as diverse but interpenetrating ways into the mystery which we all share as the very context of our being—what we are and what we are becoming.

This note has been sounded in the Indian context by rishis and sages throughout the centuries. But, more recently, an analogous point has been made by Dr. Radhakrishnan in his volume on *Religion and Culture*. Here he remarks:

if there is any phenomenon which is characteristic of our times, it is the mingling of peoples, races, cultures and religions. Never before has such a meeting taken place in the history of our world.¹

But no one, to my knowledge, has sought to develop the implications of this fact for the study of religion as we are attempting to do here.

The very fact of my being invited to give these lectures is evidence of the new and transforming situation in which we find ourselves. It is also evidence that the modern study of religion has given rise to an international community of scholarship that makes it possible for me, a Christian from the United States teaching in a Canadian university, to be here in this distinguished Indian Institute of Islamic Studies to speak about the contemporary study of religion. As a young boy growing up on the plains of North Dakota under a boundless sky alive with dancing clouds, I certainly never dreamed that I would someday be walking, together with my family, on the sun drenched soil of India attempting to hear and sense the rhythms and patterns of being that have emerged in lives of Indian Muslims who have heeded the call of Allah, or the lives of Hindus in Vrindaban who have heard the flute of Krishna, or the lives of Buddhists who strive along the “middle way” in search of “enlightenment,” or the lives of Sikhs who have heeded the songs of Guru Nanak. But here I am and here we are—all of us together—caught up in a great transformation that is our common future.

As a way into our topic I want to begin by reviewing certain developments and trends in the study of religion. In this review I make no pretense of offering a sketch of the whole field nor of narrating all the trends discernible in the study of religion. Rather, my attention will focus on those figures, works, and issues that I consider most fruitful for the future of the study of religion, a future oriented to the living encounter of persons from the different religious traditions. To understand why I have given prominence to this living encounter, it is necessary to review, briefly and schematically, the history of the study of religion as it emerged in the West.

The Emergence of the Modern Study of Religion

It is important to remind ourselves that the modern study of religion is comparatively recent and is to be distinguished from traditional religious scholarship. In traditional religious scholarship, the task of the scholar was explicating the content of a given religious tradition by immersing himself in the sacred literature of the tradition. The scholar was expected to be—

and was—a deeply believing member of the tradition that he sought to expound. Often, especially in the traditions centred around a sacred scripture, the primary task was to write commentaries on the sacred texts, or elaborations on the meaning of ritual, or expositions of the philosophical consequences of the revelation that was the touchstone of the tradition. Or the scholar might be a guru or guide on the spiritual disciplines and path of a given tradition. But in the modern study of religion, especially in the modern West, a new type of scholar emerged. This new scholar of religion was often in conflict with the traditional scholar because his scholarship rested on different premises. And those premises were often antagonistic to the religious traditions themselves.

The modern study of religion, especially in Western Europe and North America, sought to free itself from the tutelage of the Church and the premises of dogmatic Christianity. Although the universities of Europe had long had faculties of theology, it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that they begin to establish chairs in the field of the history of religion and the comparative study of religion. When studies of non-Christian religions occurred in the context of the older faculties of theology, they were largely for apologetic purposes—that is, in order to show the weaknesses of other traditions and the superiority of Christianity. In contrast, the modern disciplines of comparative religion sought to place the study of religion on a new footing. That new footing was to be neutral, i.e., not biased towards any religion. What thus emerged was an approach to the study of religion that was a) historical, b) descriptive, and c) analytic. In this approach to religion it was not necessary for one to be a believer, indeed that was often seen as a hindrance because, it was argued, that qualified one's neutrality.

In North America a similar pattern is discernible: the modern study of religion emerges out of a prolonged conflict with Christian theology. Consider, for example, Harvard University, a school founded by the Puritans in 1635 for the training of a "learned ministry." Despite its long tradition of learning—and, for example, the classic studies by William James in the *Variet-*

ies of Religious Experience, actually given as the Gifford Lectures in Scotland, and Josiah Royce at the turn of the century—it was only in the 1970s that Harvard College introduced a program of religious studies under Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a Canadian and a distinguished scholar of Islam, as its first director. And more generally in both the United States and Canada, it was only after the Second World War, and especially in the 1950s and 1960s, that departments of religious studies were established.² These departments were to be devoted to the academic study of religion, a study to be rigorously distinguished from the teaching of religion. (Here, one may teach about religion but not religion as such because that is proselytizing).

In this history are to be found certain gains. Most important is the concern for a fair, objective, and descriptive account of the different religious traditions as well as a freeing of the study of religion from the constraints of Christian apologetics. But this history has a darker side as well, a side that must be overcome if we are to achieve the true promise of the study of religion.

Beyond the Modern Study of Religion

Concerning the study of religion at its best, we might agree with Ninian Smart's conviction that

The history of religions is delicate and has a sensitive soul; and as such it represents a great achievement—a distancing, and yet a warmth; objectivity and yet subjectivity of spirit; description but also evocation; method but also imagination. It is one aspect of the nobility of the best of the humanities and social sciences—a nobility which expresses itself in a willingness to enter into the experiences of others³

But this is, in fact, a post-modern description, because it is precisely the reluctance to enter into the experience of others and to take that experience seriously on its own grounds that characterizes the modern study of religion.

This is the darker side of the modern study of religion, one that emerges from the modern form of culture in which it emerged. That darker side has both a material and formal

aspect. First, the material aspect. In the very process of freeing itself from the tutelage of the Church and the restrictions of dogmatic Christianity, the modern study of religion drank deeply at the wells of the Enlightenment, especially an Enlightenment that said a resounding “NO” to religion while enshrining technical reason (in science and elsewhere) as the engine for the creation of a specifically modern world, a brave new world. In that Enlightenment mentality—a mentality that curiously shares something with the longer history of Christianity, and especially Protestantism, in the West—is the view articulated by Voltaire that “religion is superstition,” or at best, as Comte later said, a primitive state of consciousness that we will soon outgrow. Later a second great son of the Enlightenment, Karl Marx, would argue that religion was “the opiate of the people”—a way of masking the terrible injustice rooted in the means of production by promises of a heaven in which all would be resolved. And still later, a third great offspring of the Enlightenment, Sigmund Freud, would argue that “religion is an illusion.” To be sure, this was better than calling it a delusion, since illusions are usually benign, even though they reflect an immature response to the terrors of coming face-to-face with reality. This darker side of the modern project has bequeathed to the study of religion a stubborn reductionism that continually attempts to transform religion into something else, to reduce it to an epiphenomenon of philosophy, economics, or psychology.⁴

While each of these Enlightenment critiques of religion had their grain of truth, they also tended to undercut our seeing the reality lived and experienced by the great religious traditions of humankind. Whether encountered in the Divine Imperatives of Allah, or the Divine Insights of the Upanishads, or the Divine Emptiness of Buddha, the great religious traditions opened onto a view of human existence that was quite other than that found in those Enlightenment views, which reduced the whole of reality to what could be known through the reductionist methods of modern science or by the methods of the modern study of religion. All religion is rooted in a Beyond, an Ultimate, a Transcendent that cannot be contained within

the ideological and methodological constraints of the modern study of religion.

Thus the formal aspect of the dark side of the modern study of religion is its rejection of the theological and metaphysical foundations of the phenomena of religion. This lack of an adequate metaphysical foundation has far too often left the study of religion subject to whatever ideological currents are fashionable within the academy. And in the modern world those have been the ideologies of relativism, secularism, historicism, and technical rationalism. While each of these needs to be carefully analyzed and explained, I will have to be content with two brief observations. First, these ideologies result from the rejection of metaphysics and ontology as the way into an account of the very nature of things. And secondly, they are united in their rejection of anything real beyond what can be conceived in terms of a two dimensional logic or a two dimensional reality. These ideologies have resulted in a levelling of reality to what is materially tangible.

A similar point was made by Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the well-known scholar of Sufism currently teaching in the United States, when he remarked that

The study of religions ... has been coloured by the mentality of modern Western man and seen under categories which have been either borrowed from later developments of Christianity or from reactions against Christianity. But in any case that metaphysical background which is indispensable for a study in depth of religion has generally been lacking.⁵

This heritage of antagonism towards religion that comes out of the Enlightenment coupled with the resulting ideologies that reject the Beyond as constituting what is in the order of space and time, have, in my view, seriously crippled the modern study of religion. It is only as these aspects of the modern study of religion are overcome that we can get on with the real tasks of the study of religion, namely, in the words of Professor Nasr, "to gain knowledge of other traditions and accept them as spiritually valid ways and roads to God."⁶

I have dealt with these trends in the study of religion at

such length because I believe that the modern study of religion tends to lead us away from religion, whereas the post-modern (a study that begins with a hermeneutic of wonder rather than one of suspicion) will lead us into its depths.

The post-modern study of religion, then, will be characterized by a deep and abiding love for religion itself as the human forms of the Divine made known in the course of human history. It will not seek to reduce religion to something else, but it will seek to understand it in its own varied terms. It will not impose on religion methods foreign to its own presuppositions but seek to let those methods arise from the universal and varied forms of religious life and expression themselves. Its concern will not be to explain away religion, but to understand what has been given to us in the varied patterns of religious life through the ages.

Pioneers in the "Post-Modern" Study of Religion

Within the modern era in the West, we have seen already the emergence of movements that have sought to overcome the debilitating consequences of modernism understood as the reductionist mentality outlined above. Some efforts to move beyond reductionism are evidenced in phenomenology as it emerged in the study of religion and sought to penetrate into the structures and dynamics of religion itself. In part this corrective in the study of religion was due to a faithful adherence by the phenomenologist to the actuality of religious life which was always predicated on the experience of a Beyond, even when that Beyond was manifest in the depths of the human spirit or soul, and even when that very difference was itself overcome in an all-embracing monism. The point is that the encounter with religion in what G. van der Leuw, the remarkable Dutch scholar, called its "essence and manifestation" required a break with the implicit metaphysical conceits of modernism.⁷ How could we, in our study of religion, acknowledge the Beyond that is its animating heart? Or at least, recognize that an aspiration for the Beyond is at the centre of religious life in all its universal variety?

These developments, within the European academy especially, were nourished by increased contact with non-Western

traditions and cultures that had not been so infected by what Walter Lippmann once called “the acids of modernity.”⁸ S. H. Nasr’s comment that “often a simple peasant has a more universal conception of Islam than a university educated rationalist”⁹ could be applied to other traditions as well. Through field studies of actual religious life in various parts of the world and through the efforts of some truly outstanding scholars of religion—for example, Rudolph Otto and his *Idea of the Holy*—some new currents were beginning to emerge within the study of religion.

Rather than attempt to chronicle those developments, I want to turn my attention to a few figures in what I am now calling the “post-modern” study of religion.

Mircea Eliade and the Recovery of the Integrity of Religion

One of the most important figures in the study of religion in North America was Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). Born in Romania in 1907, he was educated in Bucharest and in India. He came to the United States in the late 1950s and taught at the University of Chicago until his death. Over an exceptionally productive life-time he wrote a number of studies that are already classics in the field. His little volume *The Sacred and the Profane* is still the best introduction to the nature of religion that I know.¹⁰ A gifted student of languages, Professor Eliade read widely, bringing the contributions of many into a coherent and impressive synthesis. He has done much to establish the “History of Religions” as a respected discipline within the university.

In this context, however, I wish to focus our attention on his contribution to the recovery of the integrity of religion as “a way of being in the world.” Let me quote Eliade from the preface to his multi-volumed magnum opus, *A History of Religious Ideas*, a work that remains unfinished due to his death. Here, Eliade writes:

For the historian of religions, every manifestation of the sacred is important: every rite, every myth, every belief or divine figure reflects the experience of the sacred and hence implies the notions of being, of meaning, and of truth. As I observed on another occasion,

'it is difficult to imagine how the human mind could function without the conviction that there is something irreducibly real in the world; and it is impossible to imagine how consciousness could appear without conferring a meaning on a man's impulses and experiences. Consciousness of a real and meaningful world is intimately connected with the discovery of the sacred. Through experiences of the sacred, the human mind has perceived the difference between what reveals itself as being real, powerful, rich and meaningful and what lacks these qualities' In short, the "sacred" is an element of the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness. On the most archaic levels of culture, living, considered as being human, is in itself a religious act for food-getting, sexual life, and work have a sacramental value. In other words, to be—or, rather, to become—a man signified being 'religious.'¹¹

Here Eliade summarizes his conviction, borne out of decades of study, that being religious lies at the heart of being human. He testifies to his dissent from modern historicism in recognizing that "the sacred" is not a stage to be overcome but constitutes the very structure of consciousness of humanity. And he makes clear his awareness that the study of religion leads us into the Real that men and women have experienced in manifold forms from the beginning of time to the present. Eliade argues that in the present, especially in the modern West, we have sought to camouflage the religious quest for being.

As a discipline within the humanities, the study of religion remains more an art than a science, and few will be able to achieve what a master such as Eliade achieved. But he can stand for us as a fitting example of what a true scholar of religion can become. Not only was he able to restore the dignity and integrity of religion, but he was also able to lead us more deeply into the complex symbolism of religious life and experience. Eliade took to heart the remark of Bede Kristensen, the Scandinavian scholar of religion, that "the believer is always

right," and he taught a whole generation of scholars how to unravel the complexities and nuances of religious symbolism. In the language of religious life, Eliade showed us, the Beyond "speaks" or "reveals itself."¹² However, this is not a utilitarian or objective language, but one that reveals "a modality of the real or a structure of the World." For example, the symbol of the Cosmic Tree "reveals the World as a living totality."¹³ Thus when we learn to read religious symbols aright, we are led into

... a more profound, more mysterious life than that which is known through everyday experience. They reveal the miraculous, inexplicable side of life, and at the same time the sacramental dimensions of human existence. "Deciphered" in the light of religious symbols, human life reveals a hidden side; it comes from "another part," from far off; it is "divine" in the sense that it is the work of the gods or of supernatural beings.¹⁴

In Eliade we have an approach to the study of religion that can overcome some of those darker aspects of the modern study of religion. It is a way that respects the phenomena of religion so profoundly that it is willing to be instructed by what they show or reveal to us. And in that very process we are led beyond ourselves to an endlessly fascinating Mystery.

Huston Smith and the Recovery of the Ontological in Religion

A second development and trend in the study of religion surrounds the work of Huston Smith (1919-), longtime professor of philosophy at M.I.T. and retired professor emeritus from Syracuse University. Huston Smith was born into a missionary family in China where he lived until he returned to the United States to attend university. He is the author of the best selling *The World's Religions*, a splendid introduction to the several religious traditions. More recently, he has turned his attention in another, but related, direction. In 1976, he published his *Forgotten Truth, the Primordial Tradition*. Nourished in part by his contact with Frithjof Schuon, Smith seeks in this work to unfold the "primordial tradition," the basic ontology or worldview

that, he argues, has been common to the history of humankind “with the sole notable exception” of modern civilization. While it is not possible to explicate that primordial worldview in detail, it is possible to highlight some of its features.¹⁵

First, Smith notes that “the view of reality as consisting of graded levels of being dominated man’s outlook until the rise of modern science.”¹⁶ Heavens/Earth/Hells or Higher Planes/Earth/Lower Planes, in which the different levels were distinguished by the quality of being were the common backdrop of human experience until our time. To be sure, this hierarchical ordering of things was articulated in diverse terms and ways, but nonetheless reveals this common structure and conviction. The point was that there were things or dimensions of being, that were higher and lower, not in the literal sense of modern materialism, but in the primordial sense of quality. We might rise to the love of god or fall to the captivity of demons. We might see into the Truth of Things or remain caught in the maya of our attachments. We might move towards Dharma or remain caught in suffering. For corresponding to the “levels of reality” found in the primordial tradition were “levels of selfhood.”¹⁷ As Smith puts it, “As without, so within—the isomorphism of man and the cosmos is a basic premise of the traditional outlook.”¹⁸

What Smith then richly illustrates is the patterns of correspondence to be found in the literature of religion that points to this shared outlook. Corresponding to the cosmology that moves from the terrestrial, to the intermediate, on to the celestial, and finally the infinite is a pneumatology or science of the spirit that recognizes in humanity the levels of body, mind, soul, and spirit. Thus what Smith elaborates is the rich ontological tradition that lies embedded in the religious history of humankind, a tradition that in its richness discloses the poverty of the worldview embedded in modern scientism, the view that would reduce reality to the space/time continuum of modern science. (A view, parenthetically, that is rejected by great scientists like Albert Einstein, who knew the limits of his perspective and recognized how science opens out onto realms of infinite beauty and mystery.) Thus there is, in Smith’s view,

no need for the student of religion to continually apologize to the so-called “modern man” for the subject he studies. Rather, he might enter into a critical dialogue with the modern worldview precisely for the sake of recovering something of that great primordial tradition that is, in Smith’s words, an “invisible geometry” that “has everywhere been working” to shape the great traditions to “a single truth.”¹⁹

Of course much more needs to be said about Smith’s important work, but I must hasten on. In discussing these figures, I am not suggesting that we cannot quarrel with their findings or with their particular interpretations. I am rather emphasizing their importance for the study of religion, in providing approaches that we could profitably follow, since they move us beyond the limitations of the modern assumptions that hamper that study. And Huston Smith has shown us the importance of the ontology to be found in the primordial tradition.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith and the Recovery of Tradition

A third important figure in the development of what I am calling the post-modern study of religion is Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), a Canadian scholar of Islam and for several years Director of Harvard’s Center for World Religions. Over the past two decades, ever since the publication of his work *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Cantwell Smith has rigorously challenged the tendency to treat religions as abstractions like “Christianity,” “Buddhism,” etc.²⁰ He has rather argued for attention to the faith of persons who are Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, etc. Thus we should seek to understand persons of the different faiths in order to see the world as, for example, a Buddhist sees it. But in what has been called this “personalist” approach, Smith does not devalue the role and place of larger collectivities of believers. He simply emphasizes that believers stand in traditions, a living process of handing over from generation to generation a living faith that is embodied in human lives. As he says, “the most important single matter to remember in all this (the study of religion) is that ultimately we have to do not with religions but with religious persons.”²¹ Thus Smith would direct our attention to the lives of people, communities, and traditions in that infinitely varied

process of living what has been given to us from Beyond.

The implicit direction of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's approach to the study of religion is revealed in his book *Towards a World Theology*. Here Smith offers a "vision" of "the unity or coherence of humankind's religious history." This unity, Smith contends, is "a matter of empirical observation. It is an historical fact." Thus he breaks with the modernist assumption of discontinuity between history and theology, between fact and value, and reasserts that "the history of religion ... is intrinsically the locus of both the mundane and the transcendent, unbifurcated."²² While his study has generated considerable controversy, my point here concerns his attempt to move towards a new way of studying the religious life of humankind. He is not asserting "that all religions are the same," but rather that religious traditions can "be understood only in terms of each other: as strands in a still more complex whole."²³ This challenging vision will certainly have its critics, but we can see here an important new departure that has important consequences for the future of the study of religion.

Ursula King and the Recovery of Women in Religion

A fourth important development with profound implications for the study of religion is the women's movement, a development that began in the West but has now touched our entire globe. Again, we will have to review this development altogether too briefly, but it cannot be passed over in silence. It is difficult to know how to assess the current ferment and discussion of women's experience, roles, contributions, and place in the study of religion except to acknowledge that they are substantial in the history of humankind's religious life. We have all become aware that the story of the religious life of humankind has been skewed by a gender bias that has failed to give to women their proper due in that story.

Among the many voices that are currently exploring the meaning of the experience of women for the study of religion, one of the most significant voices is that of Dr. Ursula King (1938-), Head of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Bristol in Great Britain. Like the others reviewed here, her life and background has important cross cultural

components. Born in Germany, King was educated in India and France and brings to the study of the experience of women an important background in the history of religion as well as theology. Her recent study—*Women and Spirituality, Voices of Protest and Promise*—synthesizes a good deal of the current discussion and provides a reliable guide to this important area of study. In her study she makes the crucial point that in

... listening to the voices of contemporary women, we must first of all investigate the feminist challenge to traditional religion. We must also listen to women's claims about the nature and power of their own experience as well as about those experiences from which they strive to be liberated.²⁴

What is especially important here is the methodological observation that we must learn to listen, to take seriously and on their own terms the voices of that gender that has been too often ignored in the study of religion. It is not an issue of assenting to this or that interpretation but of learning to hear the voice of those who have been excluded. This point is especially important in the context of the current dialogue between men and women of different faiths, for an important aspect of that dialogue is the experience of women articulating their experience and men learning to listen to that experience in its own terms and then moving to a level of mutuality.

Professor King makes an additional point that is especially important in this context. She rejects a view of the women's movement which would see it in only secular terms. One of the contributions King has made to the women's movement is her interpretation of the spirituality that is inherent within the women's movement itself. And thus King makes the crucial point that "the protest and promise of the women's movement opens up a new horizon for human development which touches the horizon of transcendence."²⁵ This horizon brings the movement into the range of religious studies and poses an important challenge for the future study of religion. As we begin to recover the voice of women in the religious life of humankind, we can move towards a richer apprehension of the spiritual life of humankind.

Raimundo Panikkar and the Cross-Cultural Study of Religion

Finally I want to mention, again all too briefly, the important work of Raimundo Panikkar (1918-2010). He was born in Spain of a Spanish mother and Indian father, educated both in the West and the East, and has divided his teaching between universities in the East and West. Retired from teaching at the University of California at Santa Barbara, he always spent a part of each year in India, often at Benares Hindu University. He was also a Catholic priest deeply committed to the Christian faith yet equally at home within the Vedic spirituality of the Hindu. Thus Panikkar transcends, as do all those I have discussed, the presumed dichotomy between the scholar and believer that was so pronounced in the modern study of religion. And, again like the others, there is a deep and abiding cross-cultural, even cross-religious, experience built into his life. Thus for Panikkar, the study of religion involves the experience, in the words of the Notre Dame theologian John Dunne, of “crossing over” into the spirituality of other traditions.

In his work *Intra-Religious Dialogue*, Panikkar charts some of the dynamics inherent in the process of coming to understand another tradition.²⁶ Here the task is not to explain—which has far too often been a process of “explaining away” by interpreting the religious practice or belief in terms alien to the tradition itself—but, as Heidegger said, to understand by standing under, by allowing the religious tradition to unfold in our consciousness in its own terms. Panikkar argues that in this process we find ourselves involved not in an inter-religious encounter, but in a dialogue within the religious heritage of humankind as such. This creative encounter Panikkar calls a “dialogic dialogue” wherein we, first, meet one another in an atmosphere of mutual openness, ready to alter misperceptions about the other and eager to appreciate the values of the other. Out of this first stage can arise a second stage in which we can be mutually enriched by passing over into the consciousness of the other so that each can experience to some degree the other’s religiousness from within the other’s perspective. Panikkar acknowledges that achieving this second stage, though

possible, is very difficult. We then return to our own tradition renewed and made more aware of its own riches, but transformed by having shared the life of another.

Panikkar is intensely aware of the difficulties of articulating the meaning of the manifold spiritual paths to being religious because of the differing cultural contexts and patterns of meaning in each of the traditions. His warning needs to be heeded in the study of religion lest we draw conclusions that are too facile or superficial, or worse, add to the already vast amount of misunderstanding that exists between traditions. Thus a major virtue that the scholar of religion must cultivate is the capacity to listen, long and deeply, to the other. The scholar must return time and again to the text, the practice, the persons, the communities, always aware that we may grasp only in part, that there is always something more or deeper to be heard. Without this dialectical interior dialogue, as Panikkar calls it, our scholarship remains, at best, superficial—an other item on the resume but not a contribution to religious understanding.

We in the West especially need to hear this criticism and to reformulate our approach to the study of religion to free it from the reductionism and ideological constraints that have been the dark side of our Enlightenment heritage. The figures I have discussed here can help us in that direction.

Let me conclude on another note. We live, as I said at the outset, in a time of growing planetary consciousness, but also in a time of recognition of the plurality of religious paths to be found in the human family. Both of these perceptions must be held together and brought more forcibly into our post-modern study of religion. What is also needed is a plurality of methods in the study of religion reflecting the diversity of the great traditions of scholarship that have been part of the non-Western cultures and traditions. Despite the growing numbers of peoples from outside the North Atlantic basin to be found in the West, we in the West still remain woefully ignorant of the great contributions of the civilizations and traditions of the East: the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, China and Japan. And this ignorance is evident even in disciplines like Comparative Reli-

gion and Religious Studies. Moreover, we need to understand these traditions and civilizations in their own terms, terms that resonate deeply in the hearts and minds of the people from whom they emerged. My hope is that in the coming decades we will see work emerging from different parts of the world that moves beyond the limitations of the methods developed in the West, that drinks deeply at the life-giving sources of other traditions and cultures. Let me mention just two pioneers in such work. Dr. Krishna Sivaraman has provided us with an exemplary study of Saivism that leads us beyond the limits of Western scholarship on Eastern traditions. And Syyed Hossein Nasr's magnificent *Knowledge & the Sacred* deserves to be read by every scholar of religion.

In addition to its intrinsic value, Nasr also articulates a critique of modern Western culture that very much needs to be heard in the West. It is a critique that is only possible from those who have followed another way, heard another voice, been nurtured by another cradle. May more scholarship like this be done in the future.

Endnotes

¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Culture* (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1968), 51.

² See Harold Remus et al., "Religion as an Academic Discipline," in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, ed. C. H. Lippy and P. W. Williams (New York: Scribner's, 1988), 3:1653ff, for a standard account of the present state of Religious Studies in North America.

³ Ninian Smart, *Beyond Ideology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 47. Here I employ a three-fold distinction between traditional, modern, and post-modern study of religion.

⁴ See also Stephen Crites lecture to the Society for Values in Higher Education entitled, "The Modernist Myth Exposed," which makes a similar point about the "modernist myth." The essay is available through *Soundings*, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee, 1990).

⁵ Seyyed H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1972), 128

⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷ See G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

⁸ See Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1929),

51ff.

⁹ Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 127.

¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

¹¹ Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas* (London: Collins, 1979), 1:xiii.

¹² Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, ed. M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 97.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵ See the "Preface" in Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), ixff. I have edited a collection of Smith's writings entitled *Huston Smith: Essays on World Religions* (St. Paul: Paragon, 1993).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ix.

²⁰ See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: New American Library, 1964).

²¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York: New American Library, 1963), 17.

²² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁴ Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality, Voices of Protest and Promise* (London: Macmillan, 1989), ll. See also Ursula King, ed., *Women in the World's Religions, Past and Present* (New York: Paragon House, 1987).

²⁵ King, *Women and Spirituality*, 227.

²⁶ Raimundo Panikkar, *Intra-Religious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroads, 1978). See also my "Meeting at Snowmass: Some Dynamics of Interfaith Encounter," in *Interfaith Dialogue: Four Approaches*, ed. John Miller (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1986), 1-20.

²⁷ See Krishna Sivaraman, *Saivism in Philosophical Perspective* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1973) and S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

II Dynamics of Interfaith Encounter and Dialogue

In the first essay I was concerned with clearing some ground for what I consider a new point of departure for the study of religion in our time: the living encounter between persons of differing faiths. This focus for the study of religion will, I believe, lead us beyond the limitations of what I called the “modern study of religion,” that is, the approach to the study of religion that sought to understand religion in terms that were alien to religious consciousness itself. For if our point of departure is the living encounter between men and women of faith, then we will be spared the tendency to excessive abstraction, to easy generalization, to fitting the religious experience and beliefs of others into alien contexts.

While one may believe that “Muslims are...” or that “Buddhists are ...”, it is intellectually dishonest to maintain such beliefs in the light of one’s actual encounter with living members of a tradition other than one’s own. Here in the encounter with men and women of other faiths, one is rather called upon to listen deeply in order to understand that complex experience, history, and tradition that makes the other what he or she is as well as that Beyond which funds their faith. Thus in this second essay I want to try to outline some of the presuppositions of the growing encounter and dialogue between persons of different faiths and the implications that arise from this encounter and dialogue for the study of religion in a new key.

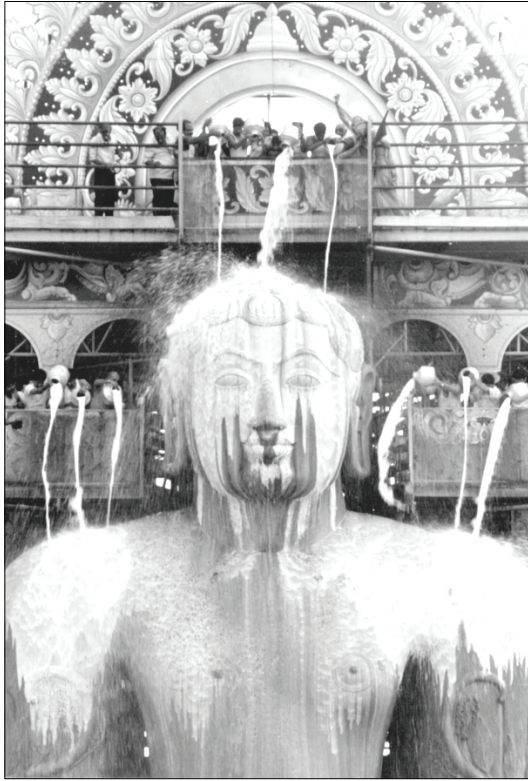
The Priority of Event Over Reflection

Let me begin by attempting to describe, not as a neutral observer but as one involved and deeply affected, two events of meeting that have been part of my recent experience. I do this,

first, in order to make clear my own conviction that the event of meeting, encounter, and dialogue must take precedence, for the student of religion, over the discussion of presuppositions for the interfaith encounter. The event has priority over considerations that emerge from academic study concerning what this event of meeting should or should not be, what issues should or should not be discussed. Such talk is whistling in the dark, a reversal of the proper order between religious life and its study. That study must be grounded in what is actually happening in the event of meeting itself. And second, the presuppositions of encounter and dialogue are those that are implicit within the event of meeting itself. It is thus in reflection upon the event of meeting that we discover, or can discover, what was presupposed and implicit in the meeting itself.

I have emphasized this point in order to underscore the fact that it is the event of meeting itself that is the new (not, of course, absolutely new but relatively in regard to its pervasiveness) factor in the religious situation of our time. This is the novel development in the history of religions that it is, in part, the task of the scholar of religion to explore and understand. It is the absence of meeting or the atmosphere of hostility when that encounter occurs that has been the major characteristic of the longer history of religion. But enough, let me turn to the events themselves.

As many of you are aware, it was my privilege in the 1980s and 1990s to have been involved in the organizing of a series of interreligious events. Especially important has been the series of conferences known as "God: The Contemporary Discussion."¹ In these meetings, we brought together scholars and believers from different traditions to contribute their reflections on many different themes. In those conferences we have explored together such varied themes as "Spiritual Discipline & Ultimate Reality," "Naming God," "Women's Experience of the Divine," and "God, Nothing and the Ultimate."² The purpose of these meetings is not to come to definitive conclusions on these questions—an aim that is not only impossible but probably undesirable as well. Rather, our purpose was to initiate a conversation within the planetary religious community concerning the Divine Mystery within which human life



Bahubali, Jain Saint at Sravanabelagola,
Karnataka, South India

unfolds. While such meetings make the participants deeply aware of the differing patterns of understanding that Mystery found among the religious traditions of humankind, they also lead to a deepening desire to understand one another and what has been given to them in their respective traditions. In these meetings, which have now involved several hundreds of men and women, we were exploring the deepest grounds, the Ultimate Ground, of both our unity and difference, our difference and unity.

For several years, I was part of an interreligious Planning Committee that planned a series of meetings known as the Assembly of the World's Religions.³ The first of these Assemblies was held in 1985 in McAfee, New Jersey, involving over 600

official participants and another few hundred spouses, children, staff, and visitors. This meeting sought to bring together a cross-section of persons from the different religious communities. Thus we had religious leaders as well as scholars, lay members, artists, men and women, young and old. Here the emphasis fell on interreligious sharing of one's spiritual journey as well as on reflection on one or another of the Assembly's twelve themes. Here we prayed and meditated together in addition to sharing ideas. Here we attempted in our small groups to become little outposts of caring and sharing in a world too much torn by conflict and mutual disregard. Here we gathered a token group of the world religious family: Muslims, Hindus, Taoists, Christians, Buddhists, Jews, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Confucianists, Shintoists, African traditional religionists, and those who travel spiritual paths outside the named traditions. Over seven remarkable days, we prayed and played together in a virtual celebration of mutuality and difference that very much surprised us all—organizers as well as participants. Here, I believe, most of us recognized a spirit of unity that we could perhaps not adequately articulate, but that we could sense and out of which we could live. There followed further Assemblies of the World's Religions in 1990 in San Francisco and 1992 in Seoul, Korea. Similar was the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions commemorating the 1893 Parliament in Chicago at the World's Fair, an event that for the first time brought Eastern religions to the attention of many in the West.

I have described, albeit briefly and sketchily, these two events in my recent history and experience because they lie at the heart of my reflection on the presuppositions and implications of the living encounter between men and women of different faiths in our time. It is from these experiences of men and women from the different traditions meeting to pray together, to share their religious pilgrimages, to discuss and debate religious ideas and concepts, to explore together uncharted dimensions of the spirit, and to discover those common things shared across tradition as well as those distinctive things that give each tradition its special character and vocation that I have come to believe what I now believe about meet-

ing, about dialogue from heart to heart. Thus what I want to do is to unpack some of the implicit assumptions resident in these events themselves and identify what seem to me to be the implications of such events for interreligious dialogue and study. This essay has something of the character of a voyage of discovery since I am sharing with you what I have learned.

Discovery One: Not Only Necessary But Desirable

We can approach the interreligious encounter in a number of ways. Many have spoken of this encounter as a necessity arising from the character of our participation in an emerging, to use Marshall McLuhan's phrase, "global village" or, in Ninian Smart's phrase, "global city."⁴ This argument from necessity has much to commend it. As our planet grows smaller due to modern means of communication and travel, it is increasingly imperative that we understand one another if we are to live together in relative peace and harmony. And it is especially imperative that we understand the different cultures and religious traditions that have nurtured us from birth. But the argument from necessity is not sufficient in itself. It must be merged with its inner side, namely, the conviction that coming to know our planetary neighbours is not only necessary but desirable. The outer necessity needs to be linked to the heart's longing so that we can see, as well, how desirable it is for us to know the depths of the other. The encounter with one another is not only a necessity imposed from without, but an opportunity given us from within. Over the past several years, this truth has gradually dawned on me as I have been enriched and enlarged by meeting men and women from around the world who live out patterns of the religious life and experience of the Beyond that are not my own. This leads me to my second discovery.

Discovery Two: Not Only Tolerance But Appreciation

From the experience of meeting men and women from other traditions, one is led beyond tolerance to appreciation. It is, I believe, important to understand that out of genuine meeting grows something more than a reluctant tolerance of persons of other faiths, a grudging concession to the fact that others have

not yet embraced our way. While tolerance is certainly a social good, it is only an intermediate stage on the road of genuine interreligious dialogue. In the encounter with men and women of different faiths, we are led, as have been the sages and wise ones of earlier ages, to a real appreciation of the gifts of other traditions. Every person will have different tales to tell at this point. In my experience, I think especially of my encounters with Tibetan Buddhists whose good humour and mental equanimity arise, I am persuaded, from their disciplines of meditation. Thus I find myself not only tolerating them, but actively appreciating them as having a real gift to share with the human family. Or I think of my encounters with Muslims who have urged me to “submit to Allah” and others who have given me a glimpse of the Sufi way. From each, something has been learned: from one, I have glimpsed an admirable depth of conviction, from the other, a glimpse of the mystic way that moves from the heart to embrace one gently. Thus I have found that one can move gradually from a recognition of the religiously plural situation of the human family to an active appreciation of the faith of others.

*Discovery Three: Not Only Understanding But
Transformation*

In the living encounter of men and women of different faiths, one is not only led to deepen one’s understanding of the other—a process that extends over time and is never finished—but one is truly transformed. We are transformed in a number of different ways and at different levels. At perhaps the most superficial but nevertheless important level, we are led to abandon our misconceptions of one another. We are led to overcome stereotypes and easy generalizations. People who have encountered others of different faiths abandon monolithic modes of speech that begin, “Hindus are ...” or “Jews are ...” or “Christians are ...”. They appreciate more nuanced ways of speaking of others. We discover that just as we are aware of the range and variety of human sensibilities—and that people are at different stages in their own personal pilgrimages—to be found within our own community of faith,

a similar range is to be found in other communities as well. When, for example, we Christians encounter the subtilities and depths of Vedanta, or the depth of bhakti to be found in a devotee of Krishna, it is impossible to retain the belief that all Hindus are mere "idol worshippers," as many Christians long believed. And as our understanding of the other grows and deepens, we are inwardly transformed as well. It is, of course, often difficult to trace the transformation in oneself. It is often recognized only with the passage of time or by one's friends, family and associates.

This transformation has led the critics of interreligious encounter to warn that such meeting will lead to a diminishment of faith, a loss of conviction, and a tendency to relativize all faiths. It would be as pointless to deny that in some cases this does happen as to pretend that the encounter is not risky. It is risky, but equally risky for all who are truly involved. But the risk inherent in the encounter can lead in another direction as well: to a deepening and broadening of faith, to growth rather than disintegration. From my own experience I am persuaded that the negative prospects are greatly exaggerated, that they represent more an unfaced fear than a real danger. More common is the experience of an internal dialectic of transformation as one comes to understand his or her own faith anew in the context of the living faith of others. Although some have found in the "plurality of religious forms ... an argument against the validity of all religions," I find myself in agreement with Professor S. H. Nasr that "the most powerful defence for religion ... is precisely the universality of religion."⁵ In the living encounter, this later response is more common: out of the encounter with the living faith of others, one is encouraged to deepen one's own faith. This is often another transforming consequence of meeting men and women of other faiths.

Discovery Four: Not Empty But Open

When asked about the presuppositions of interreligious dialogue, I have always replied that, in my experience, there is only one prerequisite for dialogue: openness to the other. But this does not mean that we come empty to the interreligious encounter. We rather come as men and women formed by dif-

ferent traditions and different patterns of religious life. Even when our religious practice may be very cursory, we continually discover that we carry with us at least the cultural forms that have emerged from the religious traditions that formed our cultures. Paul Tillich reminded us that “culture is the form of religion, religion is the substance of culture.” This dialectical interplay between religion and culture is something we need to grasp more fully, and it is readily apparent in the interreligious encounter. On the personal level, we need not, nor is it possible, to come to the encounter empty handed. Rather, we come as members of religious traditions, as men and women of faith, though to varying degrees. We come bearing the accumulated burdens and virtues of our traditions of faith, of learning, of culture, of ritual, and of personal experience. And these carry with them, let me emphasize, burdens and limitations as well as gifts. Most of us, for example, carry the suspicion—I know this was true for myself—that those in other traditions are not as blessed, favoured, or enlightened as those in our tradition. And it may turn out to be an accurate suspicion in certain respects. But more often, it is a spiritual obstacle to be overcome if one is truly to be open to the other.

Thus while I believe that the single thing required for interreligious dialogue is openness to the other, I am convinced that this is truly one of the most difficult spiritual states to achieve. As I have said, this state must grow not out of our internal emptiness, but out of the depth of our rootedness in particular traditions, ways of practice, and habits of prayer and meditation. It is from these depths that one can come to be in relation to the Divine Ground of things given in one’s tradition and thus truly be open to the other. Rootedness in a given tradition is not, in my experience, an obstacle to openness to the other, but the spiritual presupposition of openness. For from such rootedness one can relate to the other out of serenity rather than apprehension, out of inward rest rather than desperate longing. As a Christian, for example, I must come to see the other with love; as a Buddhist, with compassion; as a Hindu, with identity. In this spiritual condition, one’s faith is not external, nor is one’s religion. Rather, they have become our way

to life as well as our way of life. Here one can see the other not as a threat but as a fellow pilgrim.

At the moral level, openness to the other is manifest as a willingness to be corrected and instructed by the other. For here we have passed from morality as outward rules to the moral life as the pathway to goodness. On the intellectual level, openness to the other is manifest as a love of the truth, however it comes to us. Here, we intellectuals and scholars often have a great deal of difficulty! We often believe ourselves to have the truth, and thus there is no need for us to listen, only for the other to listen to us. Or we are often so wedded to our own conceptualizations that we are reluctant to truly hear others and to enter into their mental landscape. Thus it is imperative that intellectual openness be achieved in the process of dialogue itself. And again, I do not mean emptiness, but a willingness to see our own views as perhaps a little less than the truth itself, as an attempt to articulate a mystery that always remains, in part, beyond our schemes and thinking. At the same time, it is crucial that we offer one another our best and deepest thinking and insight, that we share what we believe has been given to us in the intellectual traditions of our community. Only in this way can we move ahead, or rework or revise our traditions if necessary. (For example, many of us who have been burdened by an excessive rationalism or an arid intellectualism need to be reminded, as is so clear in the great Hindu traditions, of the links between self-realization and thought, between spiritual practice and thinking).

Hence while we do not come empty to the encounter of men and women of different faiths, we must learn to cultivate a multidimensional openness to the other, for it is only from such openness that monologues can be transformed into genuine dialogue.

Discovery Five: Not Multiple Monologues But Genuine Dialogue

Too often, the encounter of men and women of different faiths is what might be called "multiple monologues," persons speaking to themselves in sequential order or side by side. We are

thus presented with "The Christian View" followed by "The Hindu View" followed by "The Muslim View," etc. In this situation, we have not really encountered one another, nor have we truly met or entered into genuine dialogue. As Srivatsa Goswami regularly reminds me: dialogue is dangerous. He is right. Because in genuine dialogue, where we are truly open to one another, we will be changed. What will change is both our perception of the other and our own religious self-understanding. While people come to the encounter of persons of living faiths with what has been given to them of the Divine in their respective traditions, they discover in dialogue that what has been given does not exhaust the fullness of Divine Life, that there is an inexhaustible More that we can be led into through the dialogue with persons of other traditions. It is extremely difficult to know precisely how to articulate this point, since I do not mean to suggest either (a) that any particular religious path is an inadequate way to the fullness of the Divine, nor (b) that we are led to a new syncretism. But I do want to say that no tradition exhausts the fullness of Divine Life.

This is of course an emergent insight that arises in dialogue itself as the very ground and presupposition of dialogue. What made the coming together, the genuine meeting itself, possible, now emerges as the ground of all subsequent meeting. Thus I prefer to say that in dialogue we rediscover ourselves as fellow pilgrims who have come from various places but who, in the process of meeting and sharing, recognize both similarities and differences in relation to a shared aspiration to live out of the multiform richness of divine life. In dialogue the Christian knows himself or herself anew in a fellowship of believers that not only includes other Christians, but other believers in other traditions as well. The Muslim remains a Muslim but wonders at the variety of Allah's presence in the lives of others. The Hindu remains a Hindu but delights in the manifold expressions of the One who is beyond all expressions. And yet each of us in our own way is moved to be Christian or Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu in ways that we were not before. And it is here that the transforming quality of genuine dialogue occurs. This transformation is what the American Christian Ruel

Howe, in another context, called “the miracle of dialogue.”⁶

Some prefer a name other than dialogue for the living encounter between persons of different faiths.⁷ For example, Wilfrid Cantwell Smith speaks about the interreligious colloquy, and others speak of a “multilog” since more than two (dia-) are involved. But I prefer the term dialogue because it more adequately points to the central issue and dynamic: the encounter of a speaker and listener, a listener and a speaker, in the process of communing one with another in relation to a ground that precedes and sustains them. And it is in the miracle of communication becoming communion that we encounter the true heart of genuine dialogue, of genuine meeting. The whole person is affected: not only our understanding but our hearts as well, not only our minds but our spirits too. Thus we are led to discovery six.

Discovery Six: Not Only Change But Growth

If dialogue has something of the quality I have suggested above, then we discover that the encounter with the other is not merely an occasion for change but an opportunity for growth, a call to become more. In religious terms, the encounter leads to spiritual growth. As we encounter the richness of another tradition—its patterns of piety and thought, of ritual and life, of discipline and devotion—we are led more deeply into the resources of our own traditions and can see and appropriate them in a new light. Thus we not only change but we grow and become more. For one so deeply affected by the interreligious encounter, this transformation now seems obvious, but at the outset one might anticipate only loss and change. One might approach dialogue with misgiving. Let me report from inside the encounter that there are real possibilities for growth.

It is of course impossible to characterize that growth in any singular way except to say that it involves a greater appropriation of the universal elements of our particular traditions. Growth will be varied depending on where one is on the spiritual journey when one comes into this living encounter. But that one will experience growth is, I am persuaded, a virtual corollary of genuine meeting.

Discovery Seven: Not a New Syncretism But a Revitalized Family of Religious Pathways

Some have feared that out of the living encounter of persons of different faiths will arise a new syncretism that will blur the distinctions between the different religious traditions. But this fear leads us back to the very fundamental issue of the nature of religion itself. What is the end or goal of religious life? While this is a hotly debated issue in the study of religion, my own conviction is that religion is the quest to relate human to divine life. Thus religious life is a means towards the fullness of our humanity. While religions differ in fundamental ways in their accounts of both the human and divine, they are all agreed that it is only in relation to a Beyond that transcends the mundane that we come into our fullness as human beings. For example, in some strands of Hinduism we are called to recognize the fundamental identity of "atman" with "brahman," in others we are called to a life of devotion or bhakti. In some Buddhist traditions, we are enjoined to practice a meditative middle way which will lead us beyond suffering to enlightenment. In some Christian traditions, we are urged to a life of the love of God and our neighbour as exemplified in Jesus Christ. In the Islamic traditions, we are called to submit to Allah as the source of our true freedom. And so on and so forth. What thus emerges in the religious life of humankind is a variety of divine/human types that each tradition, through its practice, beliefs, and life, nurtures. Religions, then, are nurseries for distinctive human types.

In this perspective, then, the end of the living encounter between persons of the different traditions is not a new syncretism. Rather, it is a synchronizing of the pathways of the different types in relation to their divine ground. From my own experience of interreligious dialogue, I am not persuaded either that "all religions are the same," or that "the differences are merely superficial." At the same time, I am persuaded that we have much to share across tradition and, perhaps paradoxically, that we have more in common than we normally recognize. But the issue is where to locate those shared things, those things held in common. It is clear to me that they do not lie in



Golden Temple, Sikh Holy Place, Amritsar, Punjab, India

the specifics of ritual, or belief, or practice, or prayer, or meditation, or scriptures, of any other of the specifics of a given tradition; they lie in the shared reality of believing, praying, meditating, reading scriptures, acting out rituals, and practicing the spiritual life and disciplines. These are common or shared dimensions of our varied pathways that lift human into divine life, of our being met by divine life in the midst of the human pilgrimage. This is a crucial point. While a Muslim prays to Allah, a Christian to the Triune God, a Hindu to Krishna or Ram, etc., they all have the common experience of prayer. And while one may believe in her Guru, another in her Dharma and yet another in the Tao, they all have the shared experience of believing. And it is precisely here that we find the grounds to recognize one another as fellow pilgrims, though on different pathways, perhaps to different specific ends, and surely with different maps of the Beyond (if not different Beyonds). But it is in our shared experience of believing, praying, meditating, and doing that we can as religious pilgrims meet one another; it is here that we discover our human unity as pilgrims.

Over these past few years I have walked with pilgrims in Vrindaban and Varanasi, I have prayed with Muslims in mosques in Delhi, and I have meditated with Buddhists in Dharamsala. It would be not only presumptuous but wrong to say either that I understand them in the way they understand themselves, or that we are all engaged in precisely the same thing in those shared moments. And yet I believe that it is precisely because I am attempting to walk in the Christian way that I can share, in part, their experience, understand, in part, what they are doing, be present, in part, to their world. And vice versa. Nor do I believe it would be a gain if I were to become a Hindu or a Muslim, or if they were to become Christians. Rather, I am persuaded that we all gain to the extent that we share across traditions how we are becoming human/divine in the religious pathways that we each walk. And we gain by learning how to make those gifts more present to the world in the service of a broken human family. Thus the end of the interreligious encounter is a revitalized family of religious pathways, each nourished by what has been given to it, willing to be nurtured in the distinctive type each is, and yet open to sharing across traditions those common religious experiences and gestures of prayer, meditation, discipline, ritual, reflection, and service. Much more important than syncretism is the need to encourage the universal dimensions of each tradition that they might come to cooperate with one another in service to humanity. And for that service we need a symphony of types, human types nurtured by the respective genius of each tradition, yet willing to share their virtues and gifts with others. Thus the human as well as the theological dimensions must be—and are being—fruitfully synchronized with one another.

There are, to be sure, few to whom one can point as examples of the type that might emerge from the interreligious encounter. But I think here of great souls like Gandhiji, so fully Hindu yet so open to other traditions, so fully himself yet so transparent to a Beyond that sustained him. Or of Mother Theresa, so fully Christian yet so fully radiant that we can all recognize our deepest aspirations in her. Or of the Dali Lama, so fully Buddhist yet with a warmth and compassion that is so

truly human. And on a less dramatic scale, there are those men and women who are finding in the living encounter with men and women of different faiths the crucible for their own movement into the depths of their own tradition as the way into the universal human family, a revitalized family of religious pathways to the Beyond.

Discovery Eight: Not Uniformity But Mutuality

Thus what emerges in the living encounter is not uniformity, nor a levelling to a lowest common denominator. Rather, we are led into new and unanticipated forms of mutuality and cooperation. Too often our religious nurseries have been places to hide to avoid coming to grips with the real problems that everywhere face our world. But the interreligious encounter and dialogue leads, it seems to me, in another direction: it leads towards the renewal of religious life and a more fruitful encounter with the world. I think here of the World Conference for Religion and Peace, to mention but one example. Here persons from many traditions are attempting to find forms of mutuality and cooperation that encourage not only interreligious understanding but worldly action as well. Thus, finally, we come to discovery nine.

*Discovery Nine: We Are Sustained in Interreligious
Dialogue by a Beyond that is Beyond all Our reckoning*

Let me mention finally the most difficult point to articulate, but the most important point to make—namely, that in the living encounter of men and women of different faiths, we are sustained by a Beyond beyond all our reckoning. When the miracle of dialogue occurs—and those moments cannot be pre-programmed or pre-packaged—we gain a glimpse of that Beyond that exceeds all our conceptions and prejudices, all our carefully crafted rituals and theologies, all the differences that unite us. That Beyond I call Love, but others would name it in other ways. It matters not. What matters is that we acknowledge it, that we say yes when it comes, for here we are touched by *grace*, here we have glimpsed the *mystery* in which it all unfolds, here, in the language of my tradition, “*We have seen through a glass darkly.*”

Thus at the end of this voyage of discovery we are led back to the beginning: the presupposition of the interreligious encounter and dialogue is that we find ourselves in the midst of a transcendent mystery that continually exceeds us yet makes itself known in ways that can heal and transform the human family. This is the ground that was lurking there at the beginning of the voyage, but we could not yet see it because we had not left the shore. But once we go, then we can see what has been present all along, waiting to make itself manifest to the voyagers. Just as our planet has always been a blue orb spinning through the endless mystery, so it took the voyage to the moon to allow us to see it. Yet we are still far from realizing all of what it means. So too the interreligious dialogue in our time is just beginning, and we are now beginning to get some reports of what lies ahead. Yet we are still a long way from knowing fully its meanings and implications.⁸ Indeed, we need to be patient to allow the seeds that have been sown to take root and grow up into their proper forms. We must not attempt to force the fruit prematurely; it must be allowed to ripen into its own proper end.

Our way into this voyage is through the lifeboat of our own traditions since these are the living vehicles that have transported countless numbers before us from the shores of birth to the other shore of death. They thus merit our continued loyalty and devotion, not as ends in themselves, but because they lead us to ends beyond themselves. We can walk on these paths because they have been trodden before, and they are the best preparation for travelling on new terrain. In the interreligious dialogue of our time, some new paths are emerging, but they are just being pioneered. Fortunately, we are finding that there were wise mothers and fathers who have already gone ahead of us—and we can learn from them. And at the same time, we are discovering that the patterns of religious isolation that have been too much a part of the long history of religions are beginning to breakdown. And here lies the story that, in large part, it is the task and responsibility of the scholar of religion today to try to understand. That scholar will begin this task armed with the best historical, social scientific, psycho-spiritual, and

religious methods available. She will have to do battle with the perverse secularism that has too much infected us precisely for the sake of the secular. There the scholar of religion will learn to do comparative religion in a new key. But the scales, tones, and ends of that new key will have to wait till my next essay.

Endnotes

¹ The interreligious meetings known as “God: The Contemporary Discussion” were initiated in 1981 through the New Ecumenical Research Association (New ERA), New York, New York, USA. There were eight meetings in this series. The final conference in this series was held in France in 1992, Dr. Francis D’Sa of Pune, India was the Chair.

² From these meetings twenty volumes appeared. The entire series, known as “God: The Contemporary Discussion,” is available from Paragon House, 2700 University Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA 55114. Among the titles are James Duerlinger, ed., *Ultimate Reality and Spiritual Discipline* (1984); F. Ferre and R. Mataragnon, eds., *God and Global Justice* (1985); M. D. Bryant and R. Mataragnon, eds., *The Many Faces of Religion and Society* (1985); R. Scharlemann and Gilbert Ogutu, eds., *Naming God* (1986); Ursula King, ed., *Women in the World’s Religions* (1987); and H. Ruf, *Religion, Ontotheology, and Deconstruction* (1989).

I was the Senior Consultant for New ERA and part of the Executive Committee for the Assemblies of the World’s Religions. I was the series editor for the volumes coming from the “God Conferences.” Thus, I have been intimately involved in the process of planning these conferences and the resultant publications.

³ The first Assembly of the World’s Religions (AWR) was held in 1985; the second occurred in August, 1990, in San Francisco, California, USA; the third in Seoul, Korea in 1992. For a fuller account of the first assembly, see M. D. Bryant, J. Maniatis, and T. Hendricks, eds., *Assembly of the World’s Religions, 1985: Spiritual Unity and the Future of the Earth* (New York: International Religious Foundation, 1986), volumes from the subsequent assemblies are also available.

⁴ See Ninian Smart, *Beyond Ideology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 22.

⁵ S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1972), 126.

⁶ Ruel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963). I have now forgotten much of the content of his book, but the title stayed with me.

⁷ For something of this discussion see, for example, Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

⁸ There are many important volumes on this subject now available. One of the most important is Diana Eck, *Encountering God: From Bozeman to Benares* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993). My own contribution to this literature is M. Darrol Bryant and Frank K. Finn, eds., *Interreligious Dialogue: Voices From a New*

RELIGION IN A NEW KEY

Frontier (New York: Paragon House, 1989); Darrol Bryant and S. A. Ali, *Muslim Christian Dialogue: Problems and Promise* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1998) and M. Darrol Bryant, *Woven on the Loom of Time: Many Faiths and One Divine Purpose* (New Delhi: Suryodaya/Decent Books, 1999).

III

Notes Towards the Symphony of Living Faiths

In the first essay of this volume I sought to clear some ground for a new approach to the study of religion, one that would take as its point of departure the emerging dialogue in our own time between men and women of different faiths. I have urged this point of departure in order to underscore the priority of the lived experience of religious life over its study. Our study as scholars of religion must be subject to the actualities of lived experience within the religious traditions themselves rather than to methodological assumptions that are foreign to the phenomenon of religious life. In my second essay I shifted voice from that of a historian of religions to a more personal voice in offering an account of the dynamics of interfaith meeting and dialogue. In that essay my concern was to go beyond the external study of religion and move within the living encounter of men and women of different faiths in our own time. What emerges from that approach is an awareness of the (a) different religious pathways to be found among men and women of different faiths and, simultaneously, (b) an awareness of the cross-tradition mutuality that arises from the shared experience of believing, living, praying, acting, and practising what is given in one's tradition. In this third essay, I wish to turn to the implications of this living encounter of men and women of different faiths for the study of religion in general, to outline that study in a new key.

Religious Studies and Comparative Studies

As I observed in my first essay, the study of religion is a recent development in the intellectual history of humankind. Of course, this statement needs to be qualified in the sense that in the last century there emerged a "science of religion" that sought to be historical, descriptive, and analytic. This approach to the study of religion has led to a quantum jump in available

information on the various religious traditions found in the human family. The gains are great. However, that study was also profoundly limited. The limitations arose, in large part, from a model of science that was inadequate to the religious phenomena themselves. In a word, the model obscured the role of the subject in the study of religion, the place of imaginative identification with the other as a prerequisite to understanding, and the ontological dimensions of religious experience that were in conflict with the scientism of the dominant method of study. This has led, at least in North America, to a continuing debate between those who champion an "objective science of religion" and those who see the study of religion as part of "humanistic studies." This is, I believe, a misplaced debate.

The study of religion is not a science in the sense of the natural sciences, but it is a science in the broader sense of "a disciplined way of proceeding" that has as its end the understanding of the variety of religious traditions as pathways of transcendence. Thus the study of religion is a discipline in its own right that is not reducible to history or sociology or psychology or even theology, as important as these disciplines are to the study of religion. What distinguishes the study of religion from the other disciplines is precisely its willingness to take seriously the religious dimensions of human life and experience and, most centrally, the dimension of living in relation to a Beyond that is itself beyond the methodological grasp of the discipline. At the same time, the study of religion is a humanistic enterprise precisely because it is the study of human beings, men and women in communities and traditions of faith, as *homo religious*.

In this view, then, the study of religion is vast, encompassing the whole range of human experience of the Beyond as it is manifest in whole cultures and civilizations past and present, in communities and traditions of faith, in patterns of piety and practice, belief and gesture. The comparative study of religion is both an aspect of this larger study of religion and a particular area of study aimed at the comparison of traditions and of particular beliefs, practices, rituals, etc. across traditions. In recent decades, as many of you are aware, comparative study

has come under considerable criticism. That criticism has been directed towards two tendencies. First, there is the tendency for comparative study to degenerate into apologetics by comparing the strength of one's own tradition with the weakness of another, or to caricature the other. This misuse of comparative religion is quickly dismissed by the community of scholars of religion, but much mischief can occur here. The second, more serious criticism, is against the superficiality of much comparative study. Here the tendency is to string together scattered texts from different sacred literatures or quotations from different religious writers in order to show a presumed agreement or disagreement between traditions. Again, this is a procedure unworthy of a scholar of religion. But beyond these criticisms there is a role for comparative study, a role that Professor Vahiddudin of the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies describes as creating an ethos and environment of understanding and respect for the meeting of persons of different traditions.¹

Taking this note as a point of departure, then, let me turn to some of the notes for the study of religion in a new key.

The Musical Metaphor: A Word of Explanation

I call this series of essays "Religion in a New Key." My emphasis does not fall on the "key" that unlocks doors, though I do hope that what I say will open some vistas on the study of religion. Rather, my emphasis falls on the musical metaphor of "key" as a tone that will permeate the study of religion. And that key involves, in discursive terms, a constellation of notes that add up to a new sensitivity to the variety of ways that the religious life has been lived, a willingness to hear anew the many songs that have been played in the cosmic dance. Such a metaphor has, of course, its limitations, but it also has its multi-valent suggestiveness. Part of its suggestiveness may lie in the importance I give in the study of religion to the imagination, to intuition, to playful identification with the other, to a willingness to learn to sing the other's song. The study of religion is not only, or even primarily, an exercise of technical reason, but it is, in the first instance, the exercise of disciplined imagination. Religious life as a lived response to the Ultimate has more in common with music than with discursive or technical



Dancing figures from the Halebid Temple, Karnataka, South India

reason that seeks to master what is. And thus the student of religion must cultivate the sensitivities of a singer and dancer, as much if not more than those of an analyst and philosopher, if she is rightly to appropriate her subject. Let me try to indicate some of those notes for the study of religion in a new key in the hope that harmony rather than dissonance results.

Note Number One: The Transcendent Ground Tone

Fundamental to the study of religion is the encounter with the conviction, variously conceptualized and articulated but universally present, that we live in relation to a Beyond that exceeds the mundane world. This conviction has been problematic to the modern study of religion, leading many to believe that this central element of religious life must be “bracketed” in the study of religion. Ninian Smart, one of the most outstanding students of religion today, has written concerning the transcendent that

. . . this does not mean that we have to believe in the transcendent in order to conduct the history of religions, or in order to construct a theory of the way religion works.²

SYMPHONY OF LIVING FAITHS



Halebid Temple, Karnataka, South India

While this is certainly a complex issue, it seems to me that such a position is methodologically untenable for the study of religion. Smart himself acknowledges how central the transcendent is to the history of human religiousness. And he is surely right in noting that there is no particular belief in the transcendent that is a requirement for the study of religion and that historical and sociological studies of religion can leave this question aside. But I find it difficult to understand how we in the study of religion can so easily dismiss this matter. While we do not have to decide if this or that belief about the Transcendent is true, it seems to me indispensable for the study of religion that we proceed, at least, as if the Transcendent, however understood in the different traditions, is. Moreover, it seems to me that a further conviction concerning a transcendent Beyond is not an impediment but an aid in the study of religion because it provides a point of entry into the living experiences of the other. The study of religion involves, in large measure, as Smart himself acknowledges, a disciplined empathy, a capacity, in the words of the First Nations of North America, to “walk in another’s moccasins.” And if the moccasins we are asked to walk in include a belief in a Beyond, then our “bracketing” of that dimension will make it virtually impossible to

truly enter into the pattern of religiousness that we find in the other. Thus it seems to me imperative that we distinguish attempting to “prove” the truth or falsity of a particular belief in the Beyond from the methodological requirement in the study of religion to proceed on the assumption that the believer’s experience of what is, including the Beyond, is true. Thus I would argue that we need to reverse the “bracketing process” and see that in the study of religion, we can only proceed on the methodological principle of acknowledging the transcendent as central to the human communities it is our task to understand.

When our point of departure is the living encounter of men and women of different faiths, this issue becomes even more acute. In the presence of believers, the student of religion will be challenged to explore his or her own faith or lack thereof. Faithfulness to the subject will require the student to acknowledge such faith as part of the lives he or she is trying to understand. But it may well lead one into what we might call the study of “comparative Beyonds,” the ways in which believers or pilgrims on different religious paths map the Beyond they recognize as the true source of their life. Such an enterprise is exceedingly complex and difficult because the religious life comes as a whole life, and thus to abstract those comparative maps of the beyond may lead to distortion. Yet in the hands of the true artist in the study of religion, such a task is possible as can be seen in the masterworks of the great practitioners of the discipline.³ Moreover, the student of religion is led to see something of the Transcendent Mystery that comes to view in the living encounter of men and women of different faiths. Taking this living dialogue as the point of departure, he or she is placed in the heart of this Transcendent mystery which is the ground tone for the study in a new key. It is, finally, sensitivity to the manifold songs played by the Transcendent in the lives of human beings that is the mark of the scholar of religion. This observation immediately opens up the second note of the new key for comparative religion.

Note Number Two: The Manifold Melodies, or the Variety of Pathways and Their Multiformity

If one turns to the study of religion from the context of the living encounter of men and women of different faiths, one is immediately aware of the manifold melodies that have come to expression in the history of religions/religion. At first blush, the manifold number is overwhelming. It includes not only all the great traditions such as Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, etc., — but all the multiform traditions within the great traditions as well as the smaller traditions. No single mind can comprehend this variety in all its detail, or even in its sheer number. Instead, we must recognize the need to create a community of scholarship, a community of men and women devoted to the attempt to understand the manifold melodies of the religious life. Most often, we begin our studies by attempting to understand the tradition out of which we came, but some are also attracted to the study of traditions that are not their own. What moves us in one or another direction is often difficult to know, but at bottom there must be some passion to understand the dynamics present in a given tradition. Otherwise, the vocation to scholarship becomes a mere job, a love of the truth sold for a handful of pottage. But if our scholarship remains rooted in the love of our subject, then we will be at great pains to present its contour and shape with loving care, to disclose its inward melody with great precision and fidelity, to be faithful to the text or tradition or person or movement or ritual that we are seeking to understand.

The student of comparative religion thus undertakes his or her work against the backdrop of the manifold melodies of religious life — and within the context of a community of scholarship. Yet any single scholar will probably be able to truly master only one major or minor key in that larger symphony of religious pathways. Here lies the change that has taken place in recent decades in the study of religion, namely, that one's work will be read by other scholars and by living members of that particular tradition on which one works. This new audience has led a scholar like Wilfrid Cantwell Smith to remind us that "it is the business of comparative religion to construct

statements about religion that are intelligible within at least two traditions simultaneously."⁴ For example, our work must be such that a Muslim is able to acknowledge what a Christian writes about Islam, or a Buddhist what a Hindu writes about Buddhism. We are all being drawn into a planetary conversation that has considerable significance for comparative studies. Because if we in the study of religion can find ways to communicate one with another across the differences of tradition, language, culture, and especially ultimate commitments, then we might hope that such communication can take place in other spheres of life as well.

Equally important, contributors to the study of religion who come from outside the so-called "Western" world will do much to overcome the secular rationalism that has been the secret religion of so much religious study in the last hundred years. For as Buddhists write on Christian traditions, Hindus on Jewish traditions, and Muslims on Taoist traditions, we will begin to overcome the limitations of the Western secular rationalist bias in the study of religion.

At the same time, we must be aware of the limitations of comparative study: while we can establish commonalities across traditions, we must beware of too easily seeing identities.

Each tradition is a complete and distinct melody of its own, with each note gaining its particular resonance and distinctiveness in relation to that whole melody. Thus to compare traditions as if the presence of the same or similar notes in each is equivalent to establishing the identity of the two traditions is not only bad musicology but it is bad comparative religion. In other words, the question of the one and the many, or of unity and difference, must be approached with great caution and only out of a deep awareness and appreciation of the distinctive melody or melodies present in a given tradition. To observe, for example, that there are certain similarities, or at least comparative possibilities, between Luther's doctrine of "faith alone" and the emphasis on "faith alone" found in certain forms of Pure Land Buddhism, especially Nichiren, is both suggestive and misleading. Each doctrine understood in the fullness of the respective traditions in which it stands, means

quite different things. And yet to note such parallels can be illuminating. Thus there is the constant danger of superficial comparisons suggested by analogies of language or terminology, rather than of substance.

Thus we should be at great pains to acknowledge the differences in the very process of comparing, for example, "faith" in the different traditions. Without the dialectic of similarity and difference as a constitutive part of religious studies we fall either into a simplistic identification or into sheer multiplicity. Thus I prefer the term "the multiform traditions" as a way of suggesting the essential point: religiousness comes in multiple forms, but they are still forms of religiousness. We can respect the manifold melodies while still recognizing their kindred character as expressions of the Transcendent Musician.

Indeed, a major task of the comparative study of religion is to disclose the different ways in which the same or similar terms are used, meant and understood in different traditions. For example, an examination of the term "prophet" as it appears and has come to be understood in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions reveals more differences in meaning than similarities. And such an investigation might contribute considerably to understanding between these traditions. Thus comparative study often moves within the context or against the backdrop of identity and difference, attempting both to respect the integrity of the particular traditions and to show commonalities (if not identities) across traditions.

*Note Number Three: The Human Notes of a Tradition's
Melody*

When asked about his religion, Gandhiji replied, "You must watch my life, how I live, eat, sleep, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all these in me is my religion."⁵ It is important as students of religion to be reminded that religion is something lived, something manifest, in the deeply religious and culturally religious, in the whole range of a human beings being and doing. We must remember that religion comes embodied in the lives of human beings who are, finally, the human focus of our study. Religion, as Wilfrid Cantwell Smith has observed, is more concerned with the study of persons than "its," abstrac-

tions that we label Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. This is a crucial point for the student of religion to recall, and it is never far from consciousness if we make the living encounter of persons of different faiths the point of departure for comparative study. Here we are immediately confronted by the human notes of the tradition one wants to understand. It is not Hinduism as such—a notion that every Hindu I have ever met rejects—but Shrivatsa, and Dr. Balasubramaniam, and those pilgrims going from temple to temple in Vrindaban, or bathing in the Ganges at Benares, that we seek to understand. It is the Muslims we met on the street as well as in the Mosque, at learned conferences or on pilgrimage to Mecca that are the human notes and faces of the tradition. Every tradition has a more popular as well as a more learned face, a more textual as well as a more behavioural side, inward dynamics as well as outward institutions. And all of these have to be expressed in the process of understanding one another. All of these have contributed to the formation of the persons who call themselves Muslims or Hindus or Christians or Jews or Buddhists, but even all taken together they do not make the mystery of another person's lived religiousness any less profound.

Thus though we in the profession of the study of religion can be pleased with the information on the religious life that we have gathered, even with some of the theories we have constructed, we must even be more conscious of how little we understand the complexities of the human religious psyche, or institutions, or the dynamics of piety, or the subtleties of texts. We can not now, nor will we ever be able to say that we have explained religion, we can only make some limited progress in understanding what comes to expression in human beings as the traditions are lived from generation to generation. The reason for my sense of the limitations of our study is not just related to the limits of rational inquiry but also to the conviction that has grown in me through the study of religion that human life is only partially available to us, that human lives are rooted in a Beyond, an Ultimacy, that always exceeds the measure of our methods. And yet I would not underestimate the importance of our work, only note its limits.

The student of religion is not only concerned to under-

stand the externals of religious life, its institutions, its postures of prayer and meditation, its texts and theologies, its actions and history, but how each of these interfaces with the within of the religious person, what we call the "life of faith." In understanding that great within we are again and again brought face to face with the mystery of the human person, especially of those persons who believe the within is linked to a Beyond. Let me turn again to the figure of Gandhi. In the recent film of Gandhi, so widely praised (and justifiably so), we encounter the political Gandhi, the leader of movements that led to the independence of India. But what was missing here, I felt, was a sense of the inward spiritual dynamic that funded and pervaded his acts. For that we must turn to an outstanding study like Margaret Chatterjee's *Gandhi's Religious Thought*⁶ which brings us more in touch with that great within of this man's life, with what he called in his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.⁷ In this example we can perhaps see something of the multiformity of the religious person, that they come from somewhere (have a history), are formed by institutions and practices (have an outer front), have an interior life of prayer, meditation and inwardness (have an inner front), and a forward front of aspiration, hope and dreams. And as we approach the multiform human being we have to see how these dimensions of their life are rooted in a Beyond if we are to grasp them aright, or even in part.⁸

Thus the human notes of religious life gain their resonance and fullness by their rootedness in the Beyond as that is given to them in the twistings and turnings of their living experience. And this must always be remembered by the student of religion.

*Note Number Four: Dissonance and Discord, Conflict
between Religions*

Throughout these essay I have emphasized the positive aspects of the living encounter between men and women of different faiths. But it must also be acknowledged that dissonance and discord are equally part of this living encounter. Beliefs and practices are perceived to conflict, antagonisms rooted in the long histories of conflict between traditions surface, mis-

trust continually manifests itself. Here again I believe that the scholar of religion has an important role to play in examining the roots and nature of this dissonance and discord, of helping persons and communities to sort out these conflicts in which the scholar himself (or herself) is often involved. The comparative study of religion can contribute to this process of mutual understanding by providing that forum for reasoned examination. In the West one thinks for example or especially of the long and bitter relations between the Jewish and Christian communities. What progress there has been overcoming some aspects of this long and bitter history has been made by those who have risked dialogue and by scholars in both traditions who have been willing to reexamine their own traditions on this point. From this process, many (but still too few) Christians have been led beyond the caricatures of Jews and theological prejudices that have too long been part of the Christian heritage.

One might hope for similar developments within India, and there have been some,—for example, the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies research on “Inter-religious Perceptions of Hindus and Muslims” in 1982, as well as Gandhi’s own example—as the way to lessen, if not overcome, communal tensions.⁹ Surely this is needed around the planet: in the Middle East, Ireland, Sri Lanka, South Africa and everywhere where religious differences are believed to be a source of dissonance rather than harmony. Here the scholar of religion who is also a believer in a particular religious community can make a significant contribution by being a person within that community who urges understanding rather than continued conflict, who can show that genuine differences can have creative rather than conflictual consequences.

Again the contributions of the scholar of religion to overcoming dissonance and discord will be modest. But at least she should attempt to bring the light of understanding to this area in the hope that greater degrees of understanding—without asserting anything about the ultimate compatibility or incompatibility of the particular religions—will contribute to turning the conflict in a more creative direction.

*Note Number Five: Dancing in the Divine Presence and
the Study of Ritual*

Western scholars of religion, especially those who come out of Protestant Christianity, have perhaps placed too much emphasis on “belief” in the study of religion. When one moves outside the Western traditions—but even here the importance of ritual needs to be more fully acknowledged—one quickly encounters the centrality of ritual or dancing in the presence of God to many traditions. The centrality of rituals, festivals, or gestures of the holy is reflected in the very calendars of the non-Western world. I learned recently that the traditional calendar of Bali, for example, is basically for the purpose of indicating the timing of rituals that permeate the society of Bali throughout the lunar year. And here in India one encounters an astonishing number of festivals in the Hindu community, and rarely a day could be found on which some festival is not celebrated in some part of the country. Indeed in some of the bhakti or devotional traditions, festival, dance, ritual, and pilgrimage are the chief expressions of a life of devotion. Here participation takes precedence over the other notes of the religious life: it is being caught up in the life of the Divine as it is acted out, performed, not in the sense of artificiality, but as it is lived, that is crucial.

The bias of Western scholarship towards belief is reflected in the volume after volume on the doctrine of this or that tradition that appears in comparison to the much smaller number of studies on the ritual life and expressions of the different traditions. We in the study of religion need, I believe, to give more attention to the religious experience of ritual as an expression of living in the presence of the Divine.

*Note Number Six: Remembering the Whence, the
Historical Dimension*

Even though I have emphasized the living encounter of men and women of different faiths as our point of departure, I do not mean, nor do I think it possible, to underestimate the importance of historical study. Every religious person has a whence, both a source in the historical flow of things and a place in the

unfolding of generations. Thus we are led to understand that history that provides the backdrop to the present. But I cannot agree with Professor Ninian Smart that placing religion in a historical perspective is the great achievement of the modern study of religion.¹⁰ Here we must recognize the limitations of the historical method, not only the tendency to historicism but also that many religions do not understand themselves in historical terms. Thus to insist on this frame of interpretation may be inadequate and distort their own self-understanding. Nevertheless, it does seem that persons in every tradition have a sense of their whence: the guru and guru's guru that initiates, the lineage of one's teachers, and the traditions of one's sacred texts are all ways of situating oneself in relation to those who came before. And it is this story that is remembered in the lives of religious persons and of believing communities. Thus the scholar of religion is obliged also to pay attention to the historical as the living backdrop to the present generation's experience of the tradition. Historical scholarship can also be disturbing to the religious community as it always makes one aware of both the elements of continuity and discontinuity within the tradition. Let me quickly mention two further notes in this new key.

Note Number Seven: Communities of Faith Living the Melody

Religious life is not only embodied in persons and traditions, but also in communities of faith that must themselves harmonize in the distinctive ways of living the melody found in each tradition. Within every community of faith are to be found those who live the melody in more ritualistic ways, those who live it in more mystical ways, those who live it in more moral (and moralist) ways, those who live it in more intellectual ways, etc. This internal variety contributes to the richness of a community's life, but it also creates tension as there is a continual internal conversation in every community about the best way to live the melody. This multiplicity of types within each community of faith is also the basis for the recognition of commonalities across traditions, commonalities that involve mystics in different traditions, moralists in different traditions,

intellectuals in different traditions, etc. But here again we encounter the dialectic of same yet different, different yet similar.

While, for example, the Sufi, the Sant, the Pir, the Ricchi, and the Saint may all be mystics, their internal experience has been shaped and articulated by the distinctive paths that have nurtured them. Thus we must respect both the differences and the points of contact, and perhaps their common witness to a Beyond in which they are caught up and transformed. My point, once again, is one of caution, of comparative study preceding only on the basis of rigorous fidelity to the lives, texts, traditions, and communities we are seeking to understand.

*Note Number Eight: The Unfinished Symphony: The
Future of Religious Pathways*

Finally, the student of religion must be aware that the traditions of faith are still unfinished, still in process, still unfolding, still between the Beyond from which they emerged and towards which they go. Likewise, the relations between the different traditions remain in process and will not be settled by the works of scholarship. Whether or not these many melodies will contribute to an even greater symphony we cannot know. But yet the scholar of religion has a worthy vocation: to contribute to understanding, both within and between traditions, of the religious heritage and living present of the religious story of humankind.¹¹

That story is as infinitely varied as the millions of human beings who today live out the present chapter, as multiform as the different pathways of traditions that seek to lead us to the Beyond, and yet as unitary as the story of humankind in relation to that Beyond which has been heard singing the many melodies of the Ultimate. The end of it all we may not know, nor need we. What should suffice for the scholar of religion is the opportunity to attempt to understand, to hear something of the music amidst all the dissonance. And if I am right then that means that she must cultivate an ear for the Mystery of the Beyond, a disciplined imagination that will allow her to walk with another, remembering the priority of the human face we wish to understand, aware of the manifold pathways of the religious life and their manifold dimensions, and with

a sensitivity to the dancing forms that come before us. Such a scholar will not forsake the demands of fidelity in depth for superficial similarities, or be content to offer superficial explanations when deeper understanding is called for. They will, in the words of the Quran, “follow that which is inspired in thee from the Lord” (Surah 33.2).

Taken together these “notes” would lead to a “new key” in the study of religion. A key to be sung in different ways according to the improvisation of the singer/scholar and in harmony with the divine melody one encounters in the study of the pathways to the Beyond, pathways that unfold in response to the cosmic harmony it is our gift to receive.

Endnotes

¹ S. H. Vahiddudin, *Religion at the Crossroads* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1980), 8.

² Ninian Smart, *Beyond Ideology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 54.

³ I have suggested some of those “masters” above. I might also mention John Blofeld and his studies of the Taoist tradition and J. V. Murti and his studies of Buddhism.

⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?” in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, ed. Mircea Eliade and J. M. Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 52.

⁵ Gandhi, *Harijan*, 22 September, 1946.

⁶ Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi’s Religious Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 1983).

⁷ Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 1st ed. (Ahmedabad: Narajivan Press, 1927).

⁸ For a fuller discussion of the grammatical or cruciform method indicated here see Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Speech and Reality* (Norwich VT: Argo Books, 1973) and M. D. Bryant and Hans Huessy, ed., *Eugen Rosenstock Huessy: Studies in His Life and Thought* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986).

⁹ See the study at the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies in New Delhi entitled “Inter-Religious Perceptions of Hindus and Muslims,” 1982.

¹⁰ Smart, *Beyond Ideology*, 24 ff.

¹¹ Since I gave these lectures, I have written a volume which contributes to the last note mentioned here. It is entitled *Woven on the Loom of Time: Many Faiths and One Divine Purpose* (New Delhi: Suryodaya/Decent Books, 1999).

PART II

Three Essays In the Dialogue of Religions



Shinto Shrine in Kyoto, Japan

IV

Inter-Religious Dialogue: The Problems and Prospects of “Overcoming History”

This essay was first given as a lecture at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in New Delhi. Although it addresses the larger issue of “overcoming history” in order that we might begin a new era in the relations between people of different faiths, my main instances are Muslim/Christian and Hindu/Christian. I trust it will contribute to dialogue and understanding between men and women of different faiths.¹

Let me begin with a few qualifications. First, I must acknowledge that I am not a specialist in Islam, nor of the Hindu traditions. But I am a student of comparative religion and, more importantly, I have come to have some knowledge of the Muslim and Hindu faiths and worlds through my involvement in the dialogue of Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews and the peoples of diverse faiths. It is in this context that I have developed some living awareness of the power of faith in Allah, the acknowledgement of Mohammad as his prophet, and of the manifold ways to the Absolute found in the Hindu traditions. Second, I must admit that I do not know either Arabic or Sanskrit. Thus I have not been able to recite the Qu’ran in its proper language but only in translation. Likewise, Hindu scriptures are only known to me in translation. Third, I must acknowledge that as well as being a student of the religious life of humankind I am also a Christian. I say this in order that you understand the tradition that has shaped me.

In the contemporary dialogue of people of different faiths there is no wholly neutral standpoint, for all of us bring to that dialogue the particular faiths that have shaped us. And each of us are part of one or another of the varied traditions of faith and culture. Thus no one is privileged, no one stands outside, no one occupies a neutral standpoint.

Fourth, and finally, I must acknowledge with gratitude the

opportunity to spend part of an earlier sabbatical in the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies. Dr. Syed Ausaf Ali, its founder, has helped me to understand something of the tradition of Islam. I suppose that one of the first things that often surprises a Western student of religion is to discover that Islam is not confined to the Arab peoples but embraces diverse racial and ethnic communities, from Indonesia to India and the former Soviet Union, from Iran through the Middle East and down into Africa. It is also worth noting that Islam is now the fastest growing religious community in both the USA and Canada. (Some within the black community in the USA see it as an “empowering Way” without the racism of American Christianity.) And during that same sabbatical year I was also a visiting scholar at the Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Studies in Philosophy at the University of Madras and was initiated into the world of devotion to Lord Krishna at Vrindaban through my good friend, Sri Shrivatsa Goswami. I mention these things because it is part of the thesis of this essay that we will only begin to “overcome history” as we begin to create a new history of relationships between persons of the different traditions.² But let me now turn to the essay proper and place over it two verses, one from the Qu’ran and one from the Upanishads.

First, from the Qu’ran:

[In A. Yusaf Ali’s translation] Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold, that never breaks ... (Surah 2:256).³

Second, from the Isa Upanishad:

[In Juan Mascaro’s translation] Behold the universe in the glory of God: and all that lives and moves on earth. Leaving the transient, find joy in the Eternal: set not your heart on another’s possession.”⁴

We shall return to these quotations at the end of the essay, but for now just let them stand without comment.

Here I intend to do four things: (1) to unfold something of the history that must be overcome, (2) to point to a way of



Taj Mahal in Agra, India

meeting between different faiths, (3) to highlight some of the outstanding issues that Hindus, Christians, and Muslims must address, and (4) to conclude with some recommendations.⁵

On Overcoming History: A Clarification

I have entitled this essay on interreligious dialogue “Overcoming History” for the simple reason that in order for there to be a significant encounter and dialogue between men and women of different faiths it will be necessary to overcome the long history of antagonism between the different traditions. Let me illustrate this in relation to Muslim/Christian relations. Perhaps in no instance is our thesis as painfully obvious as it is in relation to these two remarkable faiths: Islam and Christianity. In his introduction to *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, Huston Smith says simply and directly “during most of their history, Muslims and Christians have been at odds”⁶

Albert Hourani, in his *Islam in European Thought* writes, “from the time it first appeared, the religion of Islam was a problem for Christian Europe. Those who believed in it were the enemy on the frontier.”⁷ Such statements could be multi-

plied by citing other authorities but these will suffice.

From the very beginning of the Muslim era, Christians, especially in the West, have misunderstood, misrepresented, and maligned the faith of those who regard Mohammad as "the Messenger of God." Albert Hourani characterizes the Christian attitude in this way: "they (Christians) knew that Muslims believed in one God ... but they could not easily accept that Mohammad was an authentic prophet The teaching of Mohammad ... was [perceived as] a denial of the central doctrines of Christianity"⁸ Thus it is essential that the Christian world repent of its failure to adequately acknowledge the faith of Islam. The Christian stereotype of Islam begins with a mistake about its very name. Rather than recognizing Islam for what it is, namely, "the perfect peace which comes from surrender to Allah," for centuries Christians have referred to Islam as "Mohammadanism." This is an error which strikes at the very heart of Islamic faith in Allah. It is only recently that Western Christians have even begun to name aright the great tradition of Islam. The West is just beginning to learn the fundamentals of Islam: the Five Pillars, the Qu'ran, and the prophet Mohammad.⁹

But it is not Christians alone who have failed to grasp the faith of Muslims. If I may be so bold, Muslims have also often characterized the Christian faith in ways that would not be acceptable to authentic Christians. Again let me turn to Albert Hourani: "For Muslim thinkers, the status of Christianity was clear. Jesus was one of the line of authentic prophets which had culminated in Mohammad, the 'Seal of the Prophets,' and his authentic message was essentially the same as that of Mohammad. Christians had misunderstood their faith, however, as they thought of their prophet as god, and believed he had been crucified"¹⁰ While Muslims have always, in their own terms, recognized Jesus, they have often not been very positive about Christianity.

It is this history, one at once Christian and Muslim, that must be overcome. And, unfortunately, it is this story that in its own distinctive versions and notes is too often with us in the relations between the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and the other religious traditions of

humankind. As one Hindu commented to a Christian concerning the longer history of Christian relations with the Hindu world “[in] all matters concerning *dharma* you were deadly against us, violently or stealthily.” In the relations between the non-Abrahamic traditions, the pattern has often been different when in China Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist *chiao* or teachings came to accommodate each other in ways that overcame the need for exclusive allegiance.¹¹

Both of these patterns have been even more complicated in our century by the emergence of a secularism (in both Western and Communist versions) that regards all religion as superstition (or an *opiate* à la Marx or an *illusion* à la Freud) and a vestige of a past age and not worthy of respect nor understanding.

Let me explain why I began with “history” and the sense in which I am here using the term. In 1993, at the University of Waterloo, I invited a Muslim woman from Waterloo (originally from India) to present to my class on “interreligious encounter and dialogue” something of the faith of Islam. She did a splendid job of outlining the major features of the Islamic faith. But in the discussion that followed, she made the following statement: “Christians have always been hostile to Islam. Look at what’s happening in Bosnia: Christians are killing Muslims and everyone just stands by and watches. It’s a continuation of the Crusades.” I was shocked by her statement. Partly because I realize that there is some truth to it—it is probably true that many countries in Europe and North America are not as exercised by these events as they would be if Christians were being slaughtered—and that in itself is appalling. But her statement also made me realize that for many (both in the Muslim and Christian world) the “Crusades” is not just an event of medieval history. It continues to be a living sense of the ongoing relationship between Christians and Muslims. While it is perhaps understandable—given the depth of Christian misunderstanding of and antagonism towards Islam—that a Muslim would perceive Christianity as a hostile, aggressive force—it is also disconcerting.

The second story involves Christian responses to the Hindu world. I regularly take my students to visit Muslim Masjids, Sikh Gurdwaras, and Hindu Mandirs, and the more typi-



Jama Masjid in Delhi, India

cal Christian comment, often heard from my students when I take them to a Hindu temple, is “yes, but that’s all idolatry.” It is a comment that just comes spontaneously from their Christian background and does not have anything to do with what the Hindus have just told us about the images we have seen in their mandir or temple. It is often a long and difficult process to get my students to understand the “images of the Absolute” that one encounters in the Hindu traditions *in their own terms*. For Hindus, images of the Absolute are not forbidden. Indeed they are essential. The image gives form to the believers for their sake, but none of the forms are the Absolute itself which is beyond all form. “Nameless and Formless Thou art, O Thou Unknowable. All forms of the universe are Thine: thus Thou art known” is the way it is put in a hymn of praise to the Great Goddess.¹²

What these comments make clear is that we all, whether Christian or Muslim or Hindu come to the encounter and dialogue between faiths burdened, for good and ill, by the legacy of the past. We are, as Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy saw so clearly, creatures who, while living in the present, face four directions simultaneously.¹³ Backward and forward in time,

inward and outward in space. And here at the intersection of these four fronts—the crux where we live—we are confronted continuously with what from the past we need to let go of and what we need to retain, what from the future we must respond to and that to which we must say no. These are certainly questions that confront the believers in all traditions in the present situation.

The issue for us is not “overcoming history” in some specialized or professional sense, nor is it a task of rewriting history. Rather, *it is the past that lives in the present and shapes our perceptions and responses to the faith of the other that must be overcome.*

I will not presume to say what that past might be in Muslim and Hindu consciousness, but let me illustrate this by making some points about the Christian world in the USA and Canada. The images of Islam especially in the contemporary West are not positive. Some of the images North Americans have of Muslims are that Muslims are people who attempt to blow up the World Trade Centre in New York City. (And now, after September 11, 2001, they are fanatics who hijack airplanes and slam them into the WTC killing thousands.) They are terrorists in the Middle East or oil-rich Sheiks who live without regard for the everyday Muslim in their home country. They have no regard for the rights of women. They are led by fanatical leaders in North Africa and the Middle East. And I could go on and on. Writing in 1983, R. Marston Speight in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, wrote,

In general ... the people of this country remain uninformed as to what Islam is and what Muslims are like ... the prejudices and stereotypes of the past still persist so that the image projected of Islam upon the imagination of the average American is one of intolerant, legalistic, and fatalistic religion¹⁴

Little seems to change.

And the story is not that positive in relation to images of Hindus among Christians. Hindus have long been regarded by Christians in North America as primitive, poor, and pagan.

They should be the object of Christian charity and mission-

ary work. In recent decades the view began to shift as we regarded Hindus as tolerant but that image has been tarnished by the Ayodhya affair.¹⁵ Most people in North America probably still regard Hindus as impoverished snake charmers and “idolaters.” These attitudes continue down into the present.¹⁶

Occasionally a voice does challenge these prejudices about people of other faiths. On September 14, 1993, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter (a devout Christian) commented on the American attitude towards the Muslim world in *The Times of India*, saying: “I think there is too much of an inclination in this country to look on Muslims as inherently terrorist or inherently against the West.” I was very pleased to see this statement, and it needs to be made often in the current climate in North America.

Let me be very clear. I am not saying that any of these negative images are correct. But I am saying that they are the ones that dominate the public media and the public consciousness of Christians (and the secular or non-religious as well) in the USA and Canada. And they are all negative. They do not serve the cause of truth and understanding between people of different faiths but they do serve the cause of secular political and religious forces that would maintain the long legacy of bitter relations between communities of different faiths. Thus both the contemporary situation and the historical record do not bode well for any significant encounter and dialogue between people of diverse faiths.

On the Possibility of Encounter and Dialogue

Are we doomed to endlessly repeat history? Is there an inherent hostility, as someone recently said to me, between religions? Is there a way to overcome this past and move towards a new day in the relations between people of different faiths? I believe that there is, and that is the way of interfaith encounter and dialogue.¹⁷ This movement heralds a new day for relations between different faiths and faith communities. It has as its aim mutual understanding and mutual recognition. Just as the past and present history of bitter relations between people of different faiths is the consequence of human acts that promoted antagonism and hatred against those they did not know

for motives that were dark and ignorant, so a new history can grow out of the acts of understanding, compassion, and mutuality that are the fruit of dialogue.

In a meeting of faiths characterized by dialogue, it is essential that each community be *allowed to define itself*. This is the first rule of dialogue. Rather than insisting on our perception of the other, we must begin with the other's understanding of its own faith and community. When Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Confucianists and Muslims (to name but a few) meet in this way, then we can move beyond the stereotypes and misperceptions of the past and be open to the other in terms of its own self-understanding, its own faith. When people of different faiths begin to truly meet, we will begin to confront the living past and we will experience some of the dissonance between our preconceptions and prejudices and the reality of the other faith. I remember with considerable embarrassment my own encounters with Muslims and Hindus over the past twenty years. I recognize that I too was caught in some of the prejudices and misconceptions I mentioned earlier. I was so surprised to meet Indian and Indonesian and Saudi Muslims who did not fit my expectations. And I discovered that Hindu devotion was often deeper and more profound than devotion found in my own community of faith and that they were not "idolaters." Through meeting in the spirit of dialogue, then, I had to confront my own "living past" and "overcome" it so that I might relate to the reality of the other.

In the encounter and dialogue between people of different faiths, the obligation is to listen to the other and attempt to understand them *in their own terms*, and to relate to them in accordance with their own self-understanding and vice-versa. This approach overcomes the too familiar pattern of either assuming one knows the faith of the other, or attempting to force them into the stereotypes of the past. Nowhere perhaps is this more obvious than the way we in the Abrahamic traditions regard the images of the Divine that are so present in Hindu life and culture. Rather than seeing them in our terms and its assumptions we need to see them in terms of the assumptions and religious contexts of those for whom they are "images of

the Divine.”¹⁸ We need to meet in a freshness and openness of spirit, willing to allow ourselves to be surprised and moved by the *din*/faith in Allah and His Prophet Mohammad, or by the faith in Jesus as the Christ, or by devotion to Krishna and Radha. This is the second rule of dialogue.

The third rule of dialogue is that when we meet in dialogue, we meet as fellow human beings and pilgrims in faith. Too often in the history of religion we have “demonized” those of other faiths. We in the Christian traditions have too often called all non-Christians “pagans” and acted as if God were not present to other peoples unless we Christians were there. This is an insufferable arrogance and a betrayal of faith in the God who is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of humankind. There are parallels to this attitude in other religions. However, when we meet in dialogue, we quickly discover that we share a common humanity (although some follow the Christian way of being human, others the Muslim way of being human, others the Hindu ways, others the Buddhist way, and so on) and that we are fellow pilgrims in our respective journeys towards the Absolute. We do not have the same faith; we have our own distinctive faiths. But at the same time, we discover crucial things that are shared across tradition: beliefs in the Ultimate, values of compassion and virtue, concerns for the welfare of “all sentient beings” (as the Buddhists say), an antipathy to evil and so on. To come into dialogue and to recognize these shared values is illuminating and transforming. It can and will profoundly alter the relations between the faith communities.

A similar point has been made by Klaus Klostermaier in writing about Hindu-Christian dialogue,

Dialogue is primarily the meeting between human beings. Hindu-Christian dialogue is not so much the meeting between Hinduism and Christianity as between Hindus and Christians, each professing his (or her) own faith. Dialogue stems ... from a profound recognition of the mutuality of our common life ... it deepens our sensitivity and promotes understanding ...¹⁹

The fourth rule of dialogue—and the last one I will men-

tion here—is that in the meeting of people of different faiths, it is essential that the depths of the respective faiths come to expression. There is often a misconception of what occurs in dialogue. Many believe that it is a polite meeting where the depths of our respective faiths are set aside in the name of an easy tolerance. But this is a misconception. Genuine encounter and dialogue is a meeting of the deepest levels of our respective faiths, where we bear witness to what of the spirit and of the Absolute has been given to us. This we do not for the sake of persuading the other that we are right and they are wrong, but for the sake of bearing witness to what each has experienced and knows of the One who is beyond, yet deep within. When we meet in this way, when the dialogue goes this deeply, then all involved can grow not only in their own faith but in their recognition of the validity of the other.

We will sometimes encounter profound differences that we cannot accept. But even here we must be willing to let those differences stand as we continue our efforts to appreciate the other faith. Klaus Klostermaier puts it this way,

the encounter of two absolute Truth claims ... does not end with an abandoning of the absolute Truth claim on either side or on both sides, nor does it result in quarrels in order to establish one truth claim against the other, nor is just politely keeping silent in order not to offend the other partner, knowing well that he or she must be wrong Hindu-Christian dialogue goes on and brings both partners to realise the limits and values of their own 'truths' in their traditions and it constantly kindles the spark of the *pneuma*; it renews the *eros*, gives greater emphasis to the *mumuksutoam*; it makes the partner more open for Truth—and that is how we come nearer to Truth."²⁰

Sometimes, however, we will discover that differences do not always threaten, but can be the occasion for profound intellectual, moral, or spiritual growth.

A similar point was made by John Taylor and Muzammil Siddiqi in "Understanding and Experience of Christian-Muslim Dialogue" when they wrote:

Dialogue was essentially to be undertaken in a spirit of repentance wherein we turned our backs on past and present prejudice, wherein we turned to our neighbor in the spirit of love, wherein we turned to God, as He offered Himself to us."²¹

Through meeting in a spirit of dialogue—taking the other seriously on its own terms, listening profoundly and speaking truthfully, growing in appreciation of our shared humanity across tradition, and witnessing to the Ultimate who is the source and object of genuine faith—we can begin to overcome history and enter a new day in the relations between faiths. Fortunately, this is not merely a theoretical or “Pollyanna” statement since there are already pioneers of the dialogue between religions that have begun to build new understanding and different relations between traditions of faith. I think here of Swami Abhishiktananda/Henri LeSaux, Bede Griffiths and Vandana Mataji as Christians in dialogue with Hindus at a profound level, or Swami Chidananda and Swami Ranganathananda for their encounter with Christianity or of Dr. Shivacharya Shivamurthy for his efforts to build Hindu-Muslim understanding in Karnataka and for Syed Ausaf Ali, who has championed dialogue between Muslims and people of other faiths for more than three decades. In these people and many others that new history is beginning to dawn.²²

Can We Value the Faith of the Other?

As I have already indicated, the first problem to be overcome is the appalling ignorance of the West concerning other faiths, but especially Islam. This can be achieved most powerfully and profoundly through face-to-face meetings of Christians and Muslims. In such meetings, stereotypes and misconceptions quickly give way to an acknowledgement of the integrity and depth of each other's faith and path. The same can be said for the meeting of Hindus and Christians. The second way is through education. We need to include education about the many religious traditions of humankind in our schools. Such education should not serve the apologetic interests of a given religious community, but should be an account of the various

faiths that a believer in a given tradition can recognize as valid. I say this because I believe it essential that the study of religion be not only accurate and historically sound, but also convey something of the living heart of the various traditions.²³ Such education about the different religious traditions should also be a critical education, that is, it should not fail to speak accurately and critically of the way in which each tradition has lived its faith or has failed to live its faith in history.

The legacy of ignorance and antagonism between the religious traditions will not be overcome without inspired religious leadership. Those in positions of authority within their respective communities of faith must take up the cause of respecting other faiths and seek to communicate that respect for other Ways to their own communities. No one, to my mind, has done this more profoundly in our time than H. H. the Dalai Lama. One repeatedly finds in his writings and his speeches positive statements about other faiths. Let me quote him speaking to his own community:

We should accept that there are many different religions and that each one is valuable. Each religion has a special technique and message for humanity ... despite having different philosophies, all religions teach us to be good human beings ... all religions have the potential to produce good human beings.²⁴

Think of the impact such words would have if spoken by all religious leaders.

When we meet one another on the basis of mutual respect and some understanding of the faith of the other, then there will be other issues we must address. There will be complex theological issues to address: our understandings of the Divine, our differing understandings of Jesus/Isa, our differing views of the Qu'ran, Bible, Vedas, and other scriptures, etc. Among other issues are two that I would highlight as crucial for consideration: fundamentalism and conversionism. I have stated them in this way deliberately, for I want you to understand each for what it is—namely, an “ideology,” as indicated by the suffix “ism.” Let me try to make this clearer.

Fundamentalism

One of the problems that faces many communities of faith is that of “fundamentalism.” I know that many within the Muslim world do not like to use this term, since they rightly see it as having originated in the Christian world and as first defining a Christian phenomenon. And it is a term that some Hindus reject because it distorts what they consider to be a legitimate affirmation of their own Hindu way. But if we can move beyond these polemics to the reality, then we can see the issue. If the movement we call “fundamentalism” is a return to the fundamentals of faith, then *it is legitimate*, for it revitalizes the faith of the community. But this is not what the term usually connotes. The “fundamentalism” that must concern all communities is when faith is transformed into a closed ideology. The ideology then becomes a way to clothe or mask the fear and alienated consciousness of a group. The living faith of Hindus then becomes the ideology of “Hindutva” that leaves no place for people of other faiths, or the living “din” of Muslims becomes the ideology of “Jihad” that perceives everyone else as an enemy, or the living faith of Christians becomes the iron clad ideology that sees those outside the fold as not only enemies but “damned.”

Studies of Christian fundamentalism in the United States have shown that fundamentalism arises among sectors of the Christian population that have been marginalized and feel threatened by modern conditions of life and advances in knowledge. They react by articulating an ideological version of the Christian faith—inerrant scripture, insistence on certain dogmatic formulas, opposition to modern life, etc.—that is not open to question, but must simply be affirmed in the ideological terms of the group. This reaction and development can be found across many religious communities, and it needs to be addressed from within our respective religious communities. Such an ideology does not lead to a vital faith in Allah or God or the Absolute, but rather legitimizes the fears of the group. When, in the name of Hinduism or Islam or Christianity, one proclaims “death” to those whose faith is different from yours,

this is not authentic Hinduism, nor authentic Islam nor authentic Christianity.²⁵

Conversionism

Another issue, especially of the Christian world, that must be addressed if we are to move towards dialogical mutuality and understanding is “conversionism.” I mean here the attitude that the only way to relate to people of other faiths—Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Confucian, or non-believer—is to seek their conversion. This assumption is based on a profound confusion. In the Christian faith, *metanoia* or conversion is what follows in response to hearing the command to “Follow Me.” Thus it is a word directed towards the disciple, the follower, the Christian. It is the Christian who is called to “be turned around” to be “renewed in mind and spirit” which is the meaning of conversion. But far too often, Christians project this need onto someone else, the Other, whether Muslim or Hindu or Jew or Buddhist or even fellow Christian, rather than seeing it as their own deepest need. Parallel attitudes are to be found within the Muslim world and even in the tolerant world of Hinduism. But the point is that such a mentality stands in the way of dialogue, in the way of authentic meeting where Muslim and Christian and Hindu meet one another as brothers and sisters seeking to understand the One who is gracious and beneficent and beyond. It is not an issue of qualifying the Truth that has been given to us in our respective traditions, but of not insisting that our Truth exhausts all Truth.

It would be better for Christians to follow the lead of Vatican II which said:

the church also regards with esteem the Muslims who worship the One, Subsistent, Merciful, and Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, who has spoken to man ... to make sincere efforts at mutual understanding and to work together ...²⁶

Can we move in this direction?

These are but some of the issues that will need to be addressed in the encounter and dialogue between people of different faiths. From this dialogue there will not always emerge

agreement; but even in our differences, we will have a deeper understanding of one another.

A Final Word

If there is to be a future of dialogue between different faiths, then it will be necessary to overcome the bitter legacy of the past and present.

Caricatures and stereotypes of each other must give way to accurate understanding and mutual respect. This can only happen as we learn about each other, meet one another, study one another's faith and history, and seek to grasp our respective structures of belief and practice. It is imperative, for example, for the non-Muslim world to understand, as R. Zakaria has written, that "The Prophet is presented in the Qu'ran as the best example of its teachings and a perfect model of human behaviour."²⁷ Just as it is imperative for Muslims to understand that when Christians affirm that Jesus is the Christ, they do not diminish the God who is One. And we in the Abrahamic faiths must learn that the Hindu ways to the Absolute are not necessarily a rejection of the One God.

We will also have to come to understand that there is diversity within each tradition. While Christians from East and West share a common faith, they are also diverse not only in terms of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, but also in terms of different cultural and ethnic settings. Likewise, in Islam there are Shiites and Sunnis, and just as Muslims from West and East share the faith of Islam, they live it in different and changing ways across the Muslim world. Studies in Islam in the Indian, Indonesian, and Central Asian contexts—as well as Iranian and Nigerian—are making us all aware of the plurality within Islam itself. The problem is different as we move closer to the Hindu world where we will have to learn to see the unity across the diversity of communities and ways in the Hindu world.²⁸

As we begin to encounter and dialogue with one another, then the prejudices and misconceptions that have entered our respective cultures and literatures will begin to be overcome. We need to reach a day when Muslims understand aright Christian and Hindu texts and Christians understand aright

the Qu'ran and other writings of Muslims and those of the Hindus, and Hindus understand the texts of Christians and Muslims. We should all have the experience I have had reading the works of people such as the late Dr. Krishna Sivaraman the great Saivite scholar who worked most of his life in Canada or the remarkable Sufi scholar from Iran, Dr. Hossein Nasr, or Abdullah Durkee and many other Muslim and Hindu writers: the experience of growing in understanding of and sympathy with the other faith.²⁹

At the outset, I placed two verses over this essay, one from the Qu'ran and one from the Upanishads. Please forgive my audacity in offering these comments on them. The first, I believe, states a truth that Hindus, Muslims and Christians should affirm, namely, that in matters of religion there should be "no compulsion." Instead, we need to respect all those who "reject evil" and "believe in God" since this is the "most dependable handle." But it is important to link this Qu'ranic verse with the second verse from the Upanishads which urges all to "behold the universe in the Glory of God." This again I understand globally, as wisdom for believers in all traditions. For it is in beholding all—and that includes all the religious ways of humankind—in the "glory of God" that we find "joy" and do not set our hearts on "another 's possession." For it is important to understand that in the dialogue between religions, we are called not to reduce the intensity or depth of our own faith but to bear witness to it while respecting the faith of the other. So the proper contest between believers is not, I believe, in terms of the superiority of my faith over yours, but in the depth of our devotion to the One that Muslims call Allah, that Christians call God, and that Hindus call by many Names. For it is that One and that One alone who should be the object of our striving and our faith.³⁰

Endnotes

¹ A lecture given at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, October 27, 1993. It is partly based on a lecture given at the Center of Advanced Study in History at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India, in September 1993. I have made a few corrections/additions, but I have resisted making the many additions

RELIGION IN A NEW KEY

that could be made following September 11, 2001. These events only deepen, in my view, the need for encounter and dialogue.

² Some of the consequences of my experience and research during that year are found in this volume.

³ A. Yusuf Ali, Qu'ran, Surah 2:256. Compare the translation by R. Zakaria, *Muhammad and the Quran* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, India, 1991), 105.

⁴ Juan Mascaro, trans., *The Upanishads* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 49.

⁵ The more specific theological points of convergence and conflict between Islam, Hinduism and Christianity will not be addressed here; that would require several further essays.

⁶ Huston Smith, introduction to *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. C. Glasse (London: Stacey International), 5. In this context it is also worth noting Smith's citation of Meg Greenfield writing in *Newsweek* in 1979, "We are heading into an expansion of that complex religion, culture, and geography known as Islam. There are two things to be said about this. One is that no part of the world is more important ... for the foreseeable future. The other is that no part of the world is more hopelessly and systematically and stubbornly misunderstood by us."

⁷ Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Another Christian attitude towards Islam, and one more acceptable, is that found in the writings of now Bishop Kenneth Cragg, beginning with *The Call of the Mineret* in 1957. Occasionally there was a glimmer of another view as when Pope Gregory VII wrote to Prince al-nasir in 1076, "there is a charity which we owe to each other more than the other peoples because we recognize and confess one sole God, although in different ways ..." cited in Hourani, 9.

⁹ There are now several good introductions to Islam available in the West. One of the most accessible and readable is Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991).

¹⁰ Hourani, 8. This is again not simply a medieval attitude, it is still present in volumes like *Islam and Christianity* (Istanbul: Waqf Ikhlas Publications No. 12, 1991).

¹¹ Sivendra Prakash in C.M. Rogers and Sivendra Prakash, "Hindu-Christian Dialogue Postponed," in *Dialogue Between Men of Living Faiths*, ed. S. J. Samantha (Geneva: WCC, 1971). For the larger discussion see G. Parrinder, gen. ed., *Man And His Gods: Encyclopedia of the World's Religions* (London: Hamlyn, 1974), especially W.A.C.H. Dobson's "China," 263-306; Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956); W. E. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), especially "Guides of Interaction among Universal Religions," 110ff.; and Hajime Nakamura, *A Comparative History of Ideas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992).

¹² See Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1985). She cites Mark Twain who visited Banaras in the 1890s and wrote, "Idols. What a swarm of them there is! The town is a vast museum of idols—and all of them crude, misshapen, and ugly" (18). This ignorance is still

too much with us. The quotation in praise of the Great Goddess is found on p. 28. See also Arun Shourie, *Hinduism: Essence and Consequence* (Sahibabad: Vikas Publishing House, 1979), especially the chapter entitled "One End, Many Means," 92ff. He argues that "Just as there is only one reality, there is only one aim for man: to perceive that reality, to dissolve in it, to be one with Brahman" (92). And later, he says, "... the Upanishads teach us, realizing the Brahman and, upon realization, dissolving in Him, is the only aim or man" (96).

¹³ See Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Speech and Reality* (Norwich, VT: Argo Books, 1968). For an introduction to this remarkable but little known thinker see M. Darrol Bryant and Hans Huessy, *Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: Studies in his Life and Thought* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellem Press, 1985).

¹⁴ R. Marston Speight, *Christian-Muslim Relations, An Introduction for Christians in the USA* (Hartford, CN: NCCUSA, 1983), 2.

¹⁵ See Asghar A. Engineer, ed., *Babri Masjid Ramjanambhomi Controversy*, (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1990). The editor remarks that this is "... one of the major controversies which has been exploited politically ... in post-independence India" (1). See also the fine statement by Dr. Shivamurthy Shivacharya Mahaswamiji, *Communal Conflicts in India*, (Sirigere: Sri Taralabalu Jagadguru Brihanmath, 1993), where he concludes "the need of the hour is not to construct or demolish the Masjid or Mandir. Instead, we should aim at demolishing the walls of hatred and enmity in the minds of Hindus and Muslims and learn to live in harmony as brothers and sisters of the same human family ..." (36).

¹⁶ See, for example, Eck, *Darsan*, esp. 18ff.

¹⁷ For some of my own contributions to this movement see M. Darrol Bryant & Frank Flinn, eds., *Interreligious Dialogue: Voices from a New Frontier* (New York: Paragon House, 1985), and chapter 2 of this volume. See also Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1967).

¹⁸ In the foreword to Diana Eck's *Darsan*, we read "... it is our worldview, our philosophy, which prevents us from seriously considering the Hindu claim that Siva and Krishna, and their images, truly contain or manifest the divine.... So far from seeing ugly idols, we would then see with a vision which includes and advances understanding" (ii).

¹⁹ Klaus Klostermaier, "Hindu-Christian Dialogue," in S. J. Samartha, *Dialogue Between Men of Living Faiths*, 20. Sivendra Prakash, who is quoted above, continues his comment indicating why many Hindus are now suspicious of the motives of Christians interested in dialogue: "... the pity was that your attacks and derogatory remarks were founded in sheer ignorance of what really we are, ... believe and worship" (22).

²⁰ Klaus Klostermaier, "A Hindu-Christian Dialogue on Truth" in *Man's Religious Quest*, ed. Whitfield Foy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 697.

²¹ J. Taylor and M. Siddiqi, "Understanding and Experience of Christian-Muslim Dialogue," in S. J. Samartha, *Dialogue*, 60. See also S.J. Samartha & J.B. Taylor, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Geneva: WCC, 1973) and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, ed., *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths* (International Institute of Islamic

Thought, 1982). It should be clear that the call for dialogue is not equivalent to the comparative study of religion or history of religion, though the research and publication of historians of religion and comparativists have certainly contributed to understanding across tradition.

²² The literature of the dialogical encounter of people of different faiths is beginning to grow dramatically in recent years. Among those writings I will cite just a few: Swami Abishikhananda, *Secrets of Arunachala: Christian Hermit on Shiva's Holy Mountain* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1982); Vandana, *Gurus, Ashrams, and Christians* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1978), especially Part II on The Guru and the Ashram; and Swami Ranganathananda, *The Christ We Adore* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991). Orbis Books in the USA has established an excellent Faith Meets Faith series.

²³ I should mention here the many contributions of Wilfrid Cantwell Smith to the understanding of Islam, including his *On Understanding Islam* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, 1981). For Professor Smith, "to be a Muslim is to participate in the Islamic process in human history ..." (229). Here Smith emphasizes his role as a student of comparative religion, but he combines this with his Christian commitments in his important, *Towards a World Theology*, in the mid-1980s.

²⁴ See the Interview with H. H. the Dalai Lama in *Mandala* 13 (October, 1993). This is just one of innumerable examples that could be cited from his writings and his interviews.

²⁵ There are now many studies appearing on "Fundamentalism." Some are good, others are based on an antipathy to all religion and see every expression of religious fervor or depth as "fundamentalism." Such studies are to be avoided for their anti-religious bias. More useful studies are James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978) and Jeffery Hadden and W. Garrett, eds., *Prophetic Religion*, 2 vols. (New York: Paragon Press, 1986). The major project on "Fundamentalism" under the editorial direction of Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby employs, in my view, a too amorphous definition of the phenomenon, but contains some valuable studies. See their *The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 7ff. and also the three volumes edited by Marty and Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, *Fundamentalisms and the State*, and *Fundamentalisms and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991 and 1993).

²⁶ This text is cited in W.M. Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounter* (London: Routledge, 1991), 148-49. The II Vatican Council statement is cited for the simple reason that it reflects a new departure in the institutional life of the Christian tradition, not because it is fully adequate to what is being called for here.

²⁷ Zakaria, *Muhammad and the Quran*, 8. For example, Muhammad Ata ur-Rahim's, *Jesus, Prophet of Islam* (Norfolk, UK: Diwan Press, 1977), is not helpful in Christian-Muslim relations. It only takes seriously some hints in the Qu'ran and not the Quranic affirmations of Christians as a "people of the Book." And while it is necessary for Islam to understand its own understanding of Isa/Jesus as a prophet, it is not appropriate to conclude that any other understanding is wrong. Especially since, in dialogue with Christians, it is essential to allow Christians to explain their own faith and not to tell them what they should or should

not believe. Nor is Ram Swarup, *Hinduism vis-a-vis Christianity and Islam*, 3d ed. (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1992). While Swarup is right to critique Christian attitudes and practices towards Hindus, he ends up caricaturing Christianity and Islam. He finally says of all Christian theology that it "... derives from a mind prejudiced, self-centred and self-righteous ... [and] above all, like Islam, it is inwoven with bigotry and fanaticism and lacks charity ..." (63). Since I gave this lecture I have published with S. A. Ali, *Muslim Christian Dialogue: Promise and Problems* (St. Paul: Paragon Press, 1998). I have also published with Christopher Lamb a volume on conversion entitled *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies* (London: Cassell, 1999).

²⁸ See William R. Roff, ed., *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning* (London: Croom Helm, 1987) for a study that contributes to our understanding of Islam in diverse cultural settings. See also I. Q. Siddiqi, *Islam and Muslims in South Asia: Historical Perspective* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1987) and A. F. Imam Ali, *Hindu-Muslim Community in Bangladesh* (Delhi: Kanishka Publication House, 1992). For a discussion of the many communities within the Hindu world see J. R. Hinnells and E. J. Sharpe, *Hinduism* (Newcastle, UK: Oriel Press, 1972).

²⁹ See, for example, Krishna Sivaraman, *Saivism in Philosophical Perspective* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1973), S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

³⁰ Christians and Muslims often assume that in Hinduism there is just "polytheism," but this is incorrect. There are many theistic traditions within Hinduism. See, for example, Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Love of God: According to Saiva Siddhanta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). As he remarks, "The characteristic note of Tamil Saivism is its strict monotheism, with the conception of God as the Unique Supreme Person. This is in keeping with the bhakti religion, which proposes single-minded and undivided love to the Unique Supreme Being" (337). He continues, "the Saivite theologians do not conceive God's transcendence in such a way as to exclude any relation with the world and men. They repeatedly assert and demonstrate that Siva is not only transcendent but also imminent" (341). See also Bharatan Kumarappa, *The Hindu Conception of the Deity* (Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1979), where he argues that "... the world, consisting of matter and souls is the body of Brahman. He is distinct from it and forms its soul" and "Brahman creates out of free choice, there being no external force constraining Him to create" (210-11).

V
**Engaging One Another
A Christian at Eiheiiji (Japan)
And Kumsan-Sa (Korea)**

Dialogue means more than the exchange of ideas. It also involves the experience of engaging one another, of participating in one another's religious life and practice. Here, I want to share something of my journey into the Buddhist world of life and practice at the temple/monasteries of Eiheiiji in Japan and Kumsan-sa in Korea.¹

Japan: Daimanji and Eiheiiji

The fifteen hour flight was long and uneventful. Our approach to Japan was, however, remarkable. The islands were largely covered in cloud, punctuated here and there by black-green mountain tops. The scene that spread beneath me reminded me of the famous sand/rock garden in the Zen temple of Ryoan-ji in Kyoto that I had visited in 1985. It had entranced me then, and it had been the only moment on that journey when my sixteen year old son, Benjamin, became somewhat exasperated with me, remarking, "Dad, how can you just sit here. It's nothing but rocks." This time, my initial intention in coming to Japan had been to visit Kosen Nishiyama, a remarkable Soto Zen priest in Sendai, north of Tokyo. I had met Nishiyama at interfaith conferences and participated in the meditation sessions he had led. I had been drawn to him and wanted to spend some time with him at his Daimanji temple in Sendai. It was only when I arrived in Sendai that I came to know that he had done the first complete translation into English of Dogen's famous *Shobogenzo*.² This was doubly interesting to me since, shortly before leaving for Japan, I had received word that it was going to be possible to spend three days at Eiheiiji, Dogen's (1200-1253) famous temple/monastery of "Eternal Peace."

I spent several wonderful days with Nishiyama in Sendai, participating in temple life, reading the *Shobogenzo*, and engaging him in conversation about Soto Zen life and practice.³ Nishiyama had come with me to the airport at Sendai from which I would fly across Japan to the west coast to Komatsu. From there I would take a train to Fukui, then another train up into the mountains to Eiheiiji.

Though Dogen had earlier been in Kyoto, he had deliberately abandoned the centre of power for the remote place where Eiheiiji is located. As the train wound its way up into the mountains, I read bits and pieces from the *Shobogenzo* and thought about my time at Sendai with Nishiyama. Each morning at 4:30, we had climbed the two hundred steps up the hill behind his temple to an older temple that was also part of the complex. It was here that we would have our first meditation of the day following the ringing of the bell at 5:00 a.m. Once rung 108 times to symbolize overcoming the desires/attachments that keep one from Enlightenment, it is now rung a symbolic eighteen times.

The first service in the temple at the top of the hill involved chanting and some remarkable drumming by Nishiyama on a huge drum. The service was dedicated to Kokuzo, a cosmic bodhisattva. During the day there were services in Daimanji, often with only two or three in attendance. Sometimes Nishiyama spoke in English for my sake, but usually the language was Japanese, which I do not understand. Repeatedly, the message that came through from our conversations and his discourses was "Enlightenment comes through practice." Although my practice had involved meditation for some years, it was not in the style or form that I experienced with Nishiyama.

Nishiyama's meditation was the disciplined sitting that Dogen, the founder of the Soto Zen tradition in Japan, had urged. While Nishiyama acknowledged my own Christian convictions, he repeatedly assured me that Dogen's sitting meditation was "non-sectarian" and open to all. He urged me to practice zazen following these three rules: (1) "make proper form," lotus posture with back straight, (2) develop "longer breath," inhaling for ten seconds and exhaling for the same



A Buddha-hall at Eihei-ji, the Temple of Eternal Peace in Japan

time, and (3) “focus on the mind, try not to think, and come to complete stillness of whole body and whole mind.” So every day I did some sitting: at the temple on the top of the hill and in the main Daimanji temple below, sometimes in my room, sometimes on the hilltop.

Although I had visited Zen temples before, this was my first opportunity to be part of an active Soto Zen temple up close. I was surprised to discover the extent to which Daimanji, and the other temples I visited, were “keepers of the dead.” Many of the temple activities revolved around services for the ancestors who had died. This connection to the dead was reinforced by the annual O-Bon celebrations that were going on during the time I was in Sendai. The daily life of Daimanji was not as esoteric and as intellectual as many of the texts about Japanese Zen might suggest. I found this comforting.

My dominant recollection of Nishiyama is of his good natured humour. I’ll always remember asking him how I should address him. He gave me several options, but then indicated that his foreign students—currently he had two Polish students who had been with him for nearly five years and an American

who had been there for two—called him “Hojo San.” I laughed and then tried, I’m not sure how successfully, to explain to him the association, to my North American ears, of the title with Howard Johnson’s.

The countryside was gradually changing. As we went inland from the sea at Kumatsu, we went through large fields of rice and grains. After we changed trains at Fukui, we began our ascent into the mountains. The August air was humid and heavy, but the passing scene was green and glorious. Japanese pines lined the valley we had climbed as we came to Eiheiji, the small town that had grown up around the temple/monastery, which served mainly those on pilgrimage to Eiheiji.

The walk from the train-station is about a half hour but the heat and the steady climb upward make it seem longer. As I turned up another valley towards the temple-monastery of Eiheiji, I walked along a mountain stream and the sound of cicadas filled the air.

Through the entrance door and I had arrived. The entrance area was filled with tourists/pilgrims (how are they to be distinguished?). I found an “international desk” and was introduced to Reverend Jikisai Minami. He told me that there were three rules in the monastery. The first involved how one held one’s hands while walking in the monastery, (left thumb inside palm, right hand over the left as a cover and held at chest height). The second was that silence was to be observed in the bathroom and in the zazen hall. The third concerned the proper way to hold one’s hands during zazen: right inside left with the thumbs touching. I told him I wished to fast that day and that I did not want an evening meal. I was then taken to my room. As I passed beyond the entrance hall, the din diminished and the silence and peace of the place began to descend. It was this sense that led me later to write of Eiheiji:

Buddha beckons
in moss, and tree, and stone:
enter within, sit zazen

My room was simple, lovely and spacious. I was left to my own devices for a couple of hours and then a monk came to get

me. It turned out he was taking me downstairs to bathe. But how was I to know what he wanted? It was rather humorous since we shared no common words, but through his dramatic gestures and my hunches I finally guessed what we were about. At 6:50 Reverend Minami came by to take me to my first session of zazen. We went down hallways and stairs into a meditation hall where I was given my “pillow,” instructed in proper posture, breathing (“four times through the nose and mouth deeply then only through the nose, long and deep”), and ritual. Then I was left for twenty minutes with my nose sixteen inches from the wall. I tried to maintain my posture, focus on my breathing and silently—and probably unBuddhistically—called on Dogen for assistance and perseverance.

Suddenly, a bell rang and a monk appeared to escort me back to my room. Later that evening, he returned to bring me to Minami’s office where I was shown an excellent video on Eiheiji. (Unlike another video done by Japanese television that was scoffing in tone.) It showed Eiheiji through the seasons—roofs with three feet of snow on them in the winter—and something of the young monks in training. Most of the monks there were sons of Soto Zen priests who would eventually return to take over their family’s temple. Nishiyama did not come to own Daimanji in this way, but he was hopeful that his son would complete his training at Eiheiji and return to assist him at Daimanji.

Minami and I spent some time discussing the training received at Eiheiji—the young monks usually spend two years here after they have finished a university degree, preferably from one of the Soto Zen universities in Japan. Later, I would continue this conversation with Minami and Rev. Zendo Matsunaga, the head of the International Department. The training at Eiheiji focuses on zazen, ceremonies/rituals, and work. Both felt that there is not enough sutra study at Eiheiji, and they would have liked to see a social dimension added to the training at Eiheiji.

Eiheiji is a large, layered complex that goes up the mountain side. There are probably over twenty buildings in the complex. On my first morning at Eiheiji, Minami gave me the guided tour. We went through the meditation halls, the bud-

dha halls, the entrance halls, the ceremonial halls, the shrine to Dogen, and the kitchens. We walked up long wooden stairs that were roofed but half-open on the sides. Walking around the outside of the halls, along the singing stream that wends its way through Eiheiiji, through moss gardens, and under the towering trees, one was reminded again and again that for the Japanese, the sacred is in nature, not beyond it or against it. It is not nature wild but nature swept, as I was reminded when I saw the monks sweeping the moss. It is also nature groomed and shaped to yield its silent witness. Minami told me that I was free to wander about everywhere except for the monks' meditation hall which was off limits. And over the next two days, I did. Later, I was prompted to write of Eiheiiji:

who sits?
under your sloping roofs
on boards worn smooth by novice feet
on mats of reed, woven by practiced hands
amidst your towering cedars

beside your verdant moss?
who hears?
the birds among the trees, the talking brook
the quiet breeze, the ringing bell?
silence reigns
it is the temple of eternal peace.
it calls the buddha nature
to blossom.

That first morning I was awake at 2:50, washed and ready when a monk called at 3:30. I was taken to the visitors' meditation hall where that morning there were five others who were part of the meditation—all Japanese men that I placed in their late 50s or early 60s. The silence was deepened by darkness, and incense sweetened the air. Somewhere a bell rang, one gong echoing across the night. We sat: seeking to quiet the internal chatter, to just be, here. Ribbons of pain streaked up unpracticed limbs. Another bell is rung. The session is over.

At 4:50 a.m. I was led up the broad wooden steps to the

Ceremonial Hall at the top of Eihei-ji. It was a huge room of elegant simplicity. Shades of natural wood rather than the lively colours of the Korean temples created a sense of austerity that was enhanced by the formal entrance of about eighty student/monks who assumed positions along a central aisle leading to the imageless front of the hall. Their turns were precise, their postures rigid, their dress spotless. When the senior members of Eihei-ji entered the service commenced. The "Eihei-ji Sutras" are chanted and I followed along in my book: "Se son myo so gu ga kon ju mon pi Bus-shi ga in nen myo i kan ze on ..." through more than forty pages. The sutra-chanting was punctuated by the precise movements of three or four monks lighting incense, bowing in different directions, and performing other ritual gestures. But it was the chanting that dominated. It is impressive. At 5:35 the monks fell out and I returned down the long wooden stairs to my room. Breakfast would be at 6:30.

During the day I followed my own schedule as I wandered around the complex. At times I sat in the Buddha Hall, at others I read the *Shobogenzo*, at others I sat in the moss garden near Dogen's shrine, Joyoden. It was there that I wrote:

This is Dogen's place
 here time stands still, caught by tranquility
 born of zazen
 waters flow
 the air heavy with summer
 the moss a coverlet on the earth
 the rocks remember "being-time"
 there is no other place.
 just sit.
 we are here. satori.

And later I wrote of Dogen,

Echoing across the centuries:
 "drop mind-body!"
 follow the way:
 sit.

It knows not time, nor space, nor place.

IT IS:

ringing eternity, shimmering clouds
murmuring waters, glowing moss.

speaking beyond words
silence, zazen

That evening I again joined Minami for a conversation. This time the conversation began with a discussion of the limitations of language in relation to religious experience and ontology. Minami reminded me that the Zen tradition is very leery of language, fearful that we will confuse the pointing finger with the moon to which it is pointing. The conversation then turned to “deconstruction”—which he finds rather confusing—and the connections that have been drawn between it and Buddhism in general and Dogen in particular. We shared a laugh about the common ground we discovered in our confusion concerning deconstructionist writings. Minami admitted that some strands of Buddhism share the deconstructionist critique of language and concepts. But he made the essential point that Dogen’s famous “Uji-essay” on “Being-time” is grounded in the practice of zazen, of meditation, and not in some speculative nihilism as seems to be the case in deconstruction.

I returned to my room for some sitting meditation before I unrolled my bedding on the tatami mat. The rich memories of the day passed through my mind as I quickly went to sleep.

When I left Eiheiiji to return to Tokyo, the experience of the monks of Eiheiiji stayed with me. I later wrote:

They sit in silence, backs straight,
eyes open but not looking,
softly breathing, moving within,
heeding rhythms unseen,
practicing enlightenment.

Outside trees grow,
moss spreads, birds ride the wind,
water dances down the rocks, air moves unseen
as silence speaks:
beyond words, in rhythms deep within.

No outside, nor inside,
both beyond,
yet within.
They sit in silence.

It had been a moving experience and one that extended and deepened my sense of the Buddhist Way.

Korea: Kumsan-sa and Shimwon-am

Chonju is located about three hours south of Seoul by express bus. South of Chonju, a smaller highway winds its way up the valleys, through small villages, in the direction of Mt. Kum. In late August, the roadside is covered with red peppers drying in the hot sun. The rice fields are a deep green. There are signs of harvest in the terraced gardens and tiny fields that line the valleys. As the local bus twisted and turned through the villages of the valleys, always going up, I was entranced by the beauty of rural Korea. Finally we came to the large parking area outside the temple/monastery of Kumsan-sa, one of Korea's most well-known. Kumsan-sa or Mount Kum Temple was founded in 599 AD and has been the site of Buddhist practice ever since. It is part of the Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism, an order which embraces all the traditional sects.⁵ It is famous for its three-story temple, the only one in Korea, that houses a thirty foot Maitreya Buddha.

The way up to Kumsan-sa from the parking lot passes through a gate which puts us on a path that winds through cherry trees and along a stream. In August, the blossoms are long gone, and the air hot and humid, but as I walked the kilometer to the temple, I was aware that I had left one world behind and entered another. A sense of tranquility began to descend as I walked along the still bubbling stream with its song of water dancing over the stones and heard the cicadas—

“mamies” in Korean I was told—sang their August songs. Half way to the temple is another gate, a single-poled gate in the primary greens, blues, and reds that are so typical of Korean Buddhist sites. This gate, my guide Han Tap Sunim, a Buddhist monk, informed me, symbolizes the non-dualist beliefs of Buddhism, the conviction that reality is one. Nearer the temple we passed pilgrims leaving the site and a family down by the stream cooling their feet in the rushing waters. As we walked under the gatehouse that stands at the entrance to the complex of Kumsan-sa, we heard the sounds of wood blocks and chant. It was a taped recording, linking this ancient site with the world of modern technology. Around the large dusty square, under the hot August sun of late afternoon, were six temples, including the three-story Maitreya Temple currently being restored and a beautiful new Buddha Hall that faces one across the square. Behind the complex, the green mountains continued to rise, giving the whole setting a feel of being nestled in the bosom of a glorious nature.

For the next days, I would be living here in a space saturated by centuries of practice and the daily round of the twenty monks currently in residence. Han Tap Sunim has proven to be a wonderful surprise. I had not anticipated finding someone who spoke English, nor was I prepared for the moving account of Buddhist belief I received from him over the following days. One of the most memorable conversations included Han Tap’s explanation of Buddhism. According to Han Tap,

... our fate is formed through karma. And, according to the Zen sect, we can attain perfect liberation and overcome karma through meditation.

“But,” he wondered, “what about the lay person? We have found,” he continued, “that Buddha has transferred his merit to all sentient beings and when we call ‘na mu a mi ta bul’ we are calling on Buddha’s merit. Buddha’s enlightenment was not for himself, but for all creation! And since our lives are taken up in the Buddha’s life, we can attain Buddhahood by calling on his name.” For, he concluded with that infectious smile, “Buddha is life.” (Later I read in Dogen’s *Shobogenzo* these words: “Life and death itself is the life of Buddha” (678).

ENGAGING ONE ANOTHER

This wonderful expression of a Pure Land faith led me later to write,

NAMU

As the Morning Star rises and the Buddha awakens,
the Cosmos sings and all Sentient Beings rejoice.

NA-MU-A-MI-TA-BUL

NA-MU-A-MI-TA-BUL

NA-MU-A-MI-TA-BUL

. . . on and on.

It is a mercy chant, echoing across the sky
tying night to day, Living to Dead, All to All
in the dawn of Pure Land.

I later wrote a poem for Han Tap:

a human stupa, a pagoda raised up
living faith not dead bones.

at sixty he took the Buddha way:
a simple life, a holy way, an enlightened play.

now "dharma master "
preaching a Buddha enlightened for all
and living boundless life.

joy breaks across his face, lighting a million lights:
suffering overcome, mercy made real
Buddha come home.

he's a believer true.
living Buddha's mercy
in all, for all.

Nor was I prepared for the further surprises that awaited me. For now I turned my attention to a round of meditation, rest, silence, and reflection as I participated in the life of this lovely temple/monastery. Each day I rose at 2:45 a.m. to go to



Abbess Cho-ui Sunim and Chomal-sun at a retreat at Shimwon-am, South Korea

the Buddha Hall for the service and chanting. Then I remained for my solitary meditation including a meditative walk under the stars as the dawn came. During the day I read in my room, continued my conversations with Han Tap, and meditated in the halls around the central courtyard, retiring by 9:00 p.m. Of the magical beginning of each day, I wrote:

3:00 AM

Across the darkened night the wood block sounds
the bell rings, the gong soars, the drum beats
shattering the stillness of sleeping night
bearing prayer to all sentient beings.

now
eternal rhythm
sounds:

a bolt across the sky, a flash within the mind
warmth around the heart.

we rise, drawn by an enlightened beat
that beats as one with Buddha heart

And then after a walk along the mountain stream, I wrote:

One Moon
one Buddha
alive in a thousand streams
tumbling down the mountain side,

silent in still waters
mirroring a silver light.

All sing one song:
AWAKE.

Shimwon/Cho-ui Sunim

On my third day at Kumsan-sa, Han Tap suggested a walk further up the valley toward the mountain. As we went out the back-gate of Kumsan-sa, we passed crocks full of soya sauce and kimchi (the spiced cabbage that is a staple at every Korean meal) and took a road that wound through gardens and orchards lined with rose-of-sharon bushes. The way up the mountain led us along a stream that danced with cool water and sang its songs as it skipped along its boulder filled course. The road, a layer of concrete wide enough for a Korean jeep, went up the mountain towards a broadcasting station perched near its peak. But about twenty minutes away from Kumsan-sa, a path led off to the left leading to Shimwon-am. Han Tap mentioned that it was a very small temple.

The way up to Shimwon-am was very steep, and in the late morning heat, I wondered if it would be worth the effort. Although the sign said it was only a half-kilometer away, it seemed much further as we walked up the twisting path that doubled back on itself under a cover of trees and pines. On the

way we passed an ancient burial site, the round-topped domes of the past, that was obviously still cared for. After a couple of more turns, we finally came to a little jewel of a temple called Shimwon-am. It is simple of line, modest in size. It sits up on a terraced courtyard, entered up eight stone steps in the front. To the immediate right of the temple is a beautiful series of stone pools that catch the water from a spring for drinking and bathing. Further off the raised terrace, on both the left and right, are well-tended gardens. Around Shimwon lies the stillness of the mountain, its shades of green and a welcome breeze. The place is pervaded by a sense of serenity and peace, even though two puppies, one brown and one white, nosily announced our arrival.

We were greeted by the Abbess, Cho-ui Sunim. I was immediately struck by her inner calm, her gentle presence as she welcomed us to her temple. After entering the temple to pay respects to the Buddha image there, we were invited to take a seat on the veranda that stretches across the front of the temple for a drink and lunch. Although we did not share a common language, Cho-ui Sunim communicated a great deal through her presence and her actions. She and Han Tap conversed in Korean as I got my bearings in the beautiful place we had come to. The deep inward peace one sensed in the Abbess was mirrored in the tranquility of the setting. It was clear that she has laboured hard to make the little temple—an “am” rather than a “sa” to indicate its small size—and the grounds a place that is serene. Her efforts were written in her hands which tell you that her labour is physical as well as mental and inward. Later I learned that she had been there for two years and is the first resident priest in some time.

Cho-ui Sunim had someone with her, an older woman, Chomal-sun, on a hundred day devotion/retreat. Together, they quickly extended their lunch to include these two unexpected visitors. Seated on the veranda, we enjoyed a delightful lunch of rice and vegetables while I learned something of Cho-ui. She studied and trained at Hein-sa, one of the largest and most important Chogye/Zen-centres in Korea and the site of the carved wood blocks of the whole Buddhist canon. There

she had spent thirteen years, and this was the first temple where she had been in charge.

Her day begins at 2:15 a.m. when she rises for a 3:00 a.m. service followed by a period of meditation. In the daylight hours of summer, she tends her gardens to raise her own food, gathers wood for the winter, and looks after the temple site. In the spring and autumn, some hikers and climbers stop in, but mostly she is alone. When I asked her if she gets lonely, she just smiled quietly and said "a Zen nun cannot feel that way." Cho-ui had decided to become a Buddhist nun when she read about the teachings of the Buddha while she was attending high school. Since then, she has dedicated her life to the Buddhist way. The only sounds in her life these days are the "mamies and birds." She struck me as a delightful human being, self-contained yet responsive, at peace. She went on to say that she very much enjoys the "red world" of autumn and the "white world" of winter. I imagine her there in the snow covered mountains of winter, deep in meditation, with a hint of a smile across her face.

The name of her temple, Shimwon, means "Deep Origins," so hers is the "Little Temple [am] of Deep Origins." It is a wonderful name. While there, we sat in meditation in the simple meditation room with its golden Buddha image and the brightly coloured and beautiful painting. I learned that the altar painting was done by the son of the woman, Chomal-sun, doing a retreat. His name is Kang Hae Jwo, he is 28 and obviously very gifted. His strong colours, traditional images, and sense of proportion make this a painting worthy of meditative attention. After a couple of hours, we take our leave to return to Kumsan-sa, but with a promise that I will return in the early morning for meditation.

I'm overwhelmed by it all—the temple, the setting, the people who encapsulate the depth and beauty of Buddhism in such an impressive way. It exceeds words.

The following morning, I returned alone to Shimwon-am. Han Tap has had to leave for other duties. Again the way is steep, but the early morning coolness makes it an easier climb. Again, the dogs announce my coming. When I was here yes-

terday, I learned that some months earlier, a Korean Christian had broken into the temple and damaged the Buddha image. I had been appalled by the story, and thus I returned this morning partly to redress this bad faith of a fellow-Christian and to pay my respects to her Buddhist way which has taught me so much. We bow to each other, to the Buddha image in the temple and exchange a Korean greeting but that exhausts my knowledge of the language. (Yesterday, Cho-ui had laughingly chided herself for failing to pay sufficient attention to her high school classes in English.) With gestures and words I do not comprehend, Cho-ui Sunim invites me to take a seat for tea. She then proceeds to prepare the tea of the front veranda while the puppies become easy in my presence. My page of "Survival Korean" quickly proves hopeless—its composed of phrases, requests, that are appropriate to getting by in a city like Seoul, but hardly suitable for an exchange about the Buddhist Way here in Shimwon. Although I do learn the names for her puppies—Hanul (heaven) and Kurum (cloud)—and the word for "beautiful," since it most comes to my lips to describe what I am seeing, our tea unfolds in silence. It is broken only by the swish of water in the tea pot as each small cup of tea is individually prepared. After tea, the three of us go into the temple to meditate. There in the silence of this sacred space one realizes the ignorance that would separate the space within from the space of the temple and that of the mountainside without. Here they all flow into one another in an emptiness that exceeds us all. The silence speaks in its own way and must be heard within, if at all.

It is a place of "deep origins." It is a place to meet a remarkable Buddhist woman. It is a place where temple and nature, silence and meditation, work in the gardens within and without, meet and embrace each other.

As I leave, I realize I have been in a very special place and with a person of special presence. I have been moved by my experience and its imprint will remain long after details begin to fade. I later wrote this poem of my visit to Shimwon:

Beside the laughing stream runs a path,
going the other way.
It leads up, the mountain way
past fields of rice, flowering trees, pines stretched high.

the way grows/harder, the path
twists back
on itself
until it becomes
an echo, an emblem of another journey,
that twists and turns in human hearts.

Set high on mountain brow,
ringed round by nature's glory
her lines a compliment to nature's way:
Shimwom, the deep, high place.

Endnotes

¹ Eric Newby and Laurens vander Post are two of my favourite writers. Newby is an English travel writer of many books including *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, *Slowly Down the Ganges*, and *A Small Place in Italy*. His writings are marked by good humour and a sensitivity to the life and places he is writing about. Laurens vander Post was a South African whose many novels and books include *Venture to the Interior*, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, and *The Heart of the Hunter*. His writings also often involve journeys and travel. His *Venture to the Interior* is at once an account of an exploration of Nyasaland (now Malawi) and of the human psyche. His *Lost World of the Kalahari* and *The Heart of the Hunter* present the search for the people of the Kalahari, the Bushman peoples (or, as the anthropologists prefer, the !Kung) and their religious way.

Their writings, it occurred to me, point to what I am about here: a journey, as a student of religion and a Christian, into the Buddhist world. It strikes me that that is often what we are about as students of religion: seeking to describe religious worlds with sympathy and hopefully some insight. And this is so, at least for me, in the dialogue of Buddhism and Christianity, which as Wilfred Cantwell Smith continually reminds us, is a dialogue of persons who are Buddhists and Christians. As I see it, part of that dialogue in engaging one another's religious life and practice. It is such engagement that leads to a deepened understanding of each other's religious way.

² Dogen Zenji, *Shobogenzo: The Eye and Treasury of the True Law*, trans. Kosen Nishiyama (Tokyo: Nakayama Shobo/Japan Publications Trading Co., 1975). This remarkable collection of discourses and essays ranges widely from

RELIGION IN A NEW KEY

“Great Enlightenment” to “The Rule for Zazen” and “Rules for the Lavatory.”

³ See D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Buddhism* (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1970), esp. pp. 41ff.

⁴ See Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* (NJ: Prentice-Hall and Chai-Shin Yu, ed., *Korean and Asian Religious Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

VI

The Kumbha Mela A Festival and Sacred Place

The Kumbha Mela, a festival held in North India, at the conjunction of the Jamuna and Ganges rivers at Allahabad (Prayag) every twelve years is the world's largest religious and human gathering. Unfortunately, there is little written in English about the Kumbha Mela.¹ And as a student of religion since the early 60s, I must admit that I was not aware of the Kumbha Mela before 1987 when I learned about it from Shrivatsa Goswami of Vrindaban. It was this chance encounter—and Shrivatsa's generous invitation to be part of his family's camp at the Kumbha Mela—that led me to attend the Kumbha Mela in 1989² and again in 2001. Some have described this event as "the world's largest act of faith."³ In this essay I would like to both describe some of what I encountered at the Kumbha Mela and highlight some questions that the event poses for the student of religion. I also discuss how I view my participation in the Kumbha Mela as part of the dialogue of persons of different faiths. Let me begin with some of the questions and issues that face the student of religion when encountering the Kumbha Mela.

What Is It? Festival, Pilgrimage, Sacred Place?

A first and basic question—and the one students always ask me when I show them the video that I made of the Kumbha Mela—is: what is the Kumbha Mela? I know that I can always say, it is "the Festival of the Pitcher" but is this adequate? Isn't it also a place of pilgrimage?⁴ This was what was said to me by Raj Kumar and two other villagers from Bihar who had walked to the Kumbha Mela in 1989: "We have come on a pilgrimage and to bathe in the Ganga." But it is a place of pilgrimage with a difference. How is it different from places of pilgrimage like Santiago de Compostela in Spain? Or the *haj* to Mecca? Or climbing Mt. Fuji in Japan? These are all spatially fixed places



Pilgrims at the Ganges River during the Kumbha Mela, 2001

of pilgrimage—though two are historically created sites and one is a natural site. The place that is the site of the Great or Maha Kumbha Mela is a special place of pilgrimage only at certain times—about once every twelve years. At other times it remains a holy place, as the rivers Ganga and Yamuna are always sacred rivers. But at those times it is not what it becomes during a Maha Kumbha Mela. And while people may come here on pilgrimage during the times when this juncture of the two rivers is swollen or flooded with the waters of the monsoon or when it is a dry and dusty flood plain, it is not what it becomes during the Kumbha Mela.

The Kumbha Mela as a place of pilgrimage is as much an event as it is a place and a time. It is an event sanctioned by a particular solar constellation—which determines the dates on which the Festival takes place—and linked to the presence of the holy men and women—sadhus, gurus, mahaswamis, acharyas, etc.—that come to camp here at this time. But it also requires the millions of pilgrims who come to bathe in these holy waters at this auspicious time, to sit at the feet of their gurus, to perform countless acts of *puja*, to watch holy dramas enacted, to read and study holy books, to meditate, and do the myriad

other things that take place during this time.⁵ It is a conjunction of time, place, and people that make the Kumbha Mela, but in ways that are unique and unrepeatable even though this event has been occurring, some say, for the last couple of millennia.⁶ It is a complex and multivalent event more than a place.

Jack Hebner and David Osborn in their book on the Kumbha Mela call it—and I have used the phrase above—“the world’s largest act of faith.” It is surely true that it is the largest—indeed, it dwarfs all other analogous religious events like the *haj* to Mecca or the Easter gatherings in front of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome—but the authors’ account of the “faith” present at the Kumbha Mela is disappointing. And while such a description points to the remarkable numbers that are present for the Kumbha Mela, it does not clarify its purposes and intentions. To get at those dimensions of the Kumbha Mela it is necessary to probe into the stories in the sacred texts of Hinduism and into the minds of the pilgrims who come to the Kumbha Mela.

When we turn to those sacred texts we discover a wide variety of accounts of mythological stories and events that help us towards understanding the inner purposes of the Kumbha Mela. For example, in the *Rig Veda* we are told that those that “bathe at the confluence of the white waters of the Ganga and the black waters of the Yamuna go to the celestial heavens.” (Khila-svalayana) And the Garuda Purana (Arca-Kanda 81.2) says that Prayaga is “a very holy place conducive to worldly enjoyment and liberation . . . by taking a bath there, all sins are dispelled.”⁷ In several of the ancient texts we discover the story of the churning of the ocean of milk and the resulting appearance of a “pitcher” containing a “nectar of immortality.” In the Bhagavad Purana, one of the sacred texts of the Hindu traditions, the story is told of how the appearance of this pitcher of nectar provoked such a clamour on the earth that a messenger of the gods grabbed the pitcher and returned it to the heavens. (Another story says the demigods hid it at certain spots.) But in her flight back to the Beyond, some drops of the nectar of immortality fell to the earth. (One account says 11 spots, four in India.) One of those spots where the nectar touched the earth was at the confluence of these two sacred rivers: the Yamuna

and Ganges. But the mythic story also adds a third, even more powerful river to the two geographical rivers, the invisible Saraswati. Thus the site of this great festival is at the confluence of three rivers, rivers that are at once human and divine.

This mythic background points to one of the significant features of the festival as a sacred place. For the believer, this environment has been touched by divine gifts: it is here in this place that the nectar of immortality was spilled and not somewhere else. Thus it is to this spot that Hindus from across India come to participate in the festival. It is, as we indicated earlier, a place where the human and divine have been joined, and thus it is a place where human transformation can occur. But to the eye unformed by the mythic story, the site could be mistaken for a large sandy plain along two rivers.⁸

Thus far we can see that we can speak of the Kumbha Mela as a place/event of pilgrimage and as the world's largest gathering, but isn't it also important to see it as a sacred place? When we approach it in this way, we highlight the role that sacred spaces have played in the story of humankind.

From time immemorial, men and women have made pilgrimages to sacred places. Those sacred places may be, as we noted above, natural as in the case of Mt. Fuji in Japan, or Lha-moi La-tso Lake in Tibet or Mount Kenya in Africa.⁹ Or they may be constructed sites like the Shrine at Fatima, the Cathedral at Chartres, the City of the Sun (Machu Pichu) in Peru or the Sweat Lodge of the Plains Indian. But this sacred place is both a natural place and a constructed place. Humankind across the planet has gathered to celebrate in festivals the meeting of divine and human life, or what Mircea Eliade has called "the manifestation of the sacred."¹⁰ Religious festivals have been a feature of the human landscape in times past and present, East and West.

Observing/Participating in the Kumbha Mela

Here I want to report some of my observations on the Kumbha Melas that I attended in 1989 and in 2001. Elsewhere you can find a fuller account of the circumstances that brought me to the Kumbha Mela in 1989, but let me begin with my arrival at the Kumbha Mela in 1989.

I arrived in Allahabad as the sun was setting. I was met by Venu Goswami, a younger brother of Shrivatsa As we drove to the Kumbha Mela, Venu spoke about what lay ahead. In the hour-long journey, we found ourselves increasingly in the midst of a flood of humanity moving, in a variety of ways, towards the same destination As we neared the camp, the road was choked with pilgrims on their way to the Kumbha Mela, their worldly goods balanced atop their heads as they resolutely made their way to the banks of the sacred rivers. We finally came out through the city walls only to be confronted by a vast network of street lights that stretched as far as we could see over the camped city. Venu informed me that the grounds covered a 20 square kilometer area, and at this hour it was shrouded in the smoke of camp fires but alive with the booming microphones and loudspeaker systems that would be a constant feature of my days at the Kumbha Mela.¹¹

Thus from the very outset, one was confronted by the reality of pilgrims making their way to a sacred place and I wondered if I was one of them. Amidst the remarkable diversity of sites and structures that have been regarded as sacred places by different religious communities and cultures, there is an equally remarkable consistency of purpose. Sacred places in widely different parts of the world share either one or all of the characteristic functions of sacred places. They are either places of communion between the human and divine, or places of power where human life might be transformed, or places that reflect or embody the sacred order of the divine, or all three of these.¹² And even as I wondered about my own status in this place, I was made aware over the coming days that the Kumbha Mela was all of these things.

The scale of the Kumbha Mela is daunting: the camp-city along the rivers, the numbers of pilgrims, and the variety of activities occurring at the Festival. Joel Beverton has observed the close connection that exists between sacred places and ritu-

als. This is especially true at the Kumbha Mela where daily life is filled with ritual activity, beginning with the ritual bathing in the Ganga, the rituals conducted at the rivers as lamps and offering are placed in the sacred waters, in the camps before the enshrined dieties, and in other, countless ways. Beverton has observed that the rituals “that a people either practice at a place or direct toward it mark its sacredness and differentiate it from other defined spaces.”¹³ But it is critical to remember that rituals, like sacred places, are not always places that can be entered physically. They are not always sacred lands or temples or churches or mountains. Sacred places may also be places that one must enter imaginatively, as in the inner geography of the body in yoga, or visually, as in the space of a mandala or sacred design. Similarly, rituals are not only outward gestures and actions, but they are also an inner environment of the mind and imagination.

But it is difficult to understand the outward gestures and actions if you do not know or share the inner environment of the pilgrim. While it is possible to describe the outer environment of this sacred place, the inner environment that the pilgrim brings with him or her is more difficult to comprehend. The simple response of Ram Sharma — “I am a pilgrim, I’ve come to bathe in the Ganga” — was the same one that I received from others time and again. Acts and gestures of piety and devotion reflecting a special inner environment were what I observed and recorded on my first morning at the river’s edge, and throughout the Festival in both 1989 and 2001:

At the river, people are doing their morning ablutions. Occasionally, a flute being played somewhere cuts through the noise with its plaintive welcome to the new day. I also hear the blowing of a conch. The fiery red ball of the sun begins to peek over the horizon, shedding its multi-coloured hues through the haze and smoke that hangs over the camp. By the water, pilgrims go in and out, many with their lips moving in the rhythms of a silent mantra as the new day began. Some place sticks of incense in the sand and it wafts across the stirring camp. As I sit by the wa-

ter watching the rising sun and the increasing bustle around me, I find myself meditating on the wonder and beauty of it all.

On another occasion I wrote,

Here, a constant stream of men, women, and children enter the river, chanting and praying. Garlands of flowers are offered to the river along with tiny clay vessels of oil that are lit and placed in the river. As I criss-cross the camp, I am being drawn into this extraordinary event, watching the ceaseless flow of human beings; stopping to observe a sadhu seated before a fire with his trident, sign of Shiva, placed beside him; bemused by children gathered around a spigot washing some clothes and throwing water at one another; noting the colourful saris being dried while held by two human clotheslines; witnessing countless acts of puja (worship). It is unlike anything I have ever witnessed before.

Over the days I was at the Festival, I sought to enter into the inner environment that was present there as well as the outer place. This requires imagination if one is to go into the inner sacred places where the pilgrims live. It also sometimes required a translator, but I was able to speak to many in English.

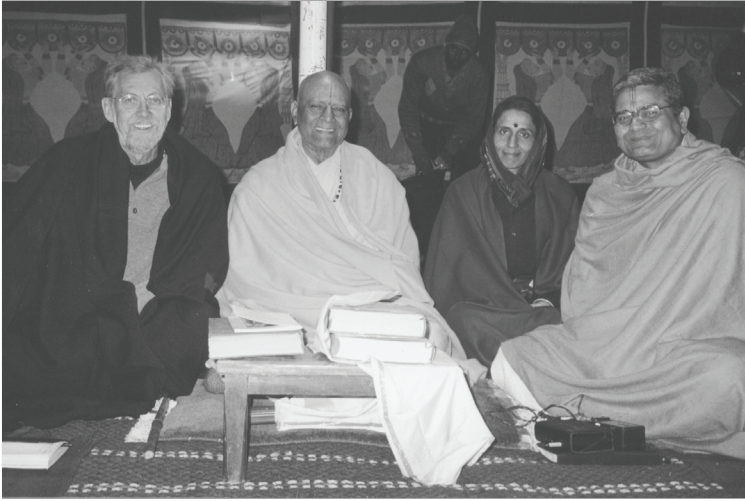
What I began to grasp is what scholars of religion call the “places of power” function of sacred spaces: that is, the conviction among the pilgrims that in these places “human life might be transformed.” Clearly, that was part of the conviction as pilgrims entered the flowing waters of Mother Ganga. Here are some of my observations from 6 February 1989 as the Kumbha Mela came to be focused on the Sangam on this most auspicious day.

Off in the east, the bright ball of the sun inched up the horizon and a roar went up from the crowd: the human world rose up to greet the sun that spreads its crimson rays on this new day. As the sun rose, one could feel the mounting energies. A rush of joy

seemed to ripple through the surging crowds. And the sunrise was beautiful: that ball of flaming red rose through the dust and haze like a jewel to refract its light on all. It revealed a humanity that spread as far as I could see along the banks of the rivers and beyond. And, for a moment, the moving waters and the ebb and flow of the humanity gathered there seemed to dance with one another in perfect harmony as the sun rose over it all. The pilgrims, nameless and numberless, were making their way to the waters, entering those waters, then returning to the banks and there changing their clothes, visiting with others, then making their way to those countless places they had come from. Had they been renewed? Cleansed? freed from sin? Purified? Strengthened on their road to moksha or liberation? I could not judge; I could only wonder as I stood there transfixed by this sea of humanity in motion in response to promptings that could not be seen but could be felt

In 2001, there was a greater attempt to manage access to the Sangam, the meeting point of the rivers, than there had been in 1989—and the police presence at the Sangam was much more evident. Though the numbers for 2001 were said to be some 4 to 6 million more than in 1989, this was not evident at the Sangam in 2001. The site was ripped by a cold wind that had blown throughout the night. And my own walk to the Sangam, together with a dozen others from the Gambira Ashram where I stayed was more difficult due to the police management of the site. Indeed, at one point I was pulled to the side for carrying a camera. “No pictures, no press,” the policeman told me. When I assured him I was not press, he let me continue.

This sacred place, the setting of the festival, is not marked by soaring mountains or other dramatic geographic features. Alongside the rivers are sandy flood plains where the rivers annually overrun their banks. The two rivers that meet here have their origins hundreds of kilometers away in the Himalayas. From their beginnings high in the mountains, they make their way across the northern plains of India to Allahabad, known



Author, Sri Purushottam, Smt Sandhya, Sri Shrivatsa Goswami at the Kumbha Mela, 2001

to many by its ancient Hindu name of Prayag, where they join. From their headwaters in the Himalayas and all along the way, these rivers are marked by places of pilgrimage where believers come to worship and to bathe in their sacred waters.

In India, with its rich Hindu heritage and culture, rivers have often been regarded in more than human terms. Rivers bespeak another language, one that is articulated in the myths and legends of Indian life. In past millenia, people gathered at Stonehenge for festivals we still do not fully understand—and recently “New Age” groups have begun to gather there again. In Canada, Native peoples, Algonquin and Mohawk, regarded the 1000 Islands as a “garden of the gods,” and journeyed there to dance on the rocky islands. The celebration of Easter draws hundreds of thousands to Jerusalem to walk the places that Jesus had walked. But when we seek to understand these events, it is necessary to grasp the inner environment that the pilgrims bring to these events.

Accessing the Inner Environment: Purushottam

One of the problems for me in attempting to understand the Kumbha Mela is that the Indian participants share an inner en-

vironment of belief and gesture that was not mine. How could I come to “see” what was happening here? Religious festivals have social, archetypal, and cosmic dimensions that are all combined in remarkably compressed gestures and actions or elaborately dramatized in extended performative acts. The difficulty of grasping the inner meanings of this event is related to the most remarkable feature this sacred place: the ever-flowing waters of the Ganga and Yamuna. And to get to those meanings I was dependent upon the insight of the participants who shared those patterns of belief that gave meaning to what I was witnessing. Earlier, Sri Jagadguru Purushottam Goswami, Shrivatsa’s father and head of the community, shared with us a discourse on the Kumbha Mela in which he explained that the Festival is a ritual of purification and renewal. Through the centuries, believers had gathered on the banks of these sacred rivers, he explained, to be renewed by offering their *puja* to Mother Ganga and listening to the discourses of their teachers and bathing in the Ganga. For him, the Festival is a retreat, a time for self-examination and meditation, for reading the sacred writings, for performing acts of devotion and worship to Lord Krishna. In 2001 I was again able to meet with Sri Purushottam and he provided a remarkable discourse on the Khumba Mela, some of which is reported here. His words were translated from Hindi into English by his son, Shrivatsa Goswami:

This place is unique because the nectar of immortality has rained on this place. And devotees gather here to gather that nectar. And what is that nectar? It is devotion to the Lord. Bhakti, or love and devotion to God, is the only proper way, the only proper devotion. And it is only through that devotion—a devotion wholly without selfishness—that we gain God, that we gain immortality. The only purpose, then, of the Kumbha Mela is to focus on loving service to God.

I then asked him to explain how that “loving service” that is the purpose of the Kumbha Mela is related to bathing in the river Ganga? Sri Purushottam responded,

When the Ganga, the nectar of immortality, was about

to descend from the heavens it wondered: if I come to earth who will revere me? And won't everyone pollute me? But Ganga was reassured: Shiva, the greatest of all devotees will receive you on his head. And it was Shiva's devotion that persuaded the Ganga to come to earth. And yet the Ganga waited for years to come, she waited for devotees to offer their devotion to the Ganga. The Ganga will cleanse the devotees and their devotion will cleanse the Ganga. Ganga thus came as an act of grace and their loving service will overcome the pollution that the Ganga will receive.

He then continued with a longer discussion of the rivers that meet at the Sangam: the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the Saraswati. He said that the Kumbha Mela was a moment of relishing for all the rivers, as they received the devotion of their devotees. When the Kumbha Mela happens "the rivers are happy when they can hear, in singing and in stories, the devotion of devotees."

Sri Purushottam, himself a devotee of Krishna and Radha, explained that,

The model for the Kumbha Mela is Lord Ram. He shows us how we should approach the rivers, how we should approach and bathe in the river. After Lord Ram had been banished, he was driven on a chariot through the forest when he saw the glow of the Ganga from afar. First he got down ... then he fell prostrate on the ground. Thereafter he gave up the ride and walked barefoot. When the Ganga is visible then you should not walk with shoes on to the river. But you should go barefoot, in humility, in devotion ... This is the code of conduct that should be observed. Exhibition bathing is not the Kumbha Mela, loving devotion is....

The Ganga is our mother and she is compassionate, not just to her children but to all. Her loving power is witnessed by many. At Benares one morning, some ladies entered the waters and some people saw a herd

of deer and a chariot flying to heaven. It was not a surprise. Ganga explained that whoever comes in contact with me will be redeemed, will get relief from their bondage. (The ladies had used musk for their unguent and the deer providing the musk were travelling to heaven!) This is the unrestricted compassion of the mother ...

It is possible to sense the devotion as one watches the pilgrims make their way to the water's edge and enter a river that is, for them, more than a river. It is a living symbol of divine grace that flows and renews constantly those who enter its transforming waters.

But Sri Purushottam also made the point that for the mutual cleansing of the rivers and the devotees to occur, it was essential for the heart of the devotee to be rightly focused. In his words,

The Kumbha Mela is the festival of pots (kumbha means a pot). Though the Ganga is so compassionate, it is also important that your heart, the pot, be empty of arrogance and pride. Those who bathe seeking prestige through the holy gift will not receive the holy gift. How could they? Their hearts are already filled with the poison of ambition and so Ganga will not be able to enter ... Those who come in purity and humility will be renewed for it is humility that makes us open. But arrogance, ambition, and pride are the opposite of loving service and close the heart.¹⁴

Throughout my time at the Kumbha Mela, I found myself continually trying to discern the meaning of what I was witnessing. The questions I had exceeded my answers, and I found myself drawn again and again to the rivers since it was obviously the rivers that constituted the heart of this sacred place:

I returned again to the river, upstream from the Sangam, and watched again the pilgrims there performing their puja on the banks of "Mother Ganga." The river flowed by, flowers were cast on its endless cur-

rents, incense was stuck in the bank, pilgrims entered and dipped themselves the ceremonial three times, the ritual continued. It went on as it has for centuries. I found myself wondering if I was watching an eternal drama, one that would continue as long as humanity remains aware of its need for renewal, for purification, for the revival of the spirit. I wondered as I watched again as the streaming waters of the Ganga met the streaming masses of humanity in the wonderful dance where outer meets inner and becomes a living symbol of something more.

Here are my reflections on my last day at the Kumbha Mela, two days after the “day of days.”

I made my way to the river for my final farewells. I felt I wanted to be at the river one last time, to see once again the cycle of pilgrims coming to and from the river, performing their acts of worship, continuing the rhythms that mark this extraordinary event. I can see that Mother Ganga is more than just another river. It is the living presence of the mystery of life’s origins and continuities as it ceaselessly flows towards its destiny. It is moving to watch the reverence with which it is approached, entered, and acknowledged through time-honoured rituals. The river is, as it were, an endlessly flowing symbol of grace that renews as it cleanses, that transforms as it receives. For the pilgrim, it seems to have a power, presence, and a persona that is difficult for me to grasp, though I can glimpse it in their acts of devotion. And I find it very moving. There is even a moment when I feel caught up in the archetypal drama as the endless round of pilgrims meet and enter its endless flowing waters. But then it draws away.

The Multivalent Event

At the outset, we pointed to the scholarly readings of the functions of sacred places and places of pilgrimage. We noted that they function as (1) places of communication, (2) places of

power, and (3) places that embody. It is possible to see all these functions occurring at the Kumbha Mela. At the heart of this sacred place and Festival are the waters of the Ganga and Yamuna. Water has always had a primordial significance within the religious life of humankind. It is a multivalent symbol. It is, in the words of the Bhavisyottara Purana, "the source of all things and all existence."¹⁵ It is, at the same time, the renewer and purifier of all. It is a living water. When this rich symbolism of water is combined with the symbolism of immersion in the water, then we are moving closer to a central feature of this Festival. Eliade remarks that:

... in water everything is "dissolved", every "form" is broken up, everything that has happened ceases to exist; nothing that was before remains after immersion in water.... Immersion is the equivalent, at the human level, of death, and at the cosmic level, of the cataclysm which periodically dissolves the world Breaking all forms, doing away with all the past, water possesses this power of purifying, of regenerating, of giving new birth; for what is immersed in it "dies", and, rising again from the water, is like a child without any sin or any past, able to ... begin a new and real life."¹⁶

When seen in this light, the sacred "Mother Ganga" begins to disclose her place in the life of India and the traditions that have shaped her inner environment. In this Festival, the waters of the rivers are at once the living waters of purification, of grace, renewal, and transformation. And immersion in the "Mother," which is at once the visible Ganga and Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati, is the ritual action that transforms. The pilgrimage to this sacred place coupled with the transforming power and presence of the sacred waters combine to make the Festival of the Pitcher a remarkable festival, a remarkable sacred place, and a remarkable place of pilgrimage.

It is a place where the rivers flow on and on, reflecting the light of the sun's rising and setting, and carrying with them the offerings of devoted hearts — flowers and oil-lit lamps — as they silently continue their endless journey.

A Kumbha Mela Update: 2013

As 2013 approached, I remembered a promise I had made to Shrivatsa Goswami in 1989. At the end of the Kumbha Mela I had told him that I would come again if I was still living. And so I had gone again in 2001. Did my promise extend to 2013? I felt it did and I made preparations to go. This time, I was accompanied by two of my children: Benjamin, now in his 40s and Emma in her early 30s, as well as Emma's friend, Clinton Vaz of Goa, and Mat D'Angelo, a former student of mine. Little did I know at the time that this would turn out to be the largest Kumbha Mela ever: thirty-million on the most auspicious day, February 10, 2013.

We arrived in Allahabad by train from New Delhi. It was early morning and we found breakfast on the street before getting an auto-rickshaw to take us to the Kumbha Mela on the floodplain of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. The street was packed with people streaming towards the Mela, most of them walking, carrying their belongings on their head or in a bag slung over their shoulders. We were quickly caught up in the mood of anticipation. Still far from the site, our auto-rickshaw stopped and informed us that this was as far as he could go. From here, we could either walk or get a bicycle rickshaw. We got two bicycle rickshaws as far as the ridge that overlooks the Kumbha Mela. There it was, this vast and colourful tent city stretching out before us. We were suddenly engulfed in a wave of sound coming from the site. But now we were on foot. We still had an hour's walk ahead of us as we headed into the middle of the Kumbha Mela and then to the Goswami's camp. The sun was hot. When we arrived we were warmly greeted and shown to our tent. We were told that this KM was especially important because it was the 12th, or 144 years from the last great Kumbha Mela.

The Kumbha Mela was on its way to becoming the largest city in the world, at least for a day. It is an amazing feat. The site is laid out in a grid pattern on both sides of the river with over 150 kms of road, water lines (550 kms of pipelines), and electricity. And this time, I finally realized why it was that a rail line and a bridge over the site were built on pylons high over

our heads: every year, this area is flooded when the monsoons come and under twenty feet or more of water. So this camp/city must be taken down and reconstructed for every Kumbha Mela. The camp is also dotted by police and fire stations. During this Kumbha Mela, a group of Harvard researchers were present just trying to comprehend the logistics of this event.

We entered into the rhythms of the Goswami camp. There was a tent for meals and another for teaching and puja (worship). Every day Venu Goswami gave three hours of teaching from the Bhagavad Purana, the sacred text of this Krishna/Radha community. Shrivatsa led some of the celebratory rituals in the afternoon and spent an hour speaking and addressing questions from those in the camp. We participated as we wished and also spent time wandering around the Mela, visiting other camps and going down by the Ganges. There were always crowds of people taking their "holy dip" in the flowing waters.

On the "big day," we got up at three a.m. to make our way to the sangam, the confluence of the three rivers, the Ganges and the Yamuna, and the invisible Saraswati. It is here that millions want to enter these transforming waters.

As we left our tent, we found ourselves in a swirling fog that was so thick that we couldn't see more than six or seven feet ahead. We stayed close as we crossed one of the pontoon bridges to the other side of the river. We were in the flow of people moving towards the sangam. After a half hour or more we stopped for tea at a tea-stall that was doing a brisk business. The fog was starting to clear.

We passed a Temple up on the ridge and could hear the sounds of finger cymbals, tabla (drum), and voices singing praise to the gods. Occasionally, a dog barked. Pilgrims, young and old, along with sadhus and villagers were on their deliberate march to the sangam. As we neared the sangam we encountered pole fences erected to try to manage the coming and going crowds. And as the light crept over the horizon, we found ourselves gathered along a fence with thousands of others. We wondered if this was a pathway for those going or coming. In front on us, a young village couple held two sleep-

ing children. There was an early morning chill and I wondered how long they had been waiting. We tried to form a protective shield around them to keep them from being pushed under the pole fence. After waiting for some time and running into others from our camp, we decided to push on towards the sangam. Police on horseback were trying to keep people back, without much success.

We finally got through and things opened up a bit, but we still had a ways to go. We began to meet the naked sadhus coming back from their holy dip. Some were standing chatting with one another, a few were on horseback and covered with ash, some were shivering. More people were pushing ahead and we finally reached a place where we could see the water and people going in and coming out. But it was too packed, and we quickly moved back to just watch the ebb and flow of the crowd.

We had arrived. We smiled and high-fived one another as we took pictures and watched this remarkable human drama unfold. After a half-hour, we began the trip back.

We did not enter the water at the sangam, but we did further upstream on the Ganges, where things were not so jammed. Back in camp, we met with Shrivatsa and others. Everyone was full of tales of their trip to the sangam. When I asked Emma what she would call the Kumbha Mela, she said “a big party.” And so it was.

Endnotes

¹ See, for example, the entry one finds in Ninian Smart's *The World's Religions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989), “We see India drawn together by great pilgrimages, at Banaras and at the vast Kumbh Mela fair at Prayag, where the rivers Jumna and Ganges meet the invisible river Sarasvati” (100). There is surprisingly little written in the literature of religious studies on the Kumbha Mela. An exception is the moving contemporary interpretation of the Festival found in Sehdev Kumar's *The Lotus in the Stone: An Allegory for Explorations in Dreams and Consciousness* (Concord, Ontario: Alpha & Omega Books, 1984), 159-90. I had read it prior to going to India for the Kumbha Mela but I had forgotten it. I reread it after my return and gained much from it. I also attended the Kumba Mela in 2013 together with my son Benjamin and daughter Emma. there

were 30 million in attendance on the most auspicious day.

² Since then I have published three articles on the Kumbha Mela: M. Darrol Bryant, "A Kumbha Mela Notebook," *Dialogue and Alliance* 4.4 (1990-91): 86-100; "The Kumbha Mela As A Festival of Renewal," *Journal of Dharma*, 15.4, 341-56, and "River of Grace: The Kumbha Mela as a Sacred Place," *Environments*, 34-40. Some of the material included here has appeared in these earlier essays. For an important discussion of "field based" research—the basis of this paper—see T. N. Madan, "On Living Intimately With Strangers," in *Pathways: Approaches to the Study of Society in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 111-30.

³ This is part of the title of the volume by Jack Hebner and David Osborn, *Kumbha Mela: The World's Largest Act of Faith*, (LaJolla, CA: Entourage Publishing, 1990).

⁴ For an interesting discussion of the pilgrim see the unpublished paper of Jana Duncan, "Kumbha Mela: The Changing Face of an Indian Pilgrimage," (Wilfrid Laurier University), 1999, available from M.D.Bryant. See also the wonderfully moving account of a pilgrimage to the sacred mountains of Wu T'ai in Northern China, its festivals, monasteries, and communities see John Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), esp. 114-55. This account is even more precious given the destruction in the region after 1949. For a fascinating account of Rajasthani pilgrims, though not to the Kumbha Mela, see Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys, The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), which demonstrates the centrality of release or moksha to the pilgrims expectation and intention. Gold's study is a fine example of field research in which the scholar is aware of her own role in the study.

⁵ The Hebner and Osborn volume, *Kumbha Mela*, is a visual feast, though it tends to focus on the exotic and the exceptional, as it contains some excellent pictures of the people and actions that happen at the Kumbha Mela.

⁶ See the article by D. P. Dubey, "Kumbha Mela: Origin and Historicity of India's Greatest Pilgrimage Fair," and "Prayag and its Kumbha Mela," in *Kumbha Mela: Pilgrimage to the Greatest Cosmic Fair*, ed. D. P. Dubey (Allahbad: Society of Pilgrimage Studies, 2001), 85-123 and 1-49 respectively.

⁷ One of the participants in an International Seminar on the Kumbha Mela held at the Kumbha Mela in 2001 spoke of these other "worldly" aspects of the Kumbha Mela, namely, its social and economic purposes.

⁸ I have been trying to locate some of these sources in the sacred literature. I was told that you find these stories in the Bhagavad Purana, but while I found the story of the churning of the sea of milk and the producing of a pitcher of amrit, I could not find the story about its falling on the earth at Prayag. I would be grateful for your assistance in this. The things quoted here are from the Hari Krishna website on the Kumbha Mela 2001. The Bhagavad Purana is in volumes seven through eleven in the Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987). The quotations here are from volume IX and indicate the book and verse. In the version, we find in the Bhagavad Purana, the churning of the oceans also brings forth a horse "radiantly white like the moon" (VIII.8.3) and an elephant with four tusks that "eclipsed the splendour and beauty of the snowy mountain, Kailasa" (VIII.8.4-6). But when the pitcher appeared, it cre-

ated such a fuss, with everyone clambering for it, that, according to the Bhagavad Purana, it was seized by a divine messenger and returned to the heavens. However, before the Lord “flies away on Garuda” (VIII.10), Mohini, the Lord in a feminine form, is able to distribute, due to her beguiling ways, some of the nectar to the “gods” thus bestowing on them immortality (VIII.9). Enroute we are told in other sources, and as battle erupts, some drops spilled on the earth and these sites became the places of the Festival.

⁹ See Edwin Bernbaum, *Sacred Mountains of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963), 1ff.

¹¹ In 2001, Shrivatsa Goswami remarked that we could call the 2001 Kumbha Mela “the Festival of who has the loudest speaker system.” I also noted that there were many more camps with neon lights at the entrance, there were the huge figures of Krishna and Caitanya at the Hari Krishna camp and a huge lighted pyramid at the north end of the site. There were also more parades during the 2001 Kumbha Mela and also more police. Shrivatsa said the extra security was due to “bomb threats that had been made against the Kumbha Mela.”

¹² See the article on “Sacred Space” by Joel Brereton in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, ed., Mircea Eliade, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 526ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ These words are taken from my notebooks for January 24, 2001, at the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana Camp at the Kumbha Mela. That evening, Purushottam had agreed to discuss the Kumbha Mela with the people in the camp. He asked me to pose the questions. Shrivatsa Goswami translated from Hindi to English. I have given a copy of what I have reported here to Shrivatsa Goswami and he has confirmed their accuracy. The whole discourse went on for more than one hour.

¹⁵ See the Bhavisyottara Purana 31,14.

¹⁶ See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, 190, 194. See also other works by Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), esp. 39-54; *Man and the Sacred* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 77-115; and *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

PART III

Four Essays on the Way of Dialogue into the Future



Xiang-fo Wang, Yan Li, Darrol Bryant, and Shi-gi Wang at the entrance to the Yungang Caves in Shanxi Province, China, with hundreds of carved Buddhas from the 7th century.

VI Muslim-Christian Dialogue after 9/11

I. A Personal Prologue

The events of 9/11 cast a chill over Muslim-Christian dialogue.¹ Across the United States and Canada many Muslims, some of whom had been American and Canadian citizens from birth, found themselves attacked and threatened. They were viewed with suspicion, just because they were Muslim. For many, the image of the “muslim as terrorist” became a commonplace. Now, nearly fifteen years later we are still seeking to find a way forward. Here I want to revisit the events of 9/11, examine the post-9/11 image of the “muslim as terrorist,” the distressing reductionism of a “twenty-four inch world,” explore some of the efforts at dialogue prior to and after 9/11. I conclude with some notes on the urgency of dialogue with the Muslims.

As some readers know, I have been engaged in what I will call “the dialogue of religions” or “the encounter and dialogue of men and women of different religious traditions” for more than thirty years. Over that time I have read innumerable studies of the many religious traditions—from Buddhist, Chinese, Hindu, and Muslim to Sikh, Shinto, and Zoroastrian, as well as my own Christian tradition. I have spent countless hours in these diverse religious communities: in homes/temples/mandirs/gurdwaras/monasteries/universities and talked with adherents of these many traditions both in North America and in other parts of the world. It has been a learning journey to encounter this rich diversity of the religious life of humankind. It was in the late 1970s that I began to engage Islam—the world’s second largest faith-filled community. As I met Muslims in North America, India, Africa and the Middle East I learned that “there were Muslims and then there were Muslims.” The Muslim community/*ummah* itself was globally diverse. Moreover, it was an *ummah* remarkably faithful, though in diverse

ways, to the teachings of their Prophet. I have consistently been struck by the depth of their prayer and their respect for Mohammad, their Prophet.² As Reza Shah-Kazemi remarks rhetorically,

...what can explain the extraordinary devotion to his personage, a devotion sustained from generation to generation down through the ages, expressed outwardly in the most sublime litanies, hymns and poems from one end of the Muslim world to the other."³

II. 9/11

When 9/11 occurred, I was in Spain and had just returned to Madrid from Toledo, the old capital, where I'd gone to see a painting of El Greco that I had long admired. I was in the main train station when I noted a large screen showing some planes diving into the World Trade Towers. I assumed it was an ad for some movie. But I was drawn to it, and I was able to read enough of the Spanish ticker moving across the screen to realize it was actual footage of what had just happened in NYC. I immediately returned to my hotel room and turned on BBC and watched, stunned, as the news of the day unfolded. The following day I left for India, and when I arrived in New Delhi, my taxi driver assured me that "we would discover that Pakistanis were behind it!" — giving voice to that deeply and widely held Indian suspicion that all bad in the world comes from Pakistan. Shortly after I returned to Canada, I gave the keynote address to the annual seminar on World Religions sponsored by Canadian Muslims. The theme for 2001 was "God and Suffering." I felt it was imperative to address the events of 9/11 in my remarks. Here, in part, is what I said then:

On the morning of September 11th, a high-jacked 747 slammed into one of the towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City. Then, as a horrified world watched, another high-jacked 747 slammed into the other tower. And within the hour, while people scrambled to get out of the buildings, some even leaping to their certain death, the towers collapsed in a matter of seconds. A third high-jacked plane slammed

into the Pentagon in Washington D.C. A fourth high-jacked plane crashed into the Pennsylvania countryside. On this day, thousands of innocent people died.

Within hours of these events, a stunned world began to speak of Muslim terrorists being behind these events. PM Tony Blair of Great Britain spoke of terrorism as "the new evil of the 21st century." Osama bin Laden reportedly responded on the following day when informed of the events: "Allah be praised." People gathered around the World Trade Center to offer prayers and to wave American flags. Days later, the entertainment world gathered to remember the acts of courage of hundreds of people on the 11th and concluded with Canada's own Celine Dion as the lead singer in a stirring rendition of God Bless America. The rhetoric of the religions of the world was suddenly splashed across the media of the world as the Muslim God was set against the God that blessed America. And in the midst of these evil acts, people suffered in all kinds of ways. In addition to the thousands that died, there were the even more thousands who were left behind: wives, husbands, lovers, friends, associates, and children. It is estimated that over a thousand children became single-parent children that day. Many others suffered inwardly: horrified, terrified, frightened by these events.

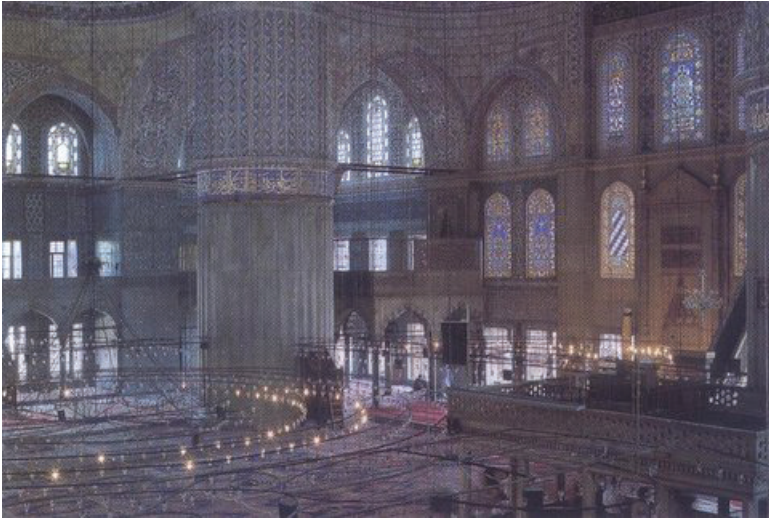
On the 11th, I had returned from Toledo in Spain to Madrid where I was defending a new religion in a court case, and on the 12th, I was headed for India to be part of an International Seminar on the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in March of 2001. There I met with Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Tibetan Buddhists and other scholars to discuss the situation under the Taliban.

And now as we meet, we are into the 6th day of the American led "War on Terrorism." Of course, the

acts of those engaged in the “war on terror” are not evil actions, according to American officials. Rather they would have us believe that these are the acts of those who would have, it is said, justice. Are not these also evil acts? And so the bombs have rained down on Afghanistan in an effort to smash and destroy the training camps of terrorists. And there is “collateral damage” and so innocent Afghani men, women and children also die and the countryside is demolished. The wheel of suffering continues to roll. No one is immune.⁴

Immediately after the events of 9/11, many Americans began to say “the world has been forever changed by these events” and that we now find ourselves in a “post 9/11 world.” I found such rhetoric overblown and counter productive, typical of the American penchant to define everything in relation to itself. What was needed was more sober consideration of these events and what they meant about, as well as for, the USA and its role in the world. What is, one might have asked, the American presence in the wider world that led to such hatred of the USA that people had high-jacked planes and committed these terrifying and horrific acts? There was no wise response to these events. There was only a reaction: President Bush called it the “war on terrorism.” Since then, the Taliban has been expelled from power in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussain removed from power in Iraq. But has anything been done to address the issues that gave rise to these events?

The men who hijacked the planes and flew them into the World Trade Towers were Muslims—mostly Saudi Arabian and none from either Afghanistan or Iraq. They were linked to Osama Bin Laden—and to other movements in the contemporary Muslim world. To be sure, these terrorist movements are highly disturbing. Ideological and deeply politicized, they are movements that are fuelled by a deep animosity towards the West (initially for Western colonization of Muslim lands but increasingly since the mid-1970s towards the USA and its imperial ambitions) and by what they perceive as the failures of contemporary Muslim states.⁵ But the high-jackers/terrorists



Inside the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey.

are not all Muslims, nor are they a majority, nor do they even represent a large number in the Muslim world. It is the equivalent of identifying Christianity with “Christian Identity,” a group that identifies Christianity with White Supremacy, and other evil things.⁶ The events of 9/11 were condemned by Muslim leaders around the world. Muslim leaders repeatedly said that this kind of action—the hijacking of planes and flying them into civilian targets, suicide bombers, etc.—could not be justified by the Qur’an, or Muslim teaching.

When I hear the term “Muslim,” what pops up on the inner screen of my mind is the Ali family in New Delhi and the Muslims I have met there over the past twenty-five years—the Shaykh from Nazareth and others praying in the mosque in Israel, the Muslims I met in Turkey who were so remarkably friendly and gracious on my visits, the Muslims gathering in the magnificent Blue Mosque in Istanbul for prayer, or scholars like the able Dr. Meena Sharify-Funk now a colleague at nearby Wilfred Laurier University.

But the image of the Muslim that has emerged after 9/11 is that of Osama bin Laden and the terrorist. In the hysteria that

followed 9/11 in the USA—Philip Roth called it an “orgy of narcissism”—the Rev. Jerry Falwell said that even the Prophet of Islam, Mohammad, “was a terrorist.”⁷ This appallingly ignorant remark led to riots and the killing of several Muslims in India. Falwell later retracted his statement and apologized. A Sikh in the USA was killed, mistaken for a Muslim because he had a “turban.” Here in the Kitchener Waterloo area following 9/11, some Muslims kept their children home from school and sharply curtailed their outside activities, feeling considerable animosity. In the USA, mosques were attacked, as were some here in Canada. Prof. Gregory Baum, one of Canada’s leading Catholic theologians, recently remarked concerning the “backlash against innocent Muslims” prompted by 9/11 that he was “horrified by this.” Indeed, he went on to say that “Christian churches have a duty to speak up and support Muslims who are facing uninformed prejudice.” Baum continued, “The church remembers its historic silence regarding prejudice [against] the Jews ... and we must not allow this again.”⁸ Baum’s courageous statement in the post-9/11 situation needs to be repeated by other Christian leaders. But it also illustrates some of the new difficulties in pursuing dialogue between Muslims and Christians after 9/11.

Prior to 9/11, there was the long-standing failure of Western Christianity to rightly understand the great traditions of Islam—a failure that is reflected in the long history of the Western world calling Islam “Mohammadinism.” This label is an offence to Muslims since it suggests that Mohammad is the object of Muslim prayer and devotion. For the Muslim, that is reserved for Allah alone. In an earlier essay first given at Aligarh University in India, I spell out some of those misunderstandings.⁹ Before 9/11, I had found that dialogue with Muslims was generally welcomed though sometimes difficult—usually because of suspicions of Christian motives given the history of colonization and a pervasive conversionism within so much of the Christian world. And, because of the long-standing anti-Muslim narratives that have been part of the Christian world since the early Middle Ages.

Dialogue with Muslims was possible simply because Is-

lam is a great tradition that has given comfort and direction to millions and millions of people over the past 1400 years. Wilfrid Cantwell Smith, a great Canadian scholar of Islam, later Director of the Centre for the World's Religions at Harvard and a teacher of mine, made this point about Muslims repeatedly in his many volumes on Islam.¹⁰ Dialogue with Muslims was not only possible, but also was welcomed when the Christian came with an open heart and respect for the Muslim Way. Today, it is the world's second largest tradition with approximately twenty-five percent of the believing world being Muslim—of one kind or another. Christianity is the world's largest tradition, with approximately one-third of the world's believers finding themselves in one or another of the Christian traditions. Together, these two traditions constitute nearly sixty percent of the believing world. Yet the relations between these two traditions have nearly always been strained if not overtly hostile. However, in the post-WWII period there has been a large movement of Muslims into the historically more religiously homogeneous countries in Europe, the USA and Canada—Turkish Muslims to Germany and other places in Europe, North African Muslims to France and Spain, Muslims from former “colonies” to the UK, East African Muslims to Canada and the USA. Thus some Christians saw, from the mid-twentieth century on, the importance and significance of changing the relationships between Muslims and Christians.

The Muslims we encountered in the mid-20th century were Muslims that had recently emerged from lands that, formerly Muslim, had been dominated by Western colonial powers. There were the Dutch in Indonesia, now the world's largest Muslim country. There were the British in India who left India fractured in 1947 with 500,000 to over a million Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs dying during partition. Now there is a Pakistan and an India and each has more Muslims than any Middle Eastern Arab country. There was the former Soviet Union, which dominated the Muslim lands of central Asia. Egypt was dominated by the French then the British until mid-20th century, and after WWI, the former Ottoman Empire was carved up among the British and French. With the end of colonization there has been

a resurgence of Islam in the 20th century, but it is a resurgence that still bears the marks, the hurts, the scares of colonization.¹¹

After 9/11, the atmosphere in the meeting of Muslims and Christians definitely took on a chill. Christians were worried that perhaps these Muslims were also terrorists—that suspicion about the Muslim was always there, usually covertly, sometimes overtly. And Muslims often were aware that they were being seen through the “terrorist lens” that had fallen across the world following 9/11.

III: La Ilaha Illah Allah.

If the depth of ignorance of Islam in the West was pervasive prior to 9/11, it has deepened and worsened following 9/11. Now the word “Muslim” is so deeply entwined with that of terrorist that these words have, for countless numbers in the Western world and beyond, become synonymous. It is thus very difficult to see the great traditions of Islam for what they are. *La Ilaha Illah Allah* (There is no god but Allah) is the belief that stood at the foundation of the faith proclaimed by the prophet Mohammad (570-630) in the midst of the Arabian Peninsula nearly a millennium and a half ago. Mohammad saw himself in the line of prophets that went back to Adam, Noah, Abraham and countless others including Isa, the Qur’anic name of Jesus. Mohammad did not see himself as founding a new religion but rather as recalling humankind to “the peace that comes with submission to Allah”—the meaning of the term “Islam.” (And Allah is the term that Arab Christians use for God.) Yet Christians have an awful record in relation to Islam. Christianity has more maligned than understood this great faith. We have called it “Mohammadism”—a term offensive to Muslims—rather than by its proper name. Its Prophet has been denigrated by Christians time and again: Dante encounters Mohammad in the lower reaches of Hell in his not-so-divine *Divine Comedy*. Its scripture, the Qur’an, has not been acknowledged and is little known or studied by Christians. This history has contributed too many negative images of Islam within the Christian world. Christians need to overcome this history in their relations with Muslims. And there are some signs in our times that this is beginning to happen.

For example, the 2nd Vatican Council of the Catholic Church called for dialogue with Islam, as has the World Council of Churches.¹² In the Vatican II “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” ... we read:

Upon the Moslems, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all powerful, Maker of heaven and earth ... they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. Although in the course of centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding.¹³

Kenneth Craig’s characterization of Islam in *Call of the Minaret* in the late 1950s was a wake-up call for many in the Christian world.¹⁴ Furthermore, there are those within the Muslim world who have also initiated dialogue with Christians in the hope of moving beyond some of the ignorance and misunderstanding that has too much characterized Muslim/Christian relations. Most recently, there is the voice of Tariq Ramadan, an Egyptian Muslim, and grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1920s, educated in Europe, and a Professor of Islamic Studies at Fribourg. Ramadan had been invited as a guest professor to Notre Dame following 9/11, but his visa was revoked and he was not allowed into the USA. The decision was based on concerns for “public safety and national security.” Ramadan has written a number of very important books, and his *Islam, the West and the Challenge of Modernity* concludes with this paragraph:

The awakening of Islam may bring a contribution, hitherto unsuspected, to a real renaissance of the spirituality of the women and men of our world. Again one should avoid presenting the encounter between Islam and the West under the terms of a conflict, but see it instead in the perspective of mutual enrichment. In the face of a civilisation that maintains everyday its attachment to its faith in a unique God, prayer, moral-

ity, and spirituality in daily existence, the West will benefit in looking, and finding, in its own religious and cultural points of reference the means to react against the sad economist and technician drifts which we are witnessing. Does it have the means? Can it go beyond this stage of nervousness and rejection of everything that is not itself? The question deserves to be raised. Muslims doubt this sometimes; some foresee an inevitable conflict whilst others have trust in God and dialogue. All agree, however, in asserting that the future depends on our present engagement. Our daily spirituality must be nourished by the exactness of justice. This is the ultimate liberation that founds fraternities; to be with God and to live with men.¹⁵

Ramadan's commitment to universal moral principles and to dialogue with other traditions is an element that marks his writings. He is a brilliant thinker, familiar with Western thought, yet deeply rooted in the great traditions of Islam, whose voice resonates in the Muslim world. More recently, Ramadan has specifically addressed Canadian Muslims arguing that they must

“Rise to the challenge: ...they must make a considerable effort to review their sources and traditions. They must determine the fundamentals of their faith and practice. ...They must propose new ways of being Canadian Muslims. It is a complex and difficult challenge that involves knowledge and analysis of traditional Islamic sources; as well as the Canadian environment, its history, its institutions and its culture.”¹⁶

Shouldn't we welcome voices like his?

IV: The Twenty-Four Inch World

Contemporary mass media are credited with having given rise to a global village linked by instantaneous communication. Thus there is no time lag between events and our knowledge of those events. What happens in the West Bank or in Pakistan or in China or in Jerusalem or in Moscow is, we believe, immediately available to us on the evening news. But what we

often fail to notice is how this instant news reduces the world to twenty-four inches—and to a matter of seconds (the time to speak about the events that we glimpse). Our vast, complex, multi-cultural and multi-national world with its repetitive and often slow-moving rhythms on which the sun rises and sets day after day, month after month, year after year, is reduced to images on a twenty-four inch screen. And what we see is always the world in conflict. Rather than the tens of thousands of births that occur every day, we see the few, sometimes many, deaths that occur violently in war, crime, cars or catastrophe. How often do we hear, for example, of the many efforts to bridge the conflicts or see the daily peaceful interactions of people, even in the midst of conflict?

This terrible and distorting reductionism in the mass media has been repeatedly brought home to me over the past fifty years. I remember my year in Geneva (1969-70) when I read the *New York Times* only three times, when passing through the US on flights from Latin America where I was organizing events for the World Encounter of Lutheran Youth back to Geneva. I realized that I hadn't really missed anything at all: the events of the world revealed the constant patterns that had been there at the beginning of the year.

During my first year in India with my family, our visit began with someone taking a shot at Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the celebrations at the Gandhi Memorial on October 2, 1986, the day of our arrival. The first letters we received were worried about our safety in India. For the letter writers, India had been reduced to the event in one tiny corner of New Delhi—and if it weren't for the media, we probably wouldn't even have known of the event.

1986 was also a time of trouble in the Punjab and conflict between Hindus and Sikhs. We read and heard much about that conflict, but nothing of the rallies held in the Punjab where thousands of Sikhs and Hindus came together to acknowledge their historic bonds of friendship with one another.

When I was in Jerusalem in 2002 during a time of "suicide bombing," every one of my days was spent with a group of Jews, Muslims, and a few Christians trying to build bridges of

understanding in the midst of conflict. Yet the media was filled with the ever-present threat of suicide bombing.

Random acts of violence and deliberate bombings are not the whole story in any society at any time. But from the way in which our view of the world is framed and reduced to twenty-four inches, one would think so. And following 9/11, the image of the Muslim as terrorist has been burned into our psyches in ways that make it exceedingly difficult to see anything else.

IV. The Dialogue We Need

In our current situation, it is increasingly imperative that we/Christians stand in solidarity with Muslims. I noted earlier that Gregory Baum, one of Canada's leading Catholic thinkers has made this very point. It has recently been made by David J. Goa in his remarkable "*Christian Responsibility to Muslims: Four Lectures*."¹⁷ But such acts of courage need to be repeated time and again. For dialogue between people of different faiths needs to be encouraged and my experience over these last decades has convinced me of its necessity. It is not possible to explore here the dynamics of dialogue in a wholly adequate way. But let me make a few points in relation to dialogue between Muslims and Christians.¹⁸

First, dialogue—a living and vital exchange between Muslims and Christians—is essential for giving the Other (Muslim for the Christian, Christian for the Muslim) *a human face*. Face-to-face meeting is essential to breaking through the images that we have of one another. David J. Goa, a scholar and long-time curator in the Provincial Museum of Alberta, makes a similar point in *The Christian Responsibility to Muslims*. In his first lecture he movingly recounts moments in a thirty year conversation with Muslims in Alberta. And he urges his readers engage one another. Christians need, he urges, to “not bear false witness.”

Second, in our post 9/11 situation, it is now possible to realize that those who follow the Way of “the peace that comes with submission to Allah” (the meaning of Islam) are not *the Other but our neighbour*, literally and metaphorically. The so-called global village has arrived everywhere. The first mosque in Canada was built in Edmonton in 1938. There are now over

a million Canadian Muslims. David J. Goa urges us to “no longer look at Muslims through the lens of the past.”

Third, in our meeting and dialogue with one another we don’t have to sugar-coat the differences between communities of faith, nor do we need to pretend they aren’t there—they are there and they are many. But in order for this to happen, we need to build trusting relations between these great traditions. Muslims regard Jesus—known as Isa in the Qur’an—as a prophet. And one of the most troubling issues for Muslims is the failure of Christians to acknowledge their Prophet. David J. Goa approaches this issue in the fourth lecture of his *Christian Responsibility to Muslims*. Here he proposes that Christians “recognize a remarkable person (Muhammad) in the 7th century and the community he called to faithfulness ... and acknowledge Muhammad as a “servant of God.”¹⁹

In the late 1960s, I made my first trip into Eastern Europe with a group of students from a small college in Minnesota. The Cold War was still hot, and the previous year Soviet tanks had crushed the Prague Spring. As we approached the Czech border, the apprehension in the bus grew—we were entering the “Commie world.” A large fence with observation towers marked the border and contributed to the palpable anxiety. As the bus pulled into the border station and our passports were being collected, a young woman came out of the border station with her two young children. One of the students called out: “Look, they even have children.” We all laughed, nervously. The image of the Other had been broken.

As trust builds and relationships between Muslims and Christians deepen, it is possible to explore those failures and aspects of each other’s traditions that are most disturbing and troubling.

But in dialogue with Muslims it is fundamental for Christians to know that Muslims respect and honour the Prophet Mohammad, cherish the Qu’ran, pray five times a day, practice charity, and long to make a pilgrimage to Mecca in their lifetime. To respect their Ways is not to betray our own, as some Christians seem to think. Rather, it is for Christians to be faithful to the Incarnate One who recalled us to “love God and the

neighbour” as the whole of the Law and the Prophets. In the world after 9/11, this teaching is even more imperative than ever.

VI. A 2014 Postscript

As I was revising this paper for inclusion in a new edition of *Religion in a New Key* it seemed appropriate to add a postscript on the situation fourteen years after 9/11. On September 14, 2001, USA lawmakers passed AUMF or Authorization for use of Military Force against Terrorists. On September 20, George W. Bush proclaimed the “War on Terror.” Operation Enduring Freedom was launched by the USA and the UK against Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. It was thirteen years later, on October 26, 2014, under President Barak Obama that the USA and UK officially ended their combat role in Afghanistan. On December 28, 2014, NATO officially ended combat operations. But US troops would remain to train Afghani forces. The estimated cost to the USA was 468 billion dollars; Canada spent 18 billion on its contribution to the conflict. Tens of thousands of Afghani lives were lost along with 3500 foreign troops and thousands more suffered PTSD. The civil conflict continues.

Operation Enduring Freedom also saw action in the Philippines, the Horn of Africa, and the Trans-Sahara. Were the consequences there positive?

Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched by President George W. Bush in March 2003 on the unproven basis that “Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.” And in April 2003, Baghdad fell and later Saddam Hussein was captured. Yet the war continued until the US troops exited in 2011 again under President Obama. The cost was estimated at 757 billion by the US Defence Department. A study from Brown University put that number at 1.1 trillion. But the human cost soared beyond these numbers. Iraq was a political mess. Then in 2014, the emergence of ISIL (Islamic State of Syria & the Levant), the conflict in Syria, and the continuing conflict in Iraq led to US air forces returning to the fray, along with Canadian ones. Was this the outcome anyone wanted?

War has not proven to be the way to address the issues arising from 9/11. Rather, war has deepened and extended

the socio-political tensions between the West and the Muslim world. It has also provided the criminal element within the Muslim world with further evidence for their allegations that the West is anti-Muslim. Wouldn't it have been better to have pursued the criminals as a police matter? Would we be further ahead if we had chosen the way of engagement, diplomacy, and dialogue?

Despite the problems raised by 9/11 and even more by the reactions to those events, the way of dialogue continues to grow and flourish in local and national settings across the globe. According to the Catholic News Agency, Pope Francis speaking to the Pontifical Institute of Arabic & Islamic Studies on January 24, 2014, "stressed the need for dialogue between different faiths" and "praised the group's efforts to promote Christian-Muslim dialogue, emphasizing the importance of such dialogue in achieving peace."

Endnotes

¹ Earlier versions of this essay were delivered at a Faculty Seminar at Renison University College in 2005 and then at a Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2006. It has again been revisited for publication here.

² In the mid-1990s, I held a conference here at Renison that resulted in a volume I co-edited with S. A. Ali, the founder of the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies: *Muslim Christian Dialogue: Promise and Problems* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1998). Some years later I was invited to contribute to an on-line journal, *FutureIslam*. When I replied that I wasn't a Muslim, the editor responded in a way that I still treasure. I have contributed to the journal.

³ Reza Shah-Kazemi, "The Role of the Prophet Muhammad in Muslim Piety," in *Muslim Christian Dialogue, op.cit.*, p. 149.

⁴ I then went on to discuss the Conference theme of "God & Suffering," but I have never been invited back to the annual conference.

⁵ See Mark Jurgensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003 which looks at violence laced with "religious passion" in Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Buddhist and Muslim traditions. Who, for example, recalls that Timothy McVeigh, found guilty for the Oklahoma bombings, had links to

the “Christian Identity” movement. When the Oklahoma bombings occurred I was at a conference at Oxford in the UK and the headlines read: Oklahoma Blast Kills Hundreds, Muslim Terrorists Suspected.

⁶ See www.kingidentity.com. The “Christian Identity” groups gathered under this banner are several extremely conservative, racist, and militantly “supremacist” groups, including the KKK.

⁷ In 2005 a Danish newspaper published “cartoons” that portrayed the prophet Mohammad as a terrorist. It sparked a controversy that continues to this day. Already in 1995, one of the participants—a Muslim from the USA—at the Renison Conference brought along a “cartoon” portrayal of the Prophet as a terrorist that was being handed out as a tract by an American Christian group from the southern USA. The Danish cartoon controversy was followed by “riots” in Muslim countries, and the destruction of the Danish Embassy in Syria.

⁸ See the article in (KW Record, Saturday, January 21, 2006, p. 8)

⁹ See my article “Overcoming History: On the Possibilities of Muslim-Christian Dialogue” in the *Hamdard Islamicus*, Vol XVII, No. 2, 1994, pp. 5-15, a Muslim journal, that spells out my position. There I raised the issues of “fundamentalism” and “conversionism” as challenges facing Muslims and Christians. A revised version of that essay was also included in the 2nd edition of *Religion in a New Key* as well as the current edition. See pages 73-93 of the current edition.

¹⁰ Among Wilfrid Cantwell Smith’s many writings are *Islam in Modern History* (1959), *Faith & Belief* (1979), and *On Understanding Islam* (1984).

¹¹ One book that I would strongly recommend, though it does not address Muslim-Christian dialogue explicitly, is Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America’s Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004). It provides an excellent account of the past one-hundred years of the Middle East and the legacy of the colonial era.

¹² The World Council of Churches has been sponsoring exchanges between Christians and Muslims since the early 1970s. And for many years now they publish *Current Dialogue*, see www.wcc-coe.org.

¹³ *The Documents of Vatican II*, W. Abbott, ed. (New York: The America Press, 1966), p. 663.

¹⁴ See Kenneth Craig, *Call of the Mineret* (New York: 1959). Now an Anglican Bishop, Craig wrote many books on Islam.

¹⁵ Tariq Ramadam, *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester, UK: Islamic Foundation, 2001), p. 311. Speaking to European Muslims, Ramadan remarks that Muslims must “reconsider our respective isolation and strive to promote the *culture of dialogue* that each of us individually knows is fundamentally *Islamic*.” p. 220 in *To Be a European Muslim* (Leicester, UK: Islamic Foundation, 1999).

¹⁶ Tariq Ramadam, “Muslims need creative pluralism,” *Globe & Mail*, February 19, 2005.

¹⁷ See David J. Goa, *The Christian Responsibility to Muslims: Four Lec-*

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

tures (Camrose, Alberta: The Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life, 2015).

¹⁸ Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish Muslim make the same point: “interfaith dialogue is a must today, and the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones.” See www.fethullah-gulen.org.

¹⁹ David J. Goa, *Christian Responsibility to Muslims*, p. 94.

VIII

A Journey into the Great Traditions of China

It was December, 2011, and I was finally on my way to China. I was giddy with anticipation. I had long been fascinated with the great traditions of China and had taught a course on East Asian traditions for years. But now I would have the opportunity to gain some direct experience of this land, its culture and peoples, and especially its pathways of spiritual life. One of the worlds oldest cultures stretching back into the third millennium BCE, it had emerged in my lifetime onto the center stage of world affairs. This would be my opportunity to engage this world in dialogue as I had in India, Turkey, Japan, and Korea.

In the twentieth century, China went through tumultuous changes. The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) fell in 1911, and was succeeded by the Republic of China (1912-1949). There were civil conflicts beginning in the 1920s, and the Japanese had invaded China in 1937 and were finally ousted in 1945 as World War II ended. When the Red Army under Mao Zedong (1893-1976) marched into Beijing in 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded. Since then, China has been ruled by the Communist Party. Following Karl Marx, the new regime declared all religion "the opium of the people" and embraced atheism.

It was a century that was marked by great upheavals in the great Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions of China, as well as in smaller traditions like those of Islam and Christianity. Already in the mid-nineteenth century, the Confucian Way was being widely criticized for its rigidity, and during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) it was considered one of the "Four Olds" that needed to be overcome. The Daoist and Buddhist Ways also suffered greatly, especially during the Cultural Revolution when shrines (Confucian & Folk Chinese), temples

(Confucian, Daoist, & Buddhist), monasteries and historic religious sites were destroyed. But in 1981, the governing party officially allowed the practice of five religious traditions: Daoist, Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic Christianity and Protestant Christianity. Confucianism was regarded as an “ideology.” And Daoists, Buddhists, Muslims and Catholic and Protestant groups had to be registered with the state.

It was to explore what was happening in these religious/spiritual ways that most interested me when I arrived in China.

My first shock when arriving in China was the modernity and efficiency and the ease of arrival at the Beijing airport. I was traveling with Yan Li, a colleague from Renison University College and the Director of the Confucius Institute at the University of Waterloo. We proceeded through this spacious, gleaming airport without delay, and were soon in a taxi speeding into the city on a multi-lane highway. In the falling light, we sped past gleaming high-rises and down spacious avenues filled with huge modern buildings that would rival any of the modern cities of the West. This was not what I had expected. I had travelled in Eastern Europe in 1969 and expected to find here in China a strong military presence and the bleak architecture of the Communist worlds I had experienced then. But there was none of that. I was in a remarkable new world that I would come to view in a different way.

Over the next two weeks—and then a further three weeks in June 2012—I had the opportunity to visit Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian sites in Beijing, Datong, Tianjin, Jinan, Qufu, Xian, and Wutai Shan (mountains) in north China. I would also visit the Great Wall of China and the Forbidden City, and drive through Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces, and see the Yungang Grottos/Caves, the many monasteries of Wutai, Confucius’s temple complex in Qufu, Muslim mosques in Xian and Datong that went back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and a legendary grave site for Lao Tzu. I ate wonderful meals in grand and working class restaurants; I travelled with others and sometimes alone. I don’t speak Chinese, but I encountered wonderfully friendly and helpful people. And most importantly, I was able to have long conversations with Confu-

cian scholars, Daoist leaders, Buddhist monks and lay-people, Muslims, Christians and Communist officials—sometimes in translation, but often in English. They would all contribute to my dramatically altered sense of contemporary China and its great spiritual pathways. So what did I learn? I am going to answer this question by focusing on my experience in relation to the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions with some briefer notes on Muslim and Christian traditions.

As we turn to these different Ways in Chinese spirituality, it is well to recall the words of John Blofeld, an Englishman who went to China early in the 20th century and immersed himself in Chinese Ways. “The Chinese,” he said, “seldom subscribed to the view that adhering to one religious tradition precludes adherence to another—or several others. Traditionally, most Chinese have been simultaneously Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist and followers of the ancient folk religion that never attained a name of its own.”¹ These traditions that we present here separately have been woven into Chinese cultural life in ways different from what we know in the Western traditions.

There is no term more important than Dao/Tao/Way in the Chinese traditions. It is the term that points to that which is most fundamental to the life of the cosmos, society, and humanity. It is ineffable yet, encountered and experienced in the midst of life. Daoists call it the Dao, Confucianists call their Way, the Way of Goodness & Harmony, and Buddhism is also called the Buddhist Way in China. It is also a dynamic principle that is also found in the ancient *I Ching* or Book of Changes. That term is known in different ways in the different traditions but remains fundamental to each. It is worth keeping this in mind as we turn now to the ways of the peoples of China.

II. Confucian Ways: Goodness & Social Harmony

“...that friends should come to one from afar, is this not delightful... Analects I.1”

One of my first stops in Beijing was the Confucian Temple and the Imperial College. Founded in the 1300s, it is a complex of buildings including a temple dedicated to Confucius and rows of stone steles or tablets that record the names of those who had succeeded in passing the imperial exams over



Darrol Bryant at the Temple of Confucius in Beijing, stone tablets (steles) record the names of more than 50,000 scholars that passed the Imperial Exams.

the centuries. The names carved into stone went back, century after century. Nearly 2000 years ago, during the Han Dynasty, the teachings of Confucius were incorporated into the imperial exams. But following the founding of the Republic of China in 1912, these exams were abandoned and ritual events were forbidden at the site. There was a quiet but moving air about the place. I found it impressive, and like the other visitors, we took pictures near the Confucius statue. This whole complex would have come as a surprise to Confucius, since he was not a success in his own time.

The Confucian Way traces its origins to Kong the Master (Kong Fuzi), known in the West as Confucius, a teacher/scholar who lived from 551-479 BCE. Confucius did not claim novelty for his teaching; rather, he claimed to be transmitting the wisdom of the ancients. His father died early and he was raised by an impoverished mother. He held some minor posts in his native state, but early on devoted himself to teaching others.

Confucius lived during a time of much conflict and warring between different claimants to power, known as the Period of the Warring States. He sought a way beyond the conflicts that tore society apart. He sought a way that could bring about social harmony.

As a teacher, then, Confucius' teaching came to revolve around the principles of *ren* (*jen* or human-heartedness), *xiao* (filial piety) and *li* (propriety or right behavior). But they were centered in the five great relationships:

husband/wife, (husbands good, wives listening)
 parent/child, (parents loving, children reverential)
 older sibling/younger sibling, (older gentle, younger respectful)
 older friend/younger friend, (considerate, deferential)
 ruler/subject. (benevolent/loyal)

These relationships are the warp and woof of family and social life. They are also dynamic and multiple. For example, I am a son, elder brother to two sisters and a younger brother, elder friend to some, younger friend to others, husband, father and grandfather, even in some respects a ruler and in others a subject. In these many and varied relationships, I am, like everyone else, called to fulfill varied and multiple roles. Those roles are neither fixed nor one way, though they are hierarchical. Taken together, they lead to a metonymic view of society and social relations.

Confucius saw the human task as cultivating one's human nature or human-heartedness (*ren/jen*) in a social context. We are not born fully formed; it is rather through learning, negotiating the five great relationships, and practicing the arts of poetry and archery that we become what we become. Likewise, he still strove to perfect the *propriety* (*li* is propriety, right behaviour & ritual) that was so essential to harmonious relationships. Although persuaded of the rightness of his teaching, Confucius was modest about his accomplishments. He remained reticent about the gods, yet believed that Heaven (Tien) and Earth were meant for harmony. He felt, for example, that he had never really achieved filial piety, for his father

died too early, nor did he feel he had mastered the wisdom of the ancients. His students, however, regarded him as a sage, a wise man. The Confucian Way was sometimes called the Way of Goodness. It was a Way that located the sacred in the secular and social matrix of life.

As later Confucians would teach,

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character, if beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home, if there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation, if there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.²

Though Confucius spent a life-time seeking to influence the rulers of his time, he wasn't successful. When he died at seventy-two, he left a handful of disciples and a body of teaching that was inscribed in the lives of those who heeded Master Kung. Those teaching were subsequently gathered in a volume known as the *Analects* or "selected sayings/stories."

In subsequent generations, Mencius or Meng Tzu (385-302) further developed Confucian thought, giving it a more philosophical form as he argued for the potential goodness of the human being. It was achieved by cultivating one's humaneness or human-heartedness (*ren/jen*). It is an on-going activity mediated through learning and study and the arts such as poetry, calligraphy, painting and archery. Later, Zhu Xi (1130-1280) would draw upon Daoist and Buddhist teaching to give the Confucian tradition a new face: it was called Neo-Confucianism. It put a larger philosophic or metaphysical face to the ancient Way of Goodness.

Already during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), Confucian teaching became central to education in China and loomed prominently in the examinations of the imperial government. It was one's ticket into government service. These exams would continue to be important until 1911. Confucian *chiao*, or teaching, was woven into Chinese life and culture. It was said that Chinese people were followers of the folk and Daoist traditions in the morning, Confucianists in their public life during the day, and Buddhists in the evening.

These long-standing cultural patterns were challenged in the nineteenth century as China encountered Western modernity. Christian missionaries brought teachings that challenged long established societal practices and instituted new educational forms. Traders brought western goods, and as western powers sought a piece of the action in China, they brought modern sciences and new ideas of governance. These developments challenged a Confucianism that had grown complacent and settled into a rigid formality. As the winds of change swept across China there were those who saw Confucian Ways as something to be overcome. They reached a peak in the Cultural Revolution of Mao's China (1966-76) that saw much of the Confucian heritage swept away. I wondered what I would find of that great tradition.

Surprisingly, I heard much talk of Confucian traditions when in China. Universities like Shandong University in Jinan, where I lectured in 2012, now have a significant Department of Confucian Studies. Confucian temples and shrines are being restored. Some Chinese visitors to the Confucian temple in Jinan wanted to know what I thought of the temple and Confucius, and when I expressed my appreciation of the Temple and Confucius, they clapped and insisted that we all have our picture taken together.

I also learned that since the 1990s Confucian terms have re-entered the language of the political leaders in China. The new high-speed train that I rode from Beijing to Tianjin is called "Harmonius Train." It travelled at 280 kms per hour and riding it was like floating on air.

Clearly, something is happening in China in relation to the great traditions of the Confucian Way.

When I returned to China in 2012, it was for the Nishan Forum, an initiative to promote dialogue and exchange between Chinese culture/civilization and the West. Confucius was central to the event. It was held in Qufu in Shandong province, near Confucius' birthplace and the site of the largest Confucian temple in Asia. More than 200 scholars from more than fifty countries had gathered to "enhance mutual understanding and respect among peoples of different countries to build

a more harmonious world." Confucius, I think, would have been pleased.

While at the Conference, I was able to visit the Confucian temple complex in Qufu. It is said to have been founded immediately after Confucius' death, but it was only during the Han Dynasty (c.150 BCE) that the emperor came to make offerings to the spirit of Confucius. During the centuries, it has undergone many changes; it has burned down and been rebuilt several times. Today, it is a series of nine courtyards on a north/south axis. The structures are red and topped by yellow tiles, the colour for tiles normally reserved for the Imperial court. It is filled with trees and many stone steles including tortoise steles. As we wandered from courtyard to courtyard, my guide pointed out the significance of every structure. There was a steady stream of visitors, but it was not crowded. It has more the feel of a museum than a place of worship. It was heavily damaged during the Cultural Revolution but has since been largely restored and has become a world heritage site. It gave me another glimpse into the changing place of the Confucian Way in Chinese life.

III. Daoist Ways: the Way, Wisdom and Wu Wei

...the Tao (Way) that can be spoken is not the true Tao...Tao te Ching/Dao de Jing

My first visit to a Daoist Temple was in Hong Kong in the 1990s. It was mid-day and as I walked up to the temple I passed at least fifty fortune tellers and sellers of charms. This was certainly a surprise to me, and a bit shocking. At the temple, the courtyard was crowded with people offering their prayers, lighting huge incense sticks, and shaking a can containing sticks until one fell out. I stood transfixed. There were also many shrines in the Temple complex and one was dedicated to Confucius. That too came as a surprise. Later I would learn that the stick would be returned to one of the fortune tellers who would then give the devotee his or her daily fortune. Here I encountered a striking blend of superstition and authentic devotion.

While in Beijing, I visited the "White Cloud" Daoist temple but it was more subdued than what I had experienced in Hong



Inside a Daoist Temple in Hong Kong.

Kong. Then later I visited a huge new Temple complex outside Xian and another older and simpler Daoist temple high in the mountains and a Daoist recluse. These latter experiences were closer to what I had expected to encounter, since my reading about the Daoist Ways had led me to expect a more philosophical and mystical Daoism.

The origins of Daoism go back to the legendary figure of Lao Tzu (now Laozi). Some traditional accounts make him a contemporary of Confucius—and even suggest that they once met—but the “Old One,” as his name may be translated, is shrouded in mystery. He is said to have held a minor government post until he left his position and went deep into the mountains to find his *Dao* or Way. After years spent living a life of simplicity and cultivating the Way that runs through the universe, nature, and our humanity, he mounted a water buffalo and headed off to Tibet. At the border, the story goes, the guard recognized the Old Man and begged him to leave behind his wisdom. That night Lao Tzu wrote the *Daodejing* or the *Way and Its Power*, left it with the border guard and continued on his journey. This enigmatic text became foundational

for the diverse expressions—philosophical, religious, and popular—of Daoism.

Unlike Confucius with his focus on the five great relationships foundational to our social life, Lao Tzu pursued the Way (tao/dao) that is the invisible dynamic at the heart of all things. It is, at once, the Way of the Ultimate, the Way of the universe, and the Way of human life. The Way of the Ultimate always exceeds our words and concepts; it is ineffable and transcendent yet present in all things. The Way that pervades the universe is the dynamic polarity of *chi* the vital energy or spirit that enlivens all things in this ever-changing, ever unfolding universe. And that same Way pervades the human as well and is a way of *wu-wei*, a way of being that is spontaneous and rides the unfolding, ever-changing rhythms of life.

The more philosophical strand of the Daoist Way was further articulated by Chuang Tzu, (now Zhuangzi) c. 360 B.C.E. In his wise, pithy sayings and curious stories, he articulated the way that knows “it is better to sit on the banks of a remote mountain stream than to be the emperor of the whole world.” It is a life of “wu-wei” or “non-action” that simply goes, like water, with the flow of yin/yang, the polar and complimentary rhythm of the whole. It is a life of simplicity and oneness with one’s own nature and the natural world. As Chuang Tzu says, “to a mind that is still, the universe surrenders.” It is the Way of the recluse.

In the first centuries of the Common Era, another strand of Daoism began to emerge. It was known as religious/popular Daoism. It had its own temples, priests, rites, and symbolic images. The Daoist immortals were elevated as gods. It was an astrological, alchemical, and dietary gloss on the earlier traditions of the Daoist Way. The first of these Daoist sects emerged around Chang Tao-ling (c. 40-100 CE) and promised a magical transformation and long life. Others would emerge over the centuries, as did Tai Chi and other traditions designed to stimulate the *chi/qi* or bodily energy. When I was in China, every morning when I went for a walk I would encounter people practicing this ancient discipline. Sometimes I was able to join them.

The 12th century saw the emergence of a Daoist monastic movement that borrowed heavily from the Buddhists. Although Daoists were often critical of Confucian teaching, regarding it as too formal and external, their wisdom and practice became an integral strand of Chinese cultural life.

On my second visit to China, I was able to visit several Daoist centers outside of Xian, the ancient capital of China. One of those centres was called Lou Guan Tai (Mansion Observing Terrace) but I saw it as a Disney version of Daoism. Fancy big halls with brightly painted images of the Daoist Immortals/gods, everything ship-shape with mobile carts to drive one around the complex and with a shop to buy Daoist paraphernalia, what more could one want? It was said to be a place where Laozi gave teachings concerning the ineffable Dao some 2500 years ago. Fortunately, we had an excellent Daoist guide, Master Ding, and a local historian, Scholar Zhang, who could tell us about the Daoist Way and its presence in this area. They were excellent. They gave us a sense of the Daoist Way, its history and its practice.

Following our visit to Lou Guan Tai we went up into the mountains (*Zhong Nan*) to visit a more traditional Daoist centre—which was much more authentic. The Daoist teacher said that one “doesn’t become a member of Daoism, as in Buddhism or Christianity. Daoism, he continued, is “a principle and not a religion.” “Love and the protection of nature is,” he said, “the Daoist Way.” And, he informed us, he had recently urged the UN to do likewise—to love and protect nature that is.

After this visit we went to a rural restaurant situated near a mountain stream and had a wonderful lunch. I said this lunch was “one of the great spiritual experiences I’d had in China.” As we drove away, Scholar Zhang pointed to a site said to be the tomb of Lao Tzu. It was *Da Ling Hill* (Grand Tomb Hill), and we had to stop. Set deep in the green mountains above a river below, it was a lovely setting and appropriate for Laozi.

Our next meeting was with a Daoist recluse who had moved to the mountains from Xian a dozen years earlier. He had been disenchanted with society and wanted to simplify his life and regain his health. He spends his days reading the

Chinese classics trying to find “the essentials and principles of life,” being present to nature, and meditating. We spent a couple of hours drinking tea and talking. It was a fascinating moment.

Mrs. Ye, a distinguished writer with a royal lineage and our guide, had been the governor of this area, and as we went down the mountain towards the plains, we stopped to visit a farmer she knew. We found him in his beloved orchard. He was moved to tears to see Mrs. Ye and told her that his land was being confiscated to make way for some development. The village and surrounding area was going to be the site of a new town. He would be compensated, but no amount of money could cover the loss of his lands that had been in the family for generations. It was a sad moment.

Our days in Xian had been rich and varied as I learned more about the history of Xian and saw the way the city still honors its Tang Empire legacy (618-907). I had also seen the Terra Cotta warriors, visited a mosque that traced its origins back to Tang times, gone to a spectacular theatrical event outside Xian that retold the story of a Tang dynasty emperor who had fallen in love with a commoner, and went to a Protestant service in the middle of Xian. But it was especially the encounters and dialogue with practicing Daoists that was most memorable.

Now we were heading north to the Hanging Monastery (Xuankong Temple) near Datong.

As we approached the mountains, we began to make out this tiny structure clinging to the side of the mountain with no signs of support. It struck me as the perfect site for a Daoist monastery: a place apart from society and embedded in the natural world. As we walked the half-mile from the parking lot to the base of the cliff and up the wooden stairs that led us up the cliff to the monastery, the monastery grew in size as did the wonder that it had survived for 1500 years. Though the stairs up could handle two ascending side by side, the balcony that ran across the five buildings that constituted the monastery had room for only one person. So when you met another, you had to turn sideways to let the other pass. Here the only

sounds were the sounds of silence and an occasional squeaking board. Though constructed by Daoists, one of the temples included images of Confucius and Shakyamui (the sage of the Shakyas) Buddha, the historical Buddha, as well as of Laozi. Now more a museum than a living monastery, it echoed a vital past.

As we drove into Datong, I recalled the Daoist landscape painting that I had received from Shi-gi Wang, one of our guides, on my first visit to Datong. It portrayed a Daoist master with a staff walking up into the mountains. What was dominant was the landscape—the mountains, the trees, the stream—and in their midst, a human, not as the master of the environment but as seeker learning from the Dao present in nature. This was the Way of the Daoist that I had especially come to appreciate.

*IV: Buddhist Ways: Suffering, the Middle Way,
Enlightenment*

“...be lamps unto yourselves.” Buddha to his beloved disciple, Ananda.

When we arrived in Beijing in December 2011, we left our things in Beijing and caught a night train to Datong in Shangxi province. The next morning we met our guides Xiang-fo Wang and Shi-gi Wang—I called them Wang I and Wang II. Both were accomplished artists (Xiang-fo Wang a well-known Chinese writer, and Shi-gi Wang a painter), both were members of the Party, and both were Buddhists. We drove an hour from Datong to the Yungang grottoes/caves. Little did I know what awaited us. After tea with the director of the site, we walked down to the caves. I had been told that there were 252 caves containing more than 50,000 images of the Buddha. And as we entered the first, I was astonished. The images were sculpted out of the rock and behind the large Buddha image was a wall of Buddhas—which had all been painted originally. And so it went cave after cave, until we came to the huge image that was exposed to the open air. The scene was amazing. From the 5th and 6th centuries, these figures were a moving testimony to the Buddhist Way in China.



Three details from a Wall Sculpture at a Buddhist Temple at Mount Wu Tai, a sacred Buddhist site, with more than fifty temples/monasteries.

Unlike the Confucian and Daoist Ways, the Buddhist Way originated outside of China and was gradually woven into Chinese culture. It grew out of the experience of Siddhartha Gautama in North India. Siddhartha was born into a princely clan, the Sakyas. Sheltered in his early life, he left his privileged life and joined a wandering band of ascetics or seekers. He wanted to know why life was so full of suffering. For years, he practiced their hard spiritual disciplines, but failed to find the answer to his quest. When he was thirty, he determined to sit in meditation until he found an answer to his quest, or die. He was in Bodh Gaya, and as the night turned to morning, Siddhartha woke up to the truth of things. He had been enlightened. He became known as the Buddha, the Awakened One.

He then traveled to Sarnath where he gave his first discourse and outlined the central teachings of the Buddhist Way. They were called the Four Noble Truths: (1) Life is *dukkah*, or filled with suffering, (2) the cause of suffering is *tanha*, or craving desire, (3) there is a way out of suffering, and (4) this is to follow the Eight Fold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. The Awakened One, the Buddha, then spent the remaining fifty years of his life expounding his teaching and creating the *sangha*, or the community of monks and nuns that would follow his Way.

The Buddhist Way then moved south to Sri Lanka and

northwest into Central Asia and from there it entered China along the Silk Road in the first century of the Common Era. Initially opposed by the Chinese for its lack of teaching concerning the family, Buddhism gradually took root in China. It carried a message that spoke of a practice that could alter life's suffering.

The kind of Buddhism that entered China was the "Big Raft," or Mahayana Buddhism. It was a form of Buddhism that promised enlightenment for all, even if that required many, many lifetimes to achieve. In China two distinctive forms of Buddhism emerged. They were Chan Buddhism (better known by its Japanese name, Zen) and Pure Land Buddhism. Chan means meditation, and this tradition affirms that enlightenment is a transformative experience. It cannot be achieved simply by reciting Sutras or studying texts. It is the practice of meditation that would put one on the path that could lead to the experience of Awakening. Pure Land Buddhism emphasizes the importance of calling upon Amitabha Buddha, a celestial Buddha or the Buddha of Infinite Light. This was a path of devotion that emphasized the transformative or enlightening power of Amitabha in one's life. Pure Land Buddhism became the most popular form of Buddhism in China, and in Asia. There were other forms of Buddhism in China as well.

There were periods of contact and co-operation between these three great traditions of Confucius, Lao-Tzu, and the Buddha as well as periods of conflict. It often depended on which tradition a particular emperor favored. But by the 13th century, it was often commonplace to refer to these three figures as the Sages of China and to regard them as complementary.

However, the encounter with the forces of western modernity in the 19th century affected all of the great traditions of China. Though China had a long history of scientific inquiry, the new Western sciences were often presented as hostile to older religious traditions. This led many Chinese to feel confronted by an either/or choice: either the new ways of modernity, especially the sciences, or adherence to the old patterns of spirituality. No one seemed to notice that these were false al-

ternatives. Confucians, Daoists, and Buddhists were all caught up in the winds of change that were unleashed by this encounter between modernity and traditional China. But after a century and a half of tumultuous change, there seemed to be, on my visit, a sense of resurgence in the Buddhist Ways.

My experience of the Buddhist Way in China began, as I said above, at the Yungang Caves. And it remained a highlight of my first visit to China. But equally important was a living Buddhist temple in a small town outside Datong. We were heading back to Datong as the sun was starting to head for the horizon. I saw a large Buddhist complex and I asked if we could stop. Snow was swirling around the huge area in front of the complex. I could see some smoke coming from one of the buildings and so we made our way toward it. We opened the door and found ourselves in the midst of an evening Buddhist service. About twenty-five lay Buddhists were crowded into the small space, with a stove going in the corner, and they didn't miss a beat in the Sutra they were chanting as they made room for us, these strangers. They were led by a Buddhist priest dressed in winter robes. The moving service was chanted with an occasional sounding of a wood block and continued for another twenty minutes. When it was over, the priest came over, bowed, and enquired about us. Yan Li explained that I was from Canada and that I had wanted to stop. He welcomed me and insisted that we go and visit some of the large Buddha halls that had large images of the Buddha. He had some English and so as we walked through the swirling snow, he told me about his community. I asked him if he was engaged at all in dialogue with other communities. To my surprise, he immediately answered that he was and that he felt that was very important. We visited two halls so that I could see the Buddha images, and then we took our leave as the sun was setting. It was a moving first encounter with Chinese Buddhism.

In Beijing I visited Buddhist temples that were filled with Chinese people offering incense and their prayers, some quietly meditative, others joining in ritual events and others consulting the monks. This was especially true at Fayuan Si, one

of the leading Buddhist temples of Beijing and also the home of the Buddhist Academy of China. It was filled with visitors. When I enquired if there were any monks that spoke English, I was taken to the room of the Ven. Dr. Yuan Liu. A bubbly monk in his 40s, he had a doctorate in Buddhist Studies from Sri Lanka. When I commented on how busy it was in the temple, he informed me that it was a “full moon day” and that’s why it was so active. We had a helpful conversation about Buddhism in China and I promised to visit him again. I did, both in 2011 and when I returned in 2012.

When I saw him in 2012, he invited me to a lecture on Buddhism that he was giving. There were about forty young Chinese students in attendance. When I arrived, Ven. Liu insisted that I say something of my experience with the Buddhist Way in India, Korea, and Japan as well as China. It ended up being a dialogue between us about Buddhism that involved a lot of questions from the students present. Including the inevitable question: since I studied so many religions, which was the best! After a big smile from me and nervous laughter from the students, I told them that I had passed a lovely garden on my way to the lecture and thought all the flowers had their own unique beauty and fragrance and that “best” was impossible to say. It was a surprising and charming morning.

In 2011 I had also visited the famous Yonghe or Lama Temple (Palace of Peace & Harmony) in central Beijing. I was with Yan Li and it was Sunday and crowded. The area around the temple was filled with small shops selling books on Buddhism and Buddhist religious items: statues of the Buddha, prayer beads, incense, etc. and little Tibetan restaurants and shops. Yan Li commented how different it was from her visit ten years earlier. We had to pay an entrance fee to the temple and make our way through the crowd. In the Pavilion of Ten Thousand Happinesses, we saw the 26 meter statue of the Maitreya Buddha (Buddha of the Future), and everywhere it was bustling.

There were signs of life and renewed vitality in the Buddhist sites I visited in 2011 and again in 2012 when I came to give some lectures at Shandong University and to participate in the Nishan Forum on the dialogue of civilizations in Qufu,

the birthplace of Confucius. While there, I also met some Buddhist monks and scholars from China. Most notable was the Venerable Master Xuecheng, Abbot of the monasteries of Guanghua, Famen, and Longquan in Beijing, Vice President of the Buddhist Academy of China, and Vice Director of the Institute for Advanced Study of Humanities and Religion in Beijing Normal University. He gave me a copy of his *Understanding Life*, a series of Dharma talks translated into English. I read it with great pleasure as he explains the Buddhist response to the great questions of life. He reminds his readers that “the mind is the origin of suffering and happiness” and urges his readers to “dig into the treasure of wisdom ... to realize the value of infinite life within a finite life span.”

Following the Nishan Forum, I went to Xian, the ancient capital of China during the Tang Dynasty. While there, I was able to visit one of the leading Buddhist temples—the Benevolence Temple—and to have an hour interview with the head of the temple, Master Kuan Xu. Dressed in his robes, he explained the centrality of Xian in the history of Buddhism in China. It was, he said, during the Tang Dynasty, when Xian was the capital, that the distinctive schools of Chinese Buddhism emerged. He also spoke of the difficulties during the time of the Cultural Revolution when their temple was damaged. It has been restored and is a functioning temple today. But he also mentioned that the practice of single-child families in China has affected the numbers of young men becoming monks. As we took our leave, he invited us to attend a 4:00 service in the Buddha Hall. We did, and there were at least twenty-five monks involved in the service that involved a slow and measured circumambulating of the altar and Buddha image to the beat of the drum and chanting. Another twenty lay people joined in the procession. I was given permission to film this beautiful event.

In 2012, we also visited Mount Wutai (Qingliang Shan) in Shanxi Province, a sacred site for Chinese Buddhism. It is regarded as the home of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom (Manjusri). A Bodhisattva is a Buddha that has vowed “to remain in the world until all sentient beings are enlightened.” This sacred

site is still home to more than fifty monasteries and includes some of the oldest wooden structures in China; one goes back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). And the mountains of Wutai have also had a special tie to Tibetan Buddhism.

Our visit began one afternoon in the “Tiger’s Paw” area of the Wutai. There are major monasteries on each of the five peaks surrounding the valley below and many more on the slopes and down in the valley. The first we visited was a Tibetan monastery on the west peak, I think, where there were only a handful of monks. Lovely but empty Buddha Halls, it had a grand view of the valley below. We took the stairs and then the road to walk down into the valley, pausing to visit other Temples along the way. Down in the valley was a small lake that was a popular site for photographs. Nearby we entered another Tibetan Buddhist monastery—I called it the praying monastery since the outer courtyard was filled with prayer flags hanging from a tree and inside were many from Inner Mongolia offering prayers. A ritual was unfolding in the Temple. We heard chanting accompanied by many Tibetan instruments, some I’d neither seen nor heard before, and drums. The Mongolians were especially friendly and several insisted that I join them for a picture in front of the temple.

For two days we went from temple to temple to temple, each rooted in a particular stream of Chinese Buddhism. In one of the oldest temples in Wutai, we watched a group of lay and monastic Buddhists preparing the noon meal. They were having a jolly time, joking with one another. They invited us to assist them and to take pictures until another monk came along and shooed us out to another courtyard. Now it was gently raining and that gave another feel to the monastery as we poked our heads into a number of the halls in the complex. Back at the entrance, we were especially taken by the more than a thousand-year-old carved panels depicting Buddhist scenes. They were exquisite.

At another of the monastery complexes we climbed more than a hundred steps to reach, we crossed a symbolic bridge to enter the compound. It was a monastery that had been visited by an emperor several hundred years ago, who, following the

visit, had made a donation to the temple. That was its claim to fame. But what was most memorable to me was a brief encounter with a tall, older monk. I had greeted him with a bow and he immediately came over and grasped my hands in his. He then spoke to me in Chinese—I didn't understand—and managed to convey a desire to have our picture taken together. As we stood, there I noticed that his robes were patched and well worn. I learned that he had been here for decades. I wondered about what Wutai had endured over the decades and during the Cultural Revolution. It is only recently that the temple complex has begun to be rehabilitated.

And so it went as we visited place after place, sometimes fortunate enough to come in as a ritual was being performed in a temple. When that happened, we would stay to watch the gestures and listen to the sounds of chant, drums, and instruments that wove movements and sounds into a tapestry of gratitude. Our day was also punctuated with wonderful lunches and dinners. The food was just outstanding.

Hotels have been built and roads were being constructed that could handle the ever increasing numbers of tourists who come to Wutai. But many of the temples were still sparsely populated with monks, and our guide knew little of the spiritual purposes of these ancient centers of Buddhist practice and life. This aspect reminded me of a visit I had made to the golden domed Russian Orthodox churches that are within the Kremlin in Moscow. When I visited there in the early 1990s, the group of Western scholars I was with provided the commentary for what we were seeing inside these stunningly beautiful churches. For our guide, these were museums, not churches.

For me, the echos and memories of the centuries of Buddhist life and practice in China were still present to the stones, the trees, the mountains, the river that runs through the valley, and the hardy monks who carry on these traditions today. From my conversations with Buddhists, I came away with the feeling that in recent decades there has been a growing return to the practice of Buddhism. I did not encounter dispirited or disheartened Buddhists, but rather a vital community that is regaining something of its long-standing vitality in Chinese culture.

V. Notes on the Abrahamic Traditions in China

While traditional or folk Chinese traditions, along with Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions are dominant in Chinese culture and life, there has long been a smaller presence of the Abrahamic traditions, Jewish, Muslim and Christian in China. Jews came to China as early as 250 C.E., Christians in 635 C.E. and Muslims as early as a century after the death of Mohammad, c. 730 C.E. When I visited China in 2011 and 2012, I was able to visit Muslim mosques in Beijing, Xian, and Datong and Christian churches in the same cities. I did not have an opportunity to visit a Jewish centre.

The Way of the Torah in China

I learned that Jewish Shabbat services are held in Beijing and Shanghai. The Kihilat Foundation was established in 1979 for Jewish foreigners living in Beijing. Since 2000 there have been regular Shabbat services. They are led by lay people and their services combine elements of the several streams of Jewish religious life: ranging from “reconstructionist to reform and orthodox streams.” The Kihilat Foundation runs a school open to Jewish students. Since 2006, there have also been Chabad-Lubavitch Shabbat services run by an Orthodox rabbi. But Jews have long been part of Chinese life,

Like later Christians and Muslims, Jews are believed to have entered China from India along the Silk Road that began at the Mediterranean Sea just north of ancient Israel. But it wasn't until the time of the early Northern Song Dynasty (90-1127) that they established a community in Henan province. Known as the Kaifeng Jews (Tiaojinjiao), they have survived down to the present day. But they have increasingly assimilated into Chinese culture and intermarried with the Han Chinese, especially in the 1700s. They were always known for the fact that they did not eat pork.

When Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), a Jesuit missionary, was in China, he met a Kaifeng Jew, Ai Tian. Later in the 1800s, contact with Jews in Shanghai led the Kaifeng Jews to reconnect with their Jewish heritage. Today some 600-1000 residents of Kaifeng trace their origins back to the Jews of Kaifeng.

Following the Russian Revolution (1917), some Russian Jews sought refuge in China as did European Jews following the rise to power of the Nazis (1933). Most of those refugees left China after World War II.

The Way of the Muslims in China

When the Muslims came to China, they came along the Silk Road from Central Asia and with sea-faring traders. In the 13-1400s, Muslims often held the position of Director of Shipping in China due to their prominence in trade. Over the long history of Muslims in China, there has evolved several groupings. The Hui people are a Chinese ethnic group that practice Islam and the Uyghur Muslims are from Central Asia and are concentrated in Xinjiang in Western China, where there are also Uzbeks and Kazakhs who practice the Muslim Way.

On my trips to China I was able to visit the Mosque in Beijing for Friday prayers, and then later Muslim mosques and centers in Xian and Datong. I was surprised to find the Beijing mosque crowded for Friday prayers with Chinese Muslims and a sprinkling of foreign Muslims, including some from the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Later, in Xian, I visited the Muslim mosque, market, and Quarter where I was able to speak with the imam. He was very proud of his mosque that traced its origins back to the Tang Dynasty (618-970), a time when emperors also welcomed Christians to China. While clearly a Muslim centre, the mosques in Xian, and earlier in Datong, were constructed in a Chinese style. The curved roofs and the décor inside were through and through Chinese, as was the bridge inside the entrance that led to the prayer hall. The imam in Xian pointed us to Qur'anic verses written in Chinese that were hundreds of years old. He also remarked that during the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards stormed the mosque but departed when they found no idols or images to destroy. It was a curious experience to stand in the midst of a Chinese-style mosque and discuss with this Chinese imam the Way of Islam.

Islam in China also revolves around the Five Pillars of Islam: (1) *Shahadah* or the affirmation that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger, (2) *Salat* or the five

daily ritual prayers, (3) *Sawm* or fasting during Ramadan, (4) *Zakat* or charity by giving 2.5% of one's wealth to the poor, and (5) Hajj or the pilgrimage to Mecca. But here in China, Islam is surrounded by a Chinese ethos. The Muslim scholar Sachiko Marata points out that Chinese Muslim scholars began to write in Chinese in the 1700s. Wang Tai-yu wrote *The Real Commentary on the True Teaching* and Liu Chih wrote on *Nature and Principle According to Islam*. These scholars saw a close connection between the teaching of Islam and Neo-Confucianism. These were texts written, says Marata, for Muslims "who had largely been assimilated into Chinese civilization."³ That may be an overstatement, but I never doubted that the Muslims I met were both authentically Muslim and also Chinese.

Outside the mosque, we toured a market in the Muslim quarter that was obviously a very attractive place for the Chinese of Xian as well as foreigners to visit, to shop, and to eat. It was crowded with people buying things and eating, some on the street and some inside the restaurants that lined the street. As the day ended, the trees along the streets came alive with purple strings of light strung in the trees giving a very festive feel to the whole area. Our Chinese guides told us that this was a very popular tourist/eating/shopping area and that it was flooded with hungry Chinese every evening. I loved it. And we had a wonderful meal.

The mosque in Datong was the scene of two visits. The first in 2011 was very brief, but as we arrived the second time in 2012 just at the end of Friday prayers and the Imam and a half-dozen other Muslims were happy to tell us about their mosque and Islam. They too traced their presence in Datong back to the Tang Dynasty. Now a smaller community, the mosque was well attended for Friday prayers. It was a stone carved jewel of a mosque that was impeccably maintained with many Chinese features. It was a happy exchange that ended with us all gathering in the prayer hall to have our picture taken.

Indeed, Datong had been an earlier capital before it was moved to Xian. What was striking was that one area contained most of the religious buildings of Datong: many Buddhist temples, Buddhist monasteries, a smaller Confucian shrine,

the mosque, a pagoda built on the old city wall and a Catholic church. All had existed side by side for hundreds and hundreds of years.

When the question of the tensions with the Muslims of Western China was raised, there was a lot of silence and a sense that these Muslims hadn't been fully integrated into the life of China. But my experience of the Muslims I encountered was very positive. They were welcoming, articulate about their own traditions, and open to dialogue.

Christian Ways in China

I had long heard that Eastern Christians had arrived in China in 635 C.E., but I always wondered if this was simply a legend. A few years prior to my coming to China, I had encountered a book entitled the *Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Daoist Christianity*⁴. What! Could this be? I had taught a course in the History of Christian Thought for more than thirty years so I was intrigued. In the *Jesus Sutras* Martin Palmer brings to light the story of the encounter between what the Chinese called "Light from the West" and the traditions of China. It resulted in the composition of a number of "sutras." The term "sutra" means thread in Sanskrit and was the term used for the sermons of the Awakened One, the Buddha. Here "Jesus Sutras" is the name Palmer gives to the efforts of the early Chinese Christians to articulate the Christian faith in terms drawn from the Chinese traditions, especially Daoist and Buddhist ones.

This story of a lost Christianity was in the back of my mind as I encountered contemporary Christianity in China.

However, it did not figure in my first visit to China. Instead, I visited churches in Beijing and Tianjin and a Christian village in Shanxi province. After visiting the magnificent Buddhist images carved in the Yungang Caves, we went to the nearby town of Zuo Yun for lunch. Then we went to Ba Taizi (Eight Terraces) a nearby Christian village. The village had been converted to Catholic Christianity through the efforts of an Italian Catholic priest who arrived in the 19th century and remained there until his death. A lovely church—the priest had brought plans from the church in his village in Italy—had been built

on the hill above the village, but all that now remained was a ruined front tower. No one in our group knew when the Ba Taizi church had been destroyed. But they did know that every year a pilgrimage to this site drew people from neighboring villages and from as far away as Datong. The priest was remembered as one who gave his life to the people of this village and the surrounding area.

It was cold, and a light dusting of snow was swirling against a crystal clear sky. Off in the distance we could see remnants of the Great Wall of China. The border with Inner Mongolia was not far away. When we arrived, one of the men from Zuo Yun had given me a huge Red Army parka to wear. I had draped it over my shoulders as I walked up the hill to the Church. Some of the others had thin jackets on. When I noticed one of the young men shivering, I went over and shared my green army parka with him. We then returned to the cars and drove through the village and back towards Zuo Yun and then on to Datong.

When I went to one of the Catholic cathedrals in Beijing in December 2011, I arrived near the end of the first service. The place was packed and the bishop was there to welcome 400 new members into the Church. Outside, a huge Christmas tree was decorated and a notice urged people to reserve space or come very early if they wanted a seat for the Christmas Eve service. I stayed for the second service but was unable to find someone to talk to before leaving. I wondered if perhaps this was one of the Catholic churches that is not in communion with Rome these days. And hence they were a bit more suspicious of strangers.

That was not my experience when we happened upon a Protestant Church in Tianjin after a 280 kmph train ride from Beijing. The service was just ending and people were pouring out into the street. I found a number of people visiting in the sanctuary and others praying. I asked if the pastor was available. One said, "Oh, Pastor Mary" and scurried off to find her. She was back quickly and I told her who I was and asked if she had time for an interview. She immediately said yes, and we went to her office. Pastor Mary was in her early thirties and

told me she had graduated from the seminary in Beijing. She was one of several pastors and said that her church was growing by more than 100-150 people every month. We talked for another twenty minutes until my camera ran out of tape. She was warm, friendly, articulate, and I was surprised at how good her English was.

Christians had come to China as early as 635 C.E. Franciscans came in the 13th century and Jesuits in the later 1500s. It was only at the beginning of the 19th century that Protestant missionaries arrived. What began as a trickle became a flood of Protestant missionaries from Europe and North America by the century's end. English-speaking British, American and Canadian missionaries came by the hundreds, as did smaller numbers from Protestant Europe. They brought with them Western style schooling, medicine, science, and culture as well as their different brands of Christianity. They were also often linked to the imperial ambitions of Western powers.

The Boxer Rebellion or Yihetuan (Righteous Harmony) Movement (1899-1901) was a violent anti-Western and anti-Christian uprising. Our guide in Tianjin pointed out the corner where the uprising began when a foreign soldier shot a Chinese for failing to get out of his way after a church service. The uprising was suppressed by foreign troops of the Western "Great Powers." After that time, Chinese Christians began to form their own versions of Christianity.

The Chongwennen Church claimed to be the oldest Protestant Church in Beijing. It was established in 1870 by American Methodists. Closed after 1949 but reopened in the 1980s, it celebrated thirty years of religious freedom in 2010. It is a complex of buildings with multiple services on Sunday: in Chinese, English, and Korean. The Church has six pastors, three women and three men. The service I attended was familiar and lively, with a thoughtful sermon and a good choir. Afterwards I spoke with the Head Pastor, a woman in her mid-40s. She said that the congregation has been growing, especially in the last decade. Now there are more than 100,000 Protestants living in Beijing.

On my second visit to China, I was able to pursue the

Palmer story concerning what he called "Daoist Christianity." That began with a visit to the "Forest of Stone Steles" Museum in Xian. It houses a collection of 3000 stone steles, or stone tablets, including the Nestorian Stele. Written in Chinese characters with some Syriac words, we have the Tang Emperor welcoming Alopen, the head of the Christians coming to China. It dates these events in 635 though the stele was only erected in 781.

On the following day, after visiting a number of Daoist sites south of Xian, we visited the site of an ancient pagoda and a Christian monastery where some of these "Jesus sutras" were believed to be composed. We parked the car in the valley below and followed a path up the mountainside that wound through fields of grain until coming to the pagoda. Outside the pagoda sat three or four rather unfriendly Buddhist monks and on the pagoda was a hand-written sign saying this was a Buddhist site. There was an animated exchange in Chinese. Fifty yards away was a small museum commemorating the Christian presence in this area going back to the 6-700s. Yikes! The place had become a contested site. But as I walked away I was more persuaded of the Palmer's thesis about these moving efforts to translate the Christian message into Chinese terms using language and concepts that came from the Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions of China.

In Datong I visited a Catholic Church where I spoke with a Father Francis and went to a late afternoon prayer service in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Father Francis told me that he was a great admirer of classic Chinese poetry and literature and that he felt it important for Catholics to know their Chinese heritage.

Back in Beijing before returning to Canada, I went to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, known popularly as the Ricci Cathedral. It was built on the site where Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), the Jesuit who learned Chinese and dressed as a Confucian, had built a chapel. Ricci was made an Advisor to the Court and when he died he was the first foreigner allowed to be buried in Beijing. A statue of Ricci stands outside the Cathedral. Inside, the congregation sang the liturgy like angels. I

was deeply moved. There was standing room only. And afterwards, people came up to speak to me in English and to tell me about their church and faith.

It was time to return to Canada.

On the Ways of the Chinese

My experience of the Ways of the Chinese was very positive and far exceeded my expectations. Virtually everywhere I went I was welcomed, and there were always folks eager to practice their English with this foreigner. Nowhere was this more apparent than in my solitary visits to the Forbidden City. Without a guide and carrying a video camera, I was often the object of interest rather than these splendid halls that go on and on. Whether in the Muslim masjids/mosques or in the Buddhist temples, whether talking with a Daoist or with a Christian, whether visiting a University like Shandong or the Confucian temple being refurbished in Jinan, I encountered Chinese people who were friendly and often eager to share their stories. I was also blessed with the presence of Yan Li and the people she knew who served as our guides in Beijing, Xian, and Datong. I should also mention Dr. Fu from Shandong University who invited me to his university to give some lectures on Indian Religions when I returned in 2012. He heads the Centre for Judaic Studies and Interreligious Dialogue. I spent several days at the university and met many students and professors. And they too were always most helpful and generous with their time. Every morning, I encountered groups doing Tai Chi on campus. Those days were rich, as I was able to discuss with scholars the present religious situation in the country. And I will always fondly remember my conversations with Shuhja Ding, a bright graduate student at Shandong who was my guide to Jinan, the City of Springs. She felt that her own interest in the study of religion placed her in the minority of younger people. But she did allow that things have been changing rapidly over the past decade. One problem is that the term "religion" doesn't resonate in the Chinese psyche. The great traditions of China instead talk of "cultivation," the practice that can transform the mind and our behavior so that we become truly human beings. There is great interest in that, as

witnessed by the phenomenal growth of Falun Gong (Dharma Wheel Practice), a contemporary movement in China that combines elements drawn from Daoism & Buddhism in a set of meditative exercises. The growth and popularity of Falun Gong scared the government so much that they have attempted to shut this movement down, yet it continues. The government also continues to clamp down on Chinese Christian groups that are not officially registered with the government, with Muslim communities in western China, and Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet. These things are known to me, though I did not have direct experience with these groups.

The Nishan Forum in Qufu was also a treasure, as I had three days to read papers about China and talk with many scholars not only from China but also from other countries about things Chinese and the “dialogue of civilizations. These were the new mandarins.

It is clear to me that in the midst of the economic juggernaut of contemporary China, there is an intense search for a vital faith after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the collapse of earlier patterns of meaning. And as China continues its phenomenal growth, a growing number will revisit the great traditions of China as well as the newer Christian traditions from the West to find new depths of meaning and perhaps to provide an orientation towards the future.

Endnotes

¹ John Blofeld, *Taoism, The Road to Immortality* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1978), p. 90.

² Huston Smith, *The World Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), p. 174.

³ See Sachiko Murata, “The Islamic Encounter with Chinese Intellectual Traditions,” in Abdul Aziz Said & Meena Sharify-Funk, eds., *Cultural Diversity & Islam* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2003), pp. 107-118.

⁴ See Martin Palmer, *Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Daoist Christianity* (New York: Ballantine Wellspring, 2001).

IX

Interreligious Dialogue in the Global Village¹: Opening the Way of Dialogue in the Abrahamic Traditions

I. Prologue: The Call to a New Way

We are entering a new era.² The modern era is in transition and we don't yet know the way to characterize the dawning new era. But I believe it is one in which the many peoples, cultures, religions, and voices of humankind are being called to create a planetary society, a truly global civilization. This will challenge us all as we have never been challenged before. We will have to learn to cross borders without going to war, to embrace the rich diversity of peoples and cultures, to give a human face to technology, to move from exploiting nature to respecting the earth. It is an era where the politics of dominance must give way to a politics of co-operation for the sake of the unity of the human family that is our collective destiny.

The great religious and spiritual traditions of East and West, North and South must also assume their responsibilities in this new era. No longer can we Christians continue to presume we are the only way. Nor can we fail to remake our relations with the way of the Torah given to our Jewish forbears, or fail to respect the promises of Yahweh given to his Jewish people. Likewise, we can no longer treat our Muslim brothers and sisters as the followers of a false prophet, as we Christians have through much of our history. We, the children of Abraham, need to find a new way of relating to one another.³

We must learn a new way, since the history of the relations between these traditions has been, in a word, bitter, though there was a shining moment in Andalusia when Muslims, Christians and Jews practiced the way of tolerance.⁴

However—and this may come as a surprise to some of

you—this new way is the way of dialogue and it is already unfolding. The way of dialogue is not a debate about who is right and who is wrong. Nor is it a process open only to experts. It is not about the differences of teaching or doctrine nor is it about their points of agreement. It is rather an entering into new relationships with the peoples of faith. It is learning about one another and building bridges of understanding. It is an exploration of the manifold soul-scapes of the spirit in the East, West, North and South. It is an adventure as we cross boundaries and borders to give a human face to those diverse traditions of humankind that we call African Traditional, Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Daoist, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and those of no fixed address. But if we are to move in that direction, then we need to find new ways to relate to peoples of other faiths. I call it the Way of Dialogue.

II. The Beginnings of the Way of Dialogue

This new way of relating to others both within the family of one's own tradition—we used to call it ecumenism but now we call it intra-faith dialogue—and also to the faith of others with whom we share this common planet—we now call it interfaith dialogue—began in several places across the world following the end of World War II.

What were the sources of these new developments? They were multiple and included the displacement of peoples across the world due to the war, the horror of the death camps of Nazi Germany resulting in the murder of millions of Jews, and the subsequent end of colonialism. Many European Christians, for example, began to question the way that Christianity had related to the Jews. Already in 1942, William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1881-1944) and Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz (1872-1948) had created the first Council of Christians and Jews in response to the horror of what was happening to Jews in Nazi Germany and to oppose anti-Semitism in Great Britain. And across Europe and North America, Christians began to look again at their own relations with Jewish people.

These new developments also extended to Muslims as the end of colonialism saw the emergence of newly independent nations. British India was partitioned into Hindu India

and Muslim Pakistan, much to Gandhi's dismay, and Indonesia emerged as the world's largest Muslim nation in the late 1940s.⁵ North African Muslim nations threw off the chains of colonialism. These events marked the beginning of a Muslim resurgence that is still continuing.

But it wasn't until the 1960s that Christians formally addressed the question of their relation to the religious other. At the 2nd Vatican Council, called by Pope John the 23rd (1881-1963), the Catholic Church for the first time in its official documents acknowledged the many peoples of faith, including Muslims. In *Lumen Gentium*, we hear these words:

... the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Mohammedans (sic Muslims) who ... hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God.

And in *Nostre Aetate* we hear that:

... the church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself, merciful and all powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; ... they revere Jesus ... as a prophet. They honor Mary.... They await the day of judgment.... They value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting ...

And, in more tortured language, the document states that

God holds the Jews most dear ... [and] mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews ... decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed at any Jews, at any time, by anyone.

Nostre Aetate "acknowledges all that is true and holy" in other religions and urges "dialogue and collaboration."⁶

This new way of dialogue began in the Protestant/Orthodox world when the World Council of Churches (WCC) established in the late 1960s its own unit for Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies. The WCC is a fellowship of 349 Prot-



Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem a holy site for Muslims.

estant & Orthodox Churches. The WCC immediately began to organize conferences with Muslims, Marxists, Hindus, and Buddhist, Jewish and other traditions. The WCC's "Guidelines on Dialogue with Living Faiths & Ideologies" emphasized the importance of acknowledging "the right of every faith community to define itself" and encouraged a "deep listening" on the part of Christians. Something new was happening.

The new way of dialogue was also to be seen in the lay initiatives emerging across the globe. The movement was just beginning in the 1950 and 60s as I began my own study of religion and journey into the living faiths of humankind. As a movement to redress the relations between the peoples of faith, it is sometimes called the interfaith or inter-religious movement. I call it the encounter and dialogue of men and women of the believing world.

In the 1950s and 60s, these lay initiatives would result in the founding of groups like the World Conference on Religion and Peace and the Temple of Understanding. And in the 1970s and 80s there was a virtual explosion of interfaith initiatives and organizations. There were, for example, new Councils of Christians and Jews, the Three Faiths Forum, the Islamic Institute for Interfaith Dialogue and Rabbis and Imams for Peace. As we approached the 1990s, Dr. Francis Clark of the UK pub-

lished an *Interfaith Directory*⁷ that included more than 700 organizations—in all traditions—around the world dedicated to interfaith activity.

A new day in the history of the relations between people of different faiths was dawning. I call it the way of dialogue and consider it one of the most important developments in the spiritual life of our time.

In what follows, I want to do three things: (1) share something of my own experience of what we now call intra-faith dialogue—for me, that was within Christianity—and inter-faith dialogue—dialogue across traditions; (2) drawing upon what I learned, briefly look at the way of dialogue in relation to Jewish, Christian and Muslim relations: and (3) conclude with some lessons learned.

I will begin by sharing something of my own story in the way of dialogue, since I believe that the way of dialogue involves a direct personal and global encounter and meeting with peoples of all faiths. This encounter is not a classroom exercise, nor is it a theoretical one; it is rather a journey into the lives of others, peoples of faith. It is a call to respect, know and love those who heed what is given to us of the ineffable Ultimate in African traditional, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and indigenous ways, as well as in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.⁸

In 2011, I went to China for the first time. I was surprised to find such a modernized society and by the level of religious practice I observed when I went to Friday prayers at the mosque in Beijing—it was full—to the Buddhist temples—they were crowded—and to the Christian Churches and Cathedrals—they were bursting. I was then invited to return in 2012 for the Nishan Forum on World Civilizations and discovered that interfaith dialogue has come to Confucian China too.⁹

III. My Path to the Way of Dialogue

I was born under the shadow of World War II and grew up under the boundless sky and the endless horizon of North Dakota near the geographical centre of North America. I was raised in a small town of 1200 people with three Lutheran churches—Norwegian, German, & Finnish—plus Catholic,

Methodist, and Presbyterian churches and, surprisingly, three Muslim families although I didn't know they were Muslim until I was in my forties. We were also neighbors to First Nations peoples on the nearby Turtle Mountain reservation. The Bryant family farm was on the Canadian border. I grew up in the church, school and basketball court and began to learn about the importance of border crossing—not only the one between the USA and Canada but also the borders between churches, peoples, traditions/religions and cultures.

I went to a wonderful small Lutheran college where the president boasted in chapel that we were ninety-seven percent American Lutheran students and that he hoped that percentage would go up the following year. Here, I fell in love with the study of philosophy and religion. I encountered the great philosophers and theologians of the West and the East and the writings on dialogue of Martin Buber. Buber said that “genuine dialogue” happens “where each participant has in mind the others...and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relationship.”¹⁰ That is dialogue: a living mutual relationship. My intellectual horizons were being expanded and my heart was being opened.

When then I went to study at Harvard Divinity School, my religious and cultural horizons were challenged as I found myself in a pluralistic religious milieu. I was studying with Christians of every denomination and encountering people from the other religious traditions of humankind. Without knowing it, I was being introduced to that intra-Christian dialogue as well as the inter-religious dialogue.

One of my teachers, the Canadian Wilfrid Cantwell Smith,¹¹ taught me much about the way of Islam; another, the remarkable Catholic scholar Raimundo Panikkar,¹² opened the Hindu world to me. I will never forget the Easter service in the Harvard Chapel led by Professor Panikkar that incorporated elements from the Hindu world into the liturgy. Here I also learned a new way of thinking theologically. It was a way that recognized and grasped the questions that particular theologies were addressing. It was not about learning this or that denominational theology or religious outlook, but the way of

all theological thinking. Professor Herbert Richardson called it meta-theology.

My knowledge of the glorious gift of diversity within Christianity and among the world's faiths grew enormously. I had become an ecumenical Christian and had gotten my first sense of what would later be called the wider ecumenism.

*IV. Learning the Centrality of Experience in the Way of
Dialogue: the Poor People's Campaign, Europe, and Latin
America*

The next stage of my journey into the way of dialogue began in 1968. I was now teaching at Waterloo Lutheran University in Canada. In the spring of 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)—its motto was “speaking truth to power”—was killed. Three weeks later, I was invited by the Lutheran Council USA to come to Washington D.C. to participate in the Poor People's Campaign—King's last project—and to speak to Lutheran groups about the event in the evening and on the weekends.¹³ Every day, I spent hours at Resurrection City, the tent city constructed on the Mall between the Washington monument and the Lincoln Memorial, listening to the SCLC leadership and to the stories of African Americans from across America. I heard amazing SCLC preachers in black churches where I was often the only white person present. The experience was a life changer for me. It was a summer listening to the voices of those challenging the endemic racism of American life. When I returned to teaching that fall I was determined to share my commitment to social justice with my students. Now I was learning experientially, and it further deepened my own faith and commitment to an engaged and listening Christianity.

At the end of the year, I learned that my teaching contract would not be renewed. Little did I know that this would lead to two further life changing events: a course on “Religion in Dialogue in Europe” and an encounter with Latin American Christianity.

In the spring of 1969, I joined my college friend Marcus Borg for a spring course in Europe called “Religion in Dia-

logue." Together with a group of Concordia students, we traveled to Geneva to visit the World Council of Churches, to Rome to encounter a Catholic Church that was alive with the promise of Vatican II, and to Eastern Europe to explore Christian-Marxist dialogue in Prague and Berlin. It was thrilling to walk on European soil and to encounter a culture with a rich history that stretched back to the ancient world. In Geneva we visited the World Council of Churches, the Wall of the Reformers and Jean Calvin's church, in Rome we went to a Papal Audience with Pope Paul VI in St. Peter's, and in Prague we visited remarkable Christians a year after the Prague Spring and "socialism with a human face" was crushed by Soviet tanks. On our way to Berlin, we visited Martin Luther's Wittenberg.

Two moments stand out. The first was our time in Rome. We met with officials from the newly formed Secretariat for Non-Christians who spoke of the new initiatives that Catholics were taking for *dialogue and co-operation* with other faiths. Later, at the papal audience, our guides were sisters from a Dutch order whose vocation was to guide Protestant visitors in Rome. There was loud clapping as Paul VI was carried into the basilica. He then addressed the audience, offering words of welcome in seven different languages! He acknowledged various groups of pilgrims at the event. We were instructed to make some noise when our group, "the students from Concordia College in Minnesota, USA," was announced. To my Protestant surprise, we did! At the end of the audience a circle was formed around the altar and the Pope then went and personally greeted all those who had come forward, I was stunned. It was a vision of the church universal. In that circle were peoples from all around the globe, dressed in the clothing of their own cultural traditions, black, white, Asian, African, Latin American, European, etc. That gathered token of humankind left me with a vision of the universal church that has never left me.

The second moment was in Prague. We could still see where the bullets had hit buildings when the tanks rolled in to end the Prague Spring. Yet when we met with the Comenius Theological faculty at Charles University, they began by saying, "The worst kind of censorship is self-censorship. We don't

know who is listening. Nor do we know the consequences of what we say. But we will speak to you as truthfully as we can." I was amazed by their courage.

Later we visited a small Protestant Church on Pentecost Sunday. The pastor had been in the USA when the Communists seized power in 1948. He chose to return to Czechoslovakia where he was arrested and sentenced to three years of "re-education." He said it meant three years on a road crew. He had then returned to lead his congregation. He spoke in Czech and English. During the service, he introduced a woman from Germany who had devoted her life to rebuilding relations between Germans and Czechs after the 2nd World War. Then at the end of the service, he invited our Concordia group to sing a hymn. This group of twenty-five young, blonde, mostly Scandinavian/American women and men sang *Beautiful Savior*, and tears rolled down the faces of the congregation! It was a Pentecost where each spoke in his or her own language and we all understood one another. It was a day that further deepened my understanding of being part of a global Christianity.

There was a darker moment in Prague when I visited the Jewish cemetery and learned that most of the Jewish population of Czechoslovakia had been murdered in the concentration camps. This would haunt me for decades.

My journey into a global and ecumenical Christianity continued when I was invited to work for the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) organizing the World Encounter of Lutheran Youth in 1969-70. The youth experience would involve a week in a rural setting and a week in an urban centre in Latin America, prior to the planned 5th Assembly of the LWF in Porto Alegre, Brazil. I found myself thrown into a new world as I visited nearly every Latin American country. I met my first Catholic Bishop, the remarkable Dom Helder Camara, in Recife, and Protestants, Catholics, and Pentecostals across the continent. This experience was another year of learning, of having my view of the world remade. It was another quantum leap in my knowledge of the Christian world—its internal diversity and its universality.

Following this year, I returned to Canada and completed

my doctoral studies at the newly established Institute of Christian Thought at St. Michael's University College in the University of Toronto. I became the first Protestant to receive a doctorate from this Catholic institution. In 1973 I became a Professor of Religion and Culture at Renison University College, an Anglican college in the University of Waterloo. Over the next decade, some inter-religious and international conferences would find me drawn into the wider ecumenism, the growing interfaith dialogue.

*V: The Way of Dialogue in India: Encountering the
World's Religions*

When we—my wife, Susan, and our four children—boarded the plane for a flight to India in the fall of 1986, little did we know that we were embarking on a journey that would profoundly change us? Heretofore, my life of dialogue had been centered in Christianity, but now it would be opened into the Eastern worldviews.

We began our India sojourn by spending eight weeks in a Muslim university and sharing three meals a day with Dr. Syed Ausaf Ali and his family.¹⁴ Family life was a wonderful and special way to find our way into the Muslim world. We talked, we shared meals, we went to Muslim mosques and Sufi shrines. We learned something of the Muslim way from shared life with Muslims. This was living dialogue. It continued as we visited Sikhs in New Delhi and later Amritsar, Hindus everywhere but most importantly in Vrindaban, the heartland of devotion to Krishna and Radha, the remarkable, smiling Tibetan Buddhists in Delhi and Dharamsala, Baha'is at the Lotus Temple, Thomas Christians at the nearby Orthodox Centre, and Sufi shrines that sang praises to Allah. We learned to remove our shoes in places of worship and to greet others with a *Namaste*, *Salaam*, *Sat Shri Akaal* or *Tashi Delek*. We learned to listen with an open heart and seek to understand in their terms rather than our own, and to walk in the paths they opened to us.

Everywhere we went, we were welcomed—and often stared at. We traveled by bus, train, taxi and rickshaw. We

quickly learned that this was a different world from our own and that our assumptions needed to be revised. After eight weeks in north India, we were in Madras for a month where we encountered a whole other dimension of Indian life and spirituality—the manifold forms of South Indian spirituality centered on Shiva, the soaring temple cities, and the ancient culture. It was followed by a month in Kerala with Thomas Christians, Hindus, and Muslims who spoke yet another language, *Malayalam*, and discovered a Jewish community that had been in India for two millennia. Our last month, in Pune, led us into the Parsee world, village life, a meeting with some neo-Buddhists and a visit to a Catholic seminary that incorporated Indian traditions into its curriculum. We came away pondering what had happened to us and fully realizing that hundreds of books were no substitute for the living encounter with the human bearers of the many, many ways to the divine that we countered in India.

Ever since, I have insisted that it is the living encounter and dialogue with the peoples that walk the many ways of the Spirit that is the truly transformative heart of dialogue. On this assumption, I now turn to the Abrahamic traditions. Again, we want to speak concretely and directly about the men and women who are the living bearers of these ways.

VI. *The Abrahamic Traditions and the Way of Dialogue*

What are the Abrahamic traditions? In the introduction to *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions* by John Corrigan, Frederick M. Denny, et. al., we find the following observation:

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are three separate religions. But let us not overplay difference. We must recognize the distinctness of religious traditions, the distance between one's own worldview and the worldviews of others. But we should keep in mind ... [that] Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all monotheistic religions. They embody characteristically Western views of the individual. They share a linear view of history, a belief that God created the world

from nothing and that creation is progressing toward its fulfillment. And their common background includes their influences upon one another.¹⁵

This is an abstract characterization that gives one little sense of the living existential richness and complexity of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Ways.

In my direct encounter with the people of these great ways—each unique, with its own characteristic patterns of life, practice, and affirmation—it is their revelatory foundations that shines through. For the Jew, it is the way of the Torah, for the Christian it is the way of Christ, and for the Muslim it is the way of submission revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Each of these traditions claim Abraham as its forebear, patriarch, or origin, and these traditions affirm One God. (However, many Jews and Muslims wonder about Christians because their trinity-talk seems to suggest that there are three gods.)

The Jewish ways are the oldest and the smallest of the Abrahamic traditions.¹⁶ Though the Jewish population is currently only one percent of the believing world, its influence and importance looms larger in world history. Its offspring, the Christian ways, have become the world's largest faith community, with nearly a third of the believing world, while the Muslim ways are the youngest and constitute nearly a quarter of the world's people of faith. Together, the Abrahamic traditions constitute nearly sixty percent of the world's faithful. Thus new relations within (intra-faith) and without (inter-faith) these traditions will have profound consequences for our collective future.

The first thing I have learned in my encounter with the Abrahamic traditions is that each of these traditions is inwardly diverse. I have met Jews who say they are Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, Reconstructionist or culturally Jewish but NOT religious; Muslims who say they are Sunni Muslims or Shi'a or Sufi or Ismailia or just Muslims and even some who are culturally Muslim but NOT religious; and Christians who are Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant or Evangelical or the People of Love or Pentecostal or.... While I have never doubted that they were anything but Jews, Muslims or Christians, each

of these ways is inwardly diverse.

Jews are those who follow the Way of the Torah. This way is embodied in the *shema*: *Hear O' Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One*. It is to follow the gift of the law. The way of the Torah that is largely practiced today is the way created by the Rabbis in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, following the destruction of the Temple in 60 CE. It honors Shabbat, remembers the Exodus, observes the laws and maintains the rituals and customs of the Jewish people. But Jews do these things in diverse ways.

Christians are those who follow the way of love of God and the neighbor. This way emerged around the Jewish figure of Jesus of Nazareth, his life, teachings, death and resurrection. Christians first regarded Jesus as the Messiah but came to affirm that he was "the Word of God incarnate." Christianity means honoring the One who taught us "to love God and the neighbor," joining the community that confesses faith in the Creator, Redeemer, and Transformer of humanity, and practicing the way of the Cross as the way to God's Kingdom. But Christians do these things in diverse Ways.

Muslims are those who affirm the way of Islam or the peace that comes from surrender to Allah. The Muslim acknowledges that "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger." Muslims pray five times a day, honor Ramadan (a month of fasting), practice charity, and make a pilgrimage to Mecca, once in their lifetime. They strive to create a just community (umma) rooted in the guidance given in the Qu'ran. After the death of Muhammad, they spread rapidly across the world and created an enduring civilization. Yet they do these things in diverse ways.

Within each tradition, I have encountered people with animosity towards people within another stream of that same larger tradition. This is a problem in all traditions. One of my college friends told me that his Swedish Lutheran father warned him when he went off to college about having anything to do with Norwegian Lutherans. And a Thomas Christian in South India once remarked to me that there had been no persecution for Thomas Christians from Hindus or Muslims. The only persecution they experienced came from Catholic Christians.

Intra-Jewish, Christian, and Muslim strife is a huge problem, and thus the need for intra-faith dialogue. Indeed, this might be more pressing than inter-religious dialogue since the bitterest rivalries are often between those in the same tradition.

On the other hand, I have met and know Jews, and Christians, and Muslims who are wonderfully open towards others in the other streams of their own tradition as well as those in other traditions. The first thing I have learned in my life of dialogue is that it is a mistake to characterize any tradition in any singular way.

Even to characterize these three traditions as having their origin in Abraham is problematic, since when one turns to their scriptures, the *Tanak* of the Jew, the Bible of the Christian or the *Qu'ran* of the Muslims, one discovers that each has its own Abraham. For the Jew, Abraham heeded the call of the Lord to go to "the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation." (Gen. 12.1) For the Christian, Abraham is the "father of faith," (Gal. 3.6) and for the Muslim, Abraham is the *imam* who together with Ishmael erected the Kaba in Mecca. (2.124-141)

Over their long history, Jews, Christians, and Muslims have most often not gotten along with one another, usually due to their ties to politics more than religion, though there have been moments, like those in Andalusia (Spain), when they have. This détente and cooperation happened under Muslim rule, something that has been sadly lacking in Christian lands.

Christians have been mostly dismissive of the great traditions of Islam since Islam emerged in the seventh century. Christians regarded the new way as a rival and characterized Muhammad as a false prophet. Ferdinand and Isabella, the Christian rulers of Spain, brought the Andalusia experiment to an end and required the Muslims to either convert or leave. They also gave this option to the Jews in 1492. It is only recently that Christians have begun to call Islam by its proper name and acknowledge the way given to the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁷ There is much that Christians need to heal in their relations with Jews and Muslims. Christians are just learning to approach Jews and Muslims with the respect they are due.

A decade ago, I was in Prague for a Summer Course on Dialogue in the Abrahamic Traditions. We were invited by Rabbi Peter to a Shabbat service, including the informal *Seder* that followed. It was deeply moving, as was the Friday prayer service at the local masjid. We crowded into a small masjid and found ourselves in the midst of a surprisingly international Muslim congregation. After the service we were invited to share some refreshments. For many of the students, this was a first encounter with Jews and Muslims and they all expressed how these experiences deeply extended their book learning into a sense of the lived ways of Jews and Muslims.

These are the little moments that have begun to heal relations between the great Abrahamic traditions. We can't heal the breaches between the great Abrahamic traditions unless we speak to one another, unless we enter the living dialogue of our time.

In our post 9/11 world, where every Muslim is regarded as a potential terrorist, it is increasingly imperative that we/Christians stand in solidarity with Muslims. Gregory Baum, one of Canada's leading Catholic thinkers, made this very point in 2010.¹⁸ But such acts of courage need to be repeated time and again. Dialogue between people of different faiths needs to be encouraged, and my experience over these last decades has convinced me of its necessity.

As we turn more directly to Islam, let me place over these remarks these words from the Qur'an:

We shall worship Thy God and the God of thy Fathers,—of Abraham, Isma'il and Isaac—... (2.133) We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes and that given to Moses and Isa and that given to (all) prophets from the Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to Allah... (2.138)

Shouldn't we all heed these words of guidance?¹⁹

It is not possible to explore here the dynamics of dialogue in a wholly adequate way. But let me point to a few things in relation to dialogue between Muslims and Christians.²⁰ First, dialogue—a living and vital exchange between Muslims and

Christians—is essential for giving the Other (Muslim for the Christian, Christian for the Muslim) a *human face*. Face-to-face meeting is essential to breaking through the preconceptions and misconceptions that we have of one another. I was both humbled and embarrassed to discover the depth of my ignorance and misconceptions when I first began to meet Muslims. Although I was to realize years later that I had grown up with some Muslims in my small Dakota town (the Hasens, Alec, Ron, Shirley, and Betty, who ran a local clothing store, The Golden Rule), I discovered that there lurked in my heart prejudices that I didn't even know were there, or where they had come from. But they could not be maintained in the face of actually meeting Muslims and learning their stories and their journeys and their faiths. It is face-to-face meeting that will allow us to overcome the prejudices and stereotypes that prevent us from seeing the human face of the Other, Christian or Muslim.

Second, in our post 9/11 situation, it is now possible to realize that those who follow the way of “the peace that comes with submission to Allah” (the meaning of Islam) are *not the other but our neighbour*, literally and metaphorically. When I first came to Waterloo nearly forty years ago, there was no mosque/masjid; now there are three, and there are other groupings of Muslims as well. The so-called global village has arrived everywhere. We need not look across the globe to see a Muslim. We can look at our neighbour, those we work with, those we study with, those we ride the bus with, those our children go to school with, and we will discover those who follow the Muslim way.

Third, in our meeting and dialogue with one another we don't have to sugar-coat the differences between communities of faith, nor do we need to pretend they aren't there. They are and they are many. But why do we need to assume that differences and divergences are only a problem, an obstacle, something to be overcome? Differences can also enhance and enlarge those who engage in dialogue. Of course there are differences—cultural, theological, social—and some of those we will not resolve or even bridge: those we must simply acknowl-

edge and respect. But let's not assume that there are only irreconcilable differences. There are also common bonds.

Muslims have children, they raise families, they often struggle to survive in difficult circumstances, they feel pain, they make mistakes, they fail, they do bad things; they strive to make sense out of the life given to them. Their *ummah* is no more perfect than our *ecclesias*. It seems to me that there is an equal measure of failure in every religious tradition. But as trust builds and relationships between Muslims and Christians deepen, it is possible to explore those failures and aspects of each other's traditions that are most disturbing and troubling. But in dialogue with Muslims it is fundamental for Christians to know that Muslims respect and honour the Prophet Mohammad,²¹ cherish the Qu'ran, pray five times a day, practice charity, and long to make a pilgrimage to Mecca in their lifetime. To respect their Ways is not to betray our own, as some Christians seem to think. Rather, it is for Christians to be faithful to the One who recalled us to "love God and the neighbour" as the whole of the Law and the Prophets. In the world after 9/11, this teaching is even more imperative than ever.

*VII. The Way of Dialogue in the Abrahamic Traditions:
Could this be the future?*

Let me conclude this too brief review of the way of dialogue in the Abrahamic traditions with a story. In the late 1990s, I received an invitation to be part of a conference on "The Children of Abraham: Jews, Christians, Muslims" to be held in Turkey. When I flew to Istanbul, I carried with me a paper exploring the issue of whether or not common ancestry makes for good relations. After a night in Istanbul the conference participants flew to Sanliurfa in eastern Turkey, the ancient city of Edessa. The next morning we boarded a bus that took us to Harran, the place of Abraham. Today, Harran is a small village with thatched dwellings and the ruins of an ancient church. It was in the ruins of this church that the official opening of the conference began. Up on the platform were the conference organizers and in their midst, seated side by side, was an Imam, a Rabbi, an Orthodox priest, and a Catholic cardinal. It was a

wonderful sight to see. More than a hundred people were seated in the audience including the international Muslim, Jewish, and Christian guests. We were from North America, Europe, and the Middle East, including Israel. Following the opening addresses and prayers, a Muslim choir sang. It was an auspicious beginning.

We then travelled back to Sanliurfa and our evening meal was served outside, not far from Abraham's Pool, a small oasis, where, it was said, Abraham was born. I found myself seated on rugs spread on the ground between a Muslim scholar from Turkey and a Jewish scholar from Jerusalem. We ended up having a wonderful conversation about Abraham. The Jewish scholar said that there were Jewish traditions that identified Harran as the place where Abraham received his call. The Muslim scholar unfolded some Sufi traditions concerning Abraham. It was fascinating.

Over the next days, we heard many learned papers, but the high point of the conference was that evening of conversation, the meeting and exchange among Abraham's children: a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim.²² We were living the way of dialogue. And it is my hope that my experience will become your experience—wherever you live.

I believe that the way of dialogue grows out of the heart of Christianity and out of the teachings of the prophets of Israel and Islam, as well as the interior dynamics of all other ways.²³ When we discover the dance of dialogue, we will wonder why we have waited so long to embrace our brothers and sisters.

VIII. Conclusion: The Way of Dialogue in the Global Village

As we reach the end of this journey into the way of dialogue in the global village we return to the beginning.

The way of dialogue is not aimed at conversion, nor is it a debate about doctrines or practices, nor a competition. It is a way that approaches the Other with respect and openness to listening—listening deeply and seeking to understand the Other in their terms, rather than our own. It is a way of speaking out of the depths of one's own tradition. It is exchange, listening, silence, sharing and speaking to build relationships,

to establish trust, to gain mutuality. It engages a Muslim as a Muslim, a Jew as a Jew, and a Christian as a Christian on their journeys. It is a way that embraces difference and avoids platitudes. It trusts the transformative power of human dialogue. It is a way that is emerging in relations between Muslims and Christians—for example, I was recently involved in an event between Shi'ia Muslims and Mennonite Christians²⁴—and across traditions. The dialogue is not happening everywhere, but it is happening in many, many places across the world, evidence that something new is happening in relation to the many faiths of humankind.

These are the five points I leave you with.

1. *Dialogue is a living encounter.* We need to remember that the dialogue of the peoples of faith is a living encounter between men and women of different faiths that creates relationships—and over time, friendships—overturns preconceptions, and deepens our understanding of the sacred. The encounter is grounded in the conviction that it is valuable to know something of the faith of those with whom we share this common planet and the quest for truth. It grows out of deep listening, over time and listening again and again. It requires that we develop a capacity to listen to the other in their terms, rather than too quickly translating what we hear into our own terms. This is crucial.

In the process of dialogue, we also learn about our own faith but now in relation to the faith of another. As we together share something of our deepest convictions, we move towards mutuality, we discover things we had not known about ourselves and others, we begin to break our misconceptions and misunderstandings. We move more deeply towards the truth that is given to us in our respective faiths.

Dialogue is not about all Ways being the same, or equal, or any other of the shibboleths that litter the writing about dialogue. It is an existential process, a living dance of dialogue.

2. *Dialogue is a process.* It begins with the experience of listening and listening again, of hearing the voice of the Other—

the prayers, the rites and rituals, the teachings, the stories—and then hearing again, or being silent together, or checking to see if you have rightly understood. It is speaking about what one holds dear and how one experiences the religious life and the gifts of the spirit. It acknowledges our unknowing, our uncertainties, our groping. It asks for forgiveness for past wrongs. It becomes a sharing, through words, in words, and in silence. It is being attentive to the spirit. It involves contemplating what is said or shown or participated in. It involves the rhythm of listening and speaking, of speaking and listening. There are also moments of confusion, times when words fail, times when a laugh speaks, moments of insight and understanding.

3. *Dialogue may take many forms.* It may involve participating in one another's worship or festivals. It may mean meeting over a cup of coffee. It may involve reading one another's scriptures or studying the writing of a particular writer or listening to the poetry of the mystics. It may involve participation in one another's *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) or exploring their way of meditation. It may involve sharing hurts that have come in one's experience within one's own traditions. It may involve families sharing meals—as we did so often in India and elsewhere. It may involve sitting in silence together in a holy place. It may mean working together on social issues or on practical projects to better the life of one's community. It is happening where interfaith study groups are formed, when Jews, Muslims, and Christians gather to read and reflect on one another's scriptures. Dialogue is no single thing. Dialogue is another name for “loving the neighbor” (Bryant), or “for the spiritual journey of our time” (Cousins) or “for the transformation of the world. (Eck)”²⁵

4. *Dialogue is becoming contemporaries.* In every encounter and meeting, we begin as “distorporaries,” people coming from different places, backgrounds, having different worries and preoccupations, and different experiences of our own faith and that of others. We have different interior stories as well as different social locations. In dialogue, when it is authentic, we

gain the gift of becoming contemporaries (sharing the same time).

5. *Dialogue is a way beyond exclusivism.* The notion that only my tradition is true and all others are false—and *inclusivism*—the notion that the truth in other traditions can only be seen in terms of my own tradition—and beyond *pluralism*—the view that there is simply a plurality of religious ways and all of them are equal. Dialogue is a way of exploring the gifts of every tradition without assuming any particular tradition exhausts the truth of the Ultimate.

Dialogue is not debate, proving that I am right and you are wrong. It is not arguing about doctrinal differences. It is not just the activity of scholars, or religious leaders, or professionals. It is open to all. Dialogue is going together, seeking together, pilgriming together into the truth and end of the human journey. Dialogue is a quest for meaning and the Ultimate.

As I look back on my life, I now see many influences that foreshadowed the direction of my life. It all began for me on the plains of North Dakota under a boundless sky and an endless horizon. Its end is the boundless and endless mystery of transcendence.²⁶

Endnotes

¹ The phrase “global village” was coined by the Canadian Professor Marshall McLuhan. Widely known as a media guru, McLuhan was a professor of modern literature, especially modern poetry. His best known work is the *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

² I do not consider myself as expert in Islam, as I do not know Arabic. But I do know something of Muslims as I have engaged them over the past forty years as part of my work in inter-religious dialogue. See also M. Darrol Bryant & S. A. Ali, eds. *Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Promise & Problems* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1999).

³ See M. Darrol Bryant, *Religion in a New Key*, 2nd ed. (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2001) and my essay “Interfaith Encounter and Dia-

logue in a Trinitarian Perspective" pp. 3-21 in Peter Phan, ed. *Christianity & the Wider Ecumenism* (New York: Paragon House, 1990).

⁴ Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World, How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little Brown 2002). This period of tolerance was initiated by Abd al-Rahman (731-788) and included Muslims from North Africa as well as Christians and Jews.

⁵ The largest Muslim nations in terms of population are Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Turkey, Iran, Algeria, Sudan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, China, and Syria. South & South East Asia have over one billion Muslims, the Middle East has 320 million.

⁶ See Walter Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, America Press, 1966). *Nostra Aetate* opens with these words: "In our times, when every day men are being drawn closer together, and the ties between various peoples are being multiplied, the Church is giving deeper study to her relationship with non-Christian religions."

It then continues, "All peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole race of men dwell over the entire face of the earth." It mentions Hinduism, where human beings "contemplate the divine mystery," and Buddhism that "teaches a path" whereby human beings can "attain supreme enlightenment." It notes that other religions "... strive to answer the restless searchings of the human heart." This ground-breaking document concludes by saying that "the Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions," "looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life" and calls for "dialogue and collaboration." pp. 663ff.

⁷ See Francis Clark, *Interfaith Directory* (New York: International Religious Foundation, 1987).

⁸ See also M. Darrol Bryant, *Woven on the Loom of Time, Many Faiths and One Divine Purpose* (New Delhi: Decent Books, 1999). It is an earlier attempt to address many of the issues raised here. It grew out of an invitation to give the Miller Lectures at the University of Madras in 1993-94. I am grateful to Prof. Devadoss at the University of Madras for this invitation.

⁹ See my essay "The Abrahamic Traditions in China: Judaism, Islam & Daoist Christianity" pp. 174-190 in M. Darrol Bryant, Yan Li, & Judith Miller, eds. *Along the Silk Road: Essays on History, Literature, and Culture in China* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2011).

¹⁰ See the many writings of Martin Buber, especially *I & Thou* (New York: Scribner's, 1958) and *Between Man and Man* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹¹ See Wilfrid Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) and *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

¹² See Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience* (Berkeley: University

DIALOGUE IN THE ABRAHAMIC TRADITIONS

of California Press, 1977) and *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981).

¹³ See my reflection on the Poor People's Campaign in M. Darrol Bryant, *To Whom it May Concern: Poverty, Humanity, Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969).

¹⁴ Of course I had read many books on Islam prior to my visit to India, but now this tradition had a human face. I want also to mention with gratitude the fine Muslim scholars, especially Professor Vahidudin as well as S. A. Ali that I met that year. Earlier I had met Muslims in the USA, Canada, and Egypt; after India I met Muslims in Turkey many times, England, Croatia, Kenya, Israel, and now in Peru.

¹⁵ See John Corrigan, Frederick M. Denny, et.al. *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Faiths* (NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998), p. xi.

¹⁶ See Jacob Neusner, *An Introduction to Judaism: A Textbook & Reader* (Louisville: Westminster/John Know, 1991) for an excellent introduction to Judaism.

¹⁷ See Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2006). See also my essay "Inter-Religious Dialogue: the Problems & Prospects of "Overcoming History" pp. 76-99 in M. Darrol Bryant, *Religion in a New Key, op.cit.* It primarily addresses Muslim-Christian relations.

¹⁸ Professor Gregory Baum called for "solidarity with Muslims" during his presentation on "Islam and Democracy: A Catholic Perspective on Reform and Renewal" at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Ontario, on February 12, 2010.

¹⁹ For an excellent introduction to Islam see Murata Sachiko & William Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (Minneapolis, MN: Paragon House, 1994). The prayer most often recited is the opening *surah* of the *Qur'an*:

Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,
The Compassionate, the Merciful
Lord of the Day of Judgment
'Tis thee we worship and thee we ask for help.
Guide us in the straight path...

²⁰ Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish Muslim make the same point: "Inter-faith dialogue is a must today, and the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones." See www.fethullahgulen.org. Another important contemporary Muslim voice is that of Tariq Ramadan, see his *Western Muslims & the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²¹ See also Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet, Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²² A volume was published in Turkish from this conference. It included my essay “*The Abrahamic Traditions & the Quest for Dialogue: Does Common Ancestry Make for Good Relations?*”

²³ I am thinking of the Qur’an’s prohibition against “compulsion in religion” and its respect for the “people of the book.” See also the closing paragraph of Tariq Ramadan in his *Islam, the West and the Challenge of Modernity*: The awakening of Islam may bring a contribution, hitherto unsuspected, to a real renaissance of the spirituality of the women and men of our world. Again one should avoid presenting the encounter between Islam and the West under the terms of a conflict, but see it instead in the perspective of mutual enrichment. In the face of a civilisation that maintains everyday its attachment to its faith in a unique God, prayer, morality, spirituality in daily existence, the West will benefit in looking, and finding, in its own religious and cultural points of reference the means to react against the sad economist and technician drifts which we are witnessing. Does it have the means? Can it go beyond this stage of nervousness and rejection of everything that is not itself? The question deserves to be raised. Muslims doubt this sometimes; some foresee an inevitable conflict whilst others have trust in God and dialogue. All agree, however, in asserting that the future depends on our present engagement. Our daily spirituality must be nourished by the exactness of justice. This is the ultimate liberation that founds fraternities; to be with God and to live with men.

²⁴ See M. Darrol Bryant, Susan Kennal Harrison, & A. James Reimer, *On Spirituality: Essays from the 3rd-Shi’i Muslim Mennonite Christian Dialogue* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2010).

²⁵ I consider the intra-interfaith movement as a call to love the neighbor. For the view of Ewart Cousins on “Interreligious Dialogue: The Spiritual Journey of Our Time” see M. Darrol Bryant & Frank Flinn, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: Voices From a New Frontier* (New York: Paragon House, 1989) pp. 3-7. For the view of Diana Eck see *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Benares* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

²⁶ See also M. Darrol Bryant, ed. *Ways of the Spirit: Celebrating Dialogue, Diversity, Spirituality* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2013) and M. Darrol Bryant and Val Lariviere, eds. *Ways of the Spirit: Voices of Women* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2014).

X

The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Way and Wisdom of Dialogue and Civilization

I. A Personal Prologue

It has been my dream to visit China for nearly forty years. In December (2011), that dream came true. Traveling with Yan Li, the Director of the Confucian Institute at the University of Waterloo, I came to see for myself this land that has loomed large in my reading and teaching for the past nearly half century. For me, to come to China was to come to the land that gave us the great spiritual and cultural traditions of Confucius, Lao Tzu, the Pure Land and Chan traditions of Buddhism and the now forgotten Daoist Christianity of the Tang period.¹

In Beijing, I visited the temples of Chinese Buddhism and Daoism, the Muslim mosque, the Confucian shrine, Christian churches, and the Forbidden City. But to visit contemporary China is to come to a land that has also embraced the ways of modernity, especially its sciences and technology. I was surprised by the modernity of Beijing and Tienjin. As I traveled along the broad new highways past new commercial, financial, residential towers and government buildings, I wondered where I was. I rode on the amazing 300 km/per hour Harmonious Train to Tienjin. And I zipped up to the Great Wall on a four-lane thoroughfare. This was not what I expected.

I was also able to go to Shanxi province, the seedbed of Chinese civilization. In Datong I encountered the temples from the Tang dynasty and the nearby Yungang Caves with their astonishing Buddhas carved in stone centuries ago. I met friendly and helpful people everywhere.

It was a visit to a land that has in the last century has endured great suffering, remade itself and has recently emerged as a leading power in the family of nations.

When I received the invitation to participate in this Nis-han Forum on World Civilizations, I immediately said yes and

looked forward to being part of these efforts. The reason is that I have long been a student of the great spiritual traditions of the East and West. I believe that we need to revisit the ways of wisdom that have been—and continue to be—central to the future of our planetary world.

II. A Vision and an Imperative

While the wisdom traditions have built walls of exclusivism over the centuries, they have always aimed higher. They have sought to give voice to that Beyond or Transcendence that funds the whole of life. As the *Dao de Ching* says, “the Dao that can be spoken is not the everlasting Dao. Name that can be named is not the everlasting name.”²

The task I have set for myself is overly ambitious, if not simply foolhardy. It is an attempt to sketch, in broad strokes, some of the promising features of the contemporary encounter and dialogue between members of the world-wide communities of faith and wisdom and to link those efforts to the quest for a planetary civilization. (It should be noted that all the faith communities have become global in recent decades—from Confucian to Christian, from Buddhist to Bahai, from Hindu to Muslim, etc.) Each side of this conjunction—interreligious dialogue and a world civilization—deserves a fuller consideration than either will receive here. And yet it is the linkage between these two aspirations that will be the road I propose to travel here. As we set out, I want to place before us a *vision* and an *imperative* that can guide us on the road ahead.

First, *the vision*. We are the first generation of humankind to have seen, literally, our common planet as a whole, as one. The explorations of space by the then rival inter-planetary superpowers, the USA and USSR, have, ironically, given us a view and a vision of our common planet that we have never had before. Our oneness supercedes the ideological constraints of the superpowers that gave us this vision. Thus we know ourselves, whatever the differences of language, culture, ideology, politics and spirituality, to be part of a single blue/green orb, gently laced by white wisps of cloud, miraculously sustained and moving in a starlit darkness that extends to infinity. This vision of our planet can and should lead us to an awareness



A stone tablet in the Confucius Temple in Qufu.

that we are all part of a common whole.

Second, the *imperative*. The imperative that arises from this vision makes it increasingly obvious to those with eyes to see that we must find our way to realize on this planet a form of civilization that will be life-giving for us all. The serene beauty of the planet viewed from afar is not matched by life on this planet viewed close up. Close up, we encounter the reality of bitter rivalry and conflict: between rival political forces, between science and tradition, between racial and ethnic com-

munities, between North and South, rich and poor, between different communities of faith, between the natural world and the industrial. We are now also becoming aware that climate change, in large part fueled by human activity, is adversely affecting our suffering planet. Thus we are daily confronted by imperatives arising from our concrete lives on this wondrous planet that call us to *listen*, deeply and profoundly, to the voices of suffering humanity and a suffering planet *to respond, even though we will be changed*. (*Respondeo etsi mutabor* was the mantra of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and, he argued, our time³). We must forge a way ahead that can encourage and establish on this planet a unity, a harmony, a justice and a peace to match what we see when this same planet is viewed from afar. (Wasn't this harmony what Confucius sought amidst the warring factions of his own time?)

With this vision and imperative before us, let me now proceed with a sketch of three parts. First, I want to draw the outlines of a coming world civilization with a groundtone rooted

in the Beyond. Then, I want to bring forward the promise and colour that arise from interreligious encounter and dialogue. And, thirdly, I want to weave these threads into way ahead adequate to our initial vision and imperative.

III. *The Dream of World Civilization/Culture*

The dream of a "world civilization" has long been with us. (But it is not globalization!) It continues to haunt and inspire us in our own age. The ancient civilizations of the past, whether in the East or West, North or South, often claimed for themselves a universality that none ever attained.⁴ If we survey the history of civilization, it seems that the dream is particularly likely to become a nightmare when it is subject to either *ethnocentric* or *political* distortion. The ethnocentric distortion occurs whenever the dream of a world civilization is understood as the *extension of the patterns/values/institutions/and ways of life of one group onto all*. All the known civilizations have, in varying degrees, been subject to this distortion. In attempting to extend the patterns of one to cover all, they seek to remake the whole of humanity in their own image. The dream becomes a nightmare as the subjugated peoples lose their own civilized heritage in the distorted image of the other.

The other distortion that transforms the dream of a world civilization into a nightmare involves the politicization of civilization. In this process civilization is confused with empire and is believed to be shared only by those who hold a common political ideology and a common set of political institutions. Such a politicized distortion of civilization claims that it is not only legitimate but necessary to extend the rule of a part to the whole, through the force of arms or economic domination.

Again, the result is not a form of life that enhances all, but a nightmare than turns conquered peoples into caricatures of themselves in the name of a presumed universal ideology. Both of these distortions must be avoided if the coming world civilization is not to become yet another nightmare.

Civilization is primarily the work of the civil dimensions aspects of society—its spirituality and culture. In English and French the term, "civilization/*la civilisation*" is of relatively recent vintage, perhaps in recognition that the reality or con-

dition of civilization still lies ahead of us. It became widely used only in the nineteenth century, but then subject to both its ethnocentric and political distortions, as people in China are well aware.⁵ Matthew Arnold pointed in the right direction when he stated that civilization was “the humanization of man is society.” However, it is important to link this aspiration to the primary meaning of the term in English, namely, “the action or process of civilizing or of being civilized.” Thus a truly world civilization would be that process by which the many are knit into one human family on this planet. Such an aspiration must, of necessity, recognize and acknowledge the multiple gifts, spiritual and material, that different peoples, cultures, and spiritualities bring to that process. A truly world civilization will promote the good of all; it will acknowledge the multi-formity of the human and the plurality of cultures.

Before noting some elements of that coming planetary civilization, we must be aware of the particular distortion of that dream that haunts us now, especially in the modern West. That is the view that the coming world civilization will be—or already is—a technological civilization. Jacques Ellul, the distinguished French social analyst, has written perceptively and deeply about this distortion in his book *Technological Society*.⁶ He describes how means, or the domination of technique, are transformed into ends so that the central question of civilization becomes not what we love, but rather how we can control the natural and human environment. Such a civilization becomes a tyranny as it confuses means with ends and thus fails to recognize the human and cosmic mystery in which we all find ourselves—a reality which remains outside our control. The distinguished Canadian social philosopher George Grant expresses this point eloquently when he writes, “We can hold in our minds the enormous benefits of technological society, but we cannot so easily hold the ways it may have deprived us...because the coming to be of the technological society has stripped us above all of the very systems of meaning [in my words, the Wisdom traditions] which disclosed the highest purposes of man...”⁷

Hence the coming world civilization will be worthy of the

name only if it can serve to disclose to us the “highest purposes of humankind.” It will not be worthy of our allegiance and effort if it continues the age-old patterns of extending the vision of one group to the whole; or if it confuses its ends with those of a political or economic ideology; or if it confuses means with ends. Instead, the coming world civilization must grow out of the collective wisdom of the whole human race as that wisdom has been manifest in the cultures and spiritualities of East and West, South and North. It is from this font of wisdom that we must discover the patterns of a civilizing process that will recognize, respect, and celebrate the gifts, insights, and wisdom of the many cultures and peoples and spiritualities that constitute the whole human family on this planet.

When the great British historian Arnold Toynbee looked at the future, he bravely wrote that future historians would see ours as a time of transition as we struggled towards a world civilization out of the encounter of East and West. At the heart of this encounter lie two great challenges. The first is to overcome our fear of Otherness, the fear that overwhelms souls and societies and results in flight away from the Other as enemy. (See the way that the West has often characterized the East: “the Yellow Peril,” “Gooks,” etc. or the East the West: “White Devils,” etc.) The second is like the first: it is the fear of the Ultimate Other that leads to an inability to celebrate the mystery of the Beyond as the perpetual source of our wholeness and unity in the present. It is only as these two fears are overcome—at all levels—that we begin to move towards a form of civilization worthy of our deepest aspirations, the “highest purposes of humankind.” That world civilization will be not merely an extension of the present or a hybrid of things East and West, North and South, but something genuinely novel and generative. It must rest in the mystery of the Beyond, the Ultimate that is the source of our being and becoming, but is itself beyond the capacity of any particular culture, or religion, or people, or spirituality to wholly or exhaustively grasp. Its resonance remains beyond and inexhaustible; its immanence is always only in the process of becoming in time.

I have put the matter in this way to emphasize this dynamic process as central to the aspiration of a civilization worthy

of the highest purposes of humankind. While such a process must be incarnate in the values and patterns of interaction in groups and institutional forms, it cannot be finally identified with them, since that identification leads to a bureaucratization that then stagnates the process. Only, in my view, a transcendent funding understood in the diverse ways it is within world spiritualities—the Dao or T'ien in China, the Absolute in Hindu Ways, the Emptiness or Sunyata of Buddhism, the Godhead in Christianity, Allah in Islam, the Great Spirit of tribal peoples. etc. — can rescue our efforts from ever new forms of tyranny—political, ethnocentric, ideological.

IV. The Seedbed: Interreligious Encounter & Dialogue

Now let me put some flesh on these dry bones. To do so, we must turn to the experience of interreligious/interspiritual encounter and dialogue as a crucial seedbed of a coming world civilization. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the distinguished Oxford scholar and then President of India, made the basic point in this way: "If there is any phenomenon which is characteristic of our times, it is the mingling of peoples, races, cultures and religions. Never before has such a meeting taken place in the history of our world."⁸ He is surely right in singling out this meeting of the peoples of the world as a new and characteristic development of our time. And it must be acknowledged that such meeting is partly due to the modern means of communication and transportation created by modern science and technology. But what does this new situation of humanity mean? Wherein lies its significance?

It is my contention that interreligious encounter and dialogue is an idea whose time has finally come. Though anticipated by sages, visionaries, and holy men and women in ages gone by, it has remained a largely unrealized dream, one that many do not yet realize is even desirable. Its time has come not only as an opportunity but as a necessity. Interreligious encounter and dialogue is not so much an idea to be turned over conceptually as a possibility to be experienced in our relations with the Other: other peoples, other spiritualities, other cultures. It is a development in the history of human consciousness as it unfolds in the mystery of being and becoming, a mys-

tery and reality that has its roots deep within and far beyond. It is a hope to be experienced in all its transforming power.

In his *Interfaith Directory* (1987), Dr. Francis Clark, former Chair of the Religious Studies Programme of the Open University in England, listed and described more than 700 interfaith organizations worldwide. He observes that there is probably an equal number he was not able to locate. And that number has grown exponentially ever since. If one were to have made a similar survey prior to WW II, the number of similar organizations could have been counted on one hand. Now we are beginning to find fellowships and groups, fraternities and centres, organizations and initiatives all around the world that have at the heart of their purposes interreligious encounter and dialogue.

Let me give you an example in relation to Christianity. It was only at the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965) that the Catholic Church, the largest grouping of Christians in the world, officially acknowledged other religious pathways and encouraged Christians to be involved in “dialogue and cooperation” with other faiths. The World Council of Churches then established a unit for Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies and now there are interfaith groups throughout the Christian world. There are also interreligious and interfaith initiatives happening within Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Confucian and other communities.

The reason that this worldwide interreligious movement is of such singular importance—though it is admittedly in its early stages—is that this development is but one of the outer manifestations of a very profound interior development in the history of human consciousness. That development—and it has been hinted at in many other things that have occurred in recent decades—is the encounter with the Other. We have discovered—and this is key—that the Other, so long feared and the object of our deepest anxieties, is our friend and helpmate.

Nowhere is this discovery more important than in the realm of humankind’s spiritual life, in the order of the spirit. For it is here that the deepest relations to what is are possible. I say this despite the obvious failures of the religious tradi-

tions and their repeated sanctions of fear-filled and cramped lives. Nevertheless, it is in and through these traditions that we reach towards the ultimate source of things. It is here that we can touch and be touched by that Beyond that is itself ineffable and inexhaustible. It is here that we may be brought face to face with the Ultimate—and come home to the truth of who we are. While the terms for that awakening vary from tradition to tradition, it is important to recognize that they converge as we encounter the centrality of compassion, the rhythms of harmony, the dynamics of peace, and the wisdom of unity.

In my book *Woven on the Loom of Time*, I have sought to articulate this issue in more detail in relation to the Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh traditions. But here, I must limit myself to these few generalizations.⁹ My point is that the encounter with the Other is, in my view, the most important development of our time.

This encounter with the Other is also pursued in the realm of psychology, especially in the Jungian tradition, as the source of our own renewal and transformation. Carl Jung, the great Swiss analyst, discovered the profound secret that lies hidden for most of us most of the time: that the Other we fear is our own shadow, and only by facing it and owning it can we attain to inner wholeness and transformation. Thus the Other becomes, in psychological terms, a profound source of renewing psychic energy as it is allowed to flow with the whole self rather than being wasted to block the encounter with the interior Other.

An analogous development is to be found in other realms as well, including subatomic physics, but that is another story. My point here is to suggest that the encounter with the Other will have profound consequences for our future, collectively as well as individually, all across our globe.

In the realm of politics, we see the most common way in which consciousness has traditionally handled the reality of the Other. The Other is transformed into a rival or the enemy because it is perceived as a threat to one's own reality—thus Samuel Huntington's thesis concerning the clash of civilizations. Here, the Other becomes something to oppose by what-

ever means necessary—diplomatic, economic, political, etc. Thus in the geo-political landscape, there is a division between the “good guys” and the “bad guys.” And we all know, as we travel around the world that the hats vary from place to place and region to region. In old American cowboy movies, hats distinguished the good guys—wearing white hats—from the bad guys—wearing black hats. This shifting assessment of “good and bad guys” is actually a very instructive point, as it makes clear that the dichotomy is as much a matter of perception as of reality. Of course in the movies perception is reality, but it should not be so in our social life together. My point is a simple one: we cannot go on this way, for our very survival as a planet is at stake. If we continue to regard the Other as rival/enemy, there will come a moment when we are all no more.

The modality of the Other as enemy has also been too much with us in the history of religion, especially the history of the religions of the West. I say this as a Christian with a profound sense of the need for repentance and healing within my own community of faith on this point. Nor is the encounter with the Other all sweetness and light. It is difficult and stress-filled. But it is the necessary encounter and transformation that we must undergo as individuals, as communities, as cultures, and as peoples of the world in order to begin the transition to a new generative order (ala David Bohm) of being and becoming for life on this planet. The promise of the encounter with the Other is the discovery that the Other can unlock dimensions of ourselves, individually and collectively, that lead to a new integration and wholeness that we had not attained on our own.

A crucial aspect in this process is interreligious encounter and dialogue.

What, then, is interreligious encounter and dialogue, and how can it be a seedbed for a coming world civilization? Interreligious or interspiritual encounter and dialogue is not mere politeness and good will expressed across tradition. Nor is it institutional negotiation. It is rather the deeply interior encounter and meeting with men and women of other faiths where each is transformed by the encounter with the Other. While this process may begin with the gestures of civility and

politeness that appropriately characterize all human interaction, it must move beyond these beginning to something more profound. That move must, inevitably, involve an encounter with the history of conflict and antagonism that has too much characterized the history of relations among (and within) the religious and spiritual traditions of humankind. To pretend that this history is not there—and a part of our living consciousness in the present—is to forego an encounter that can be truly transformative. For it is as we work through the history of that historical caricature/image/portrait of the Other as Enemy that we begin the process of purifying ourselves and our traditions, thus overcoming, in a significant way, that past that is still too much with us. At the same time, we begin to truly see the Other in a new light: beyond hostility, fear, or indifference. Thus we can move through a three-staged process: from fear and antagonism through tolerance and respect to genuine mutuality.¹⁰ (See Chapter II)

Tolerance is an improvement over fear and antagonism, yet it is but a way station on the way to respectful mutuality. Mutuality is the relationship that grows out of the experience and recognition of the dignity of the Other and his/her way to the Beyond that is known deep Within. This is the kind of relationship we see in the wise men and women who have walked the Way of interreligious encounter and dialogue, figures such as Thich Nhat Han in Buddhism, or Sister Vandana Mataji in Catholicism, or Tu Wei-Ming in Confucianism, or Paulos Mar Gregorios in Eastern Christianity, or M. Fethullah Gulen¹¹ and S. A. Ali in Islam or countless others in our time. Mutuality is a form of consciousness that can—and increasingly must—be nourished in the encounter of men and women of different faiths and that will lead to the nurturing of lives that can sustain and promote a planetary civilization worthy of the name.

Thus interreligious encounter and dialogue gives rise to what the British physicist David Bohm in his *Science, Order, and Creativity* calls a “generative order,” that is, an order based not on succession, but a “deeper and more inward order out of which the manifest form of things can emerge creatively.” It’s what Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy in his masterful *Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man* calls “anthropurgy” or the

making of multiform humanity towards its destiny. It is this kind of order that lies at the heart of the experience of inter-religious encounter and dialogue—the meeting of men and women of the diverse faiths who pass over into the experience of the Other and then return transformed by having entered into a new stage of creativity and consciousness. This movement is manifest in the simple acknowledgement of the humanity of the other: they, whoever the “they” are, are human too. The experience can be as profound as discovering in the practice of the Other a way that can be incorporated into one’s own spiritual life and development. The latter occurs when the Christian learns a Buddhist meditation practice and a Buddhist learns a Christian ethical engagement, or a Hindu discovers the integrity of a Muslim practice of prayer, or a Confucian recognizes the human heartedness of a Jewish way, or...any person in any tradition learns and grows through the encounter with another tradition.

The experience of meeting and passing over into mutuality creates an inward generative order that is itself more significant than the outer description of the encounter. What begins in the hearts of two or three or more persons of faith may then give rise to centres of shared work and practice and to groups that replicate this process in yet others. The presumed separation of the spiritual and the social is thus transcended in a process where each is transformed through the other. The life of the spirit is manifest in this social process that begins in the heart but reaches down to the feet and out to the hands as well.

Outwardly, then, interreligious encounter and dialogue must be characterized by respect for the multiform traditions of religious and spiritual life in the human family, and a willingness to acknowledge those different traditions as pathways to human fulfillment in relation to the Ultimate. Inwardly, that encounter and dialogue is marked by mutuality and transformation that can give rise to a generative order of creativity and renewal.

This is what I have seen in my nearly four decades of involvement with this global movement. My earlier trip to China was my first direct encounter with the land where Chinese civ-

ilization arose. While this moment was crucial in my journey, we are collectively still in the early stages of this process of interreligious encounter and dialogue. Hence it is not possible to say with certainty what the outcome will be. But my experience leads me to be hopeful. The global movement signals a transition from a consciousness that fears the Other to one that embraces the Other in love and compassion. In that transition is to be found the dawning of a new era in the life of the planet, one more in accord with the vision of the planet as a whole that it is the privilege and responsibility for our and coming generations to realize.

IV.

If what I have pointed to here has merit, then we can see that interreligious/interspiritual encounter and dialogue is not a peripheral development, of interest only to specialists in the history of religion, or the religious elite. It is rather the first fruits of an awareness of sharing a common destiny on this planet that is grounded not in cultural superiority, or political or economic hegemony, but in the Ultimate (T'ien or Dao in China) that funds our life together on planet earth. Here in the midst of the Cosmic Mystery, we are being called to recognize and acknowledge the multiform traditions of being and becoming that have been given us as the spiritual heritage of humankind. That heritage now emerges in a new configuration and generative order that may give rise to a world civilization/culture worthy of the highest purposes: those that see in the Other not the face of the Enemy but the face of a friend our brothers and sisters.

At the end of my first trip to China, Xu Jialu, Vice-Chairman of the 9th and 10th NPC Standing Committee & Director of the International Society for Chinese Language Teaching, gave a memorable speech to conclude the 6th international Confucian Institute Conference in Beijing. It was entitled "We are all Brothers and Sisters ..." It confirmed for me that China too recognizes the new global situation, one where we find ourselves searching for a way ahead that will enhance the welfare of all.

Let me conclude with the words of a native American Cree Elder:

the wind has many voices
it speaks in many languages
and one can only ponder of what
it says in one's own language
what it says in other languages
one cannot know
but one need respect
those who hear
and believe.

Endnotes

¹ For a discussion of Taoist Christianity see my "The Abrahamic Traditions in China: Judaism, Islam and Taoist Christianity" in M. Darrol Bryant, Yan Li, Judith Miller, eds., *Along the Silk Road: Essays on History, Literature, & Culture in China* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2011), pp. 174-190.

² *The Tao Te Ching*, trans. Ellen Chen (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p. 51.

³ See Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, *Out of Revolution: The Autobiography of Western Man* (Norwich, Vt: Argo Books, 1969 and especially *Speech and Reality* (Norwich, VT: Argo Books, 1970).

⁴ See M. Darrol Bryant, ed., *Huston Smith: Essays on World Religions* (New York: Paragon House, 1992) where Huston Smith argues in *Accents of the World's Philosophies, Accents of the World's Religions* that there are three enduring civilizations: East Asia (Chinese), South Asia (India), and the West. Pp. 3-36.

⁵ It is worth noting that the encounter of China with the early modern West began when the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) arrived in China in 1582. He learned Mandarin and embraced Chinese culture and in 1601 became a scientific Advisor to the Ming Emperor Wanli. On his death he became the first "foreigner" to be allowed to be buried in Beijing. Later, the Catholic Church said NO to Ricci's approach to the Chinese world. In the 19th century, the Western presence in China was exploitative as evidenced in the Opium Wars. The issue of China and Western Learning was compromised by the legacy of Western imperial ambitions.

⁶ See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Knopf, 1964).

⁷ See George Grant, *Technology & Empire: Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), p. 137.

⁸ See S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Culture* (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1968), p. 51.

⁹ See M. Darrol Bryant, *Woven on the Loom of Time: Many Faiths & One Divine Purpose* (New Delhi: Suryodaya/Decent Books, 1999).

¹⁰ See chapter II on "The Dynamics of Dialogue."

¹¹ See M. Fethullah Gulen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (Somerset, New Jersey: The Light Publications, 2008). Gulen sees our time as the "springtime" of a global civilization and writes that "this springtime will rise on the foundations of love, compassion, mercy, acceptance of others, mutual respect, justice, and rights. It will be a time when humanity will discover its real essence. Goodness and kindness, righteousness and virtue will form the basic essence of the world." p. 232.

ADDENDUM/APPENDIX:

This appendix is a tribute to four of my teachers: Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888-1973), Wilfrid Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), Huston Smith (1919-) and Paulos Mar Gregorios (1922-1996).

1. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888-1973). Born in Berlin, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy resigned from his university post when Hitler came to power in 1933. He immigrated to the United States and taught at Harvard and Dartmouth until his retirement in the late 1950s. The following excerpts are from Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Out of Revolution, The Autobiography of Western Man* (Providence, Rhode Island: first published in 1938, Berg Publishers 1995). See also *I am an Impure Thinker* (Norwich, VT: Argo Books, 1970).

"Faith, hope, and love, the religious forces of mankind are not limited to denominational purposes. Faith, hope, and love are universal. They are the only real motive forces of history and of political life and language, for the simple reason that they alone connect the words men speak and use as means of communication with a real power working in time and space."

"Man—not the individual, but man as the family of nations—was created by a series of volcanic explosions to which people gave themselves up heart and soul; and the result was a type hitherto unknown, yet connected by a secret harmony

with the previous revolution born types of Europe." p. 652

"Men [and women] being products of revolution, we cannot continue to speak of "man" in the singular without grave misunderstanding. This "singular of man"—that is, the unity of mankind present in each individual—is not so easily attained as our ancestors thought. Of course it exists, since every man is potentially a "great divide" and a "transformer." Every man is revolutionizable from one status of aggregate into another. p. 734

"Man wishes to reproduce his kind. His kind being by principle a changing species, *homo sapiens mutabile*, man is concerned with the actual course of 're'generation. He selects one or another course; his "re"-building is a responsible act in the face of the rest of mankind...

"Human history tells the tale of a freeman's reproduction. The everlasting man is always free and always a son, always an heir and always an innovator. That is expressed by the syllable "re" in revolution.... The syllable "re" signifies that his action implies selection. The riddles of human existence lie in the fact that we are reproducing a changeable kind. That is why we are neither angels nor bees, and why the childless angels of heaven and the swarming beehives of nature do not suffice to explain human behavior. The angelic light of inspiration and the busy persistence of the bees have to be reconciled afresh in every century." p. 735

2. Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) was a Canadian scholar of comparative religion, especially Islam. He founded the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill and was the Director of the Centre for World Religions at Harvard. His *Meaning and End of Religion* (1962) became a classic as did his *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958).

This excerpt is from his *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1989):

"The vision to be set forth in this presentation is of the unity or coherence of humankind's religious history. At one level, this unity is a matter of empirical observation. It is an historical fact. At another level, it is a matter of theological truth. It is of ultimate significance, for each of us personally (whether religious or not), and for any interpretive theory of reality, or of the human condition...

I hold that history, since it is human, therein has transcendent (shall we say, metaphysical) overtones....In human lives as lived over the centuries and around the globe lies the empirical base of metaphysical truth...The history of religion, by which I understand the history of men and women's religious life, especially of their faith, lived always in a specific context, is intrinsically the locus of both the mundane and the transcendent unbifurcated." p. 3

3. Huston Smith (1919-) Huston Smith was born in China. Teaching at Washington University, MIT, Syracuse University & the University of California at Berkley he became a leading voice in the study of world religions. His *Religions of Man* (1957) reissued in 1991 as *The World's Religions* has sold more than 2 million copies. It has become the classic introduction to the world religions. The excerpt here concerns his understanding of transcendence in Confucian teaching.

"The person who preserves inner harmony and spiritual glory will be so attuned to the operation of *ming* (heavenly ordinances) amidst variable circumstances that he or she will be in accord with whatever happens. From this premise Chuang Tzu proceeds to his ideas of 'enjoying one's heart in accordance with things as they are' and non-differentiation of things leading to a state of untroubled ease.' ... [Chuang Tzu] ... "I and Heaven and Earth are born together, and I and all things in the universe are in a state of unity.' Amidst these changing concepts of the character of reward was the notion that...outwardly or inwardly, virtue brings satisfaction." See M. Darrol Bryant, ed., *Huston Smith: Essays in World Religions* (New York: Paragon House, 1992) p. 67.

4. Paulos Mar Gregorios (1922-1996) Born in Kerala, India, he became a pioneer in interreligious encounter and dialogue. Raised a Thomas Christian, he became an Orthodox priest and bishop. He was a President of the World Council of Churches. He taught me much. This excerpt is from the *Guru Gobind Singh Journal of Religious Studies* (Chandigarh).

In his article he argued that rather than speaking of inter-religious dialogue we should speak of an "interfaith movement for global harmony and co-operation" since "our larger goal is peace and harmony among peoples, within the nation, as well as among nations, races and regions. It implies mutual acceptance of people of differing faiths, based on understanding and respect for the others, as well as willingness to live and work together with each other, for common service to global humanity ..." He thus recommended three reorientations for this development: (1) "greater emphasis on the spiritual than on the intellectual," since it is "the common experience of the Transcendent that can weld us together into one interracial, interfaith, global family and give us a foretaste of paradise." (2) "concern for the whole of humanity" since religious organizations and other groups often are more concerned about themselves than others. "We should come together as adherents of various religious groups, not to advertise ourselves, but to consider what we can do together to help humanity find its way to life.... This new civilization should be based not on consumerism and greed ... but on creative and all-comprehending love and compassion, on enabling people to find fulfillment in life and orientation for a creative life of service to all." And (2) "re-integrating a multi-faith perspective into all of life."



Dancers at the 2014 Grand River Powwow, Oshwekan, Ontario.

INDEX

Abhishiktananda, Swami (Henri LeSaux) 84
Ali, S. A. 13, 15, 54, 74, 84, 93, 149, 203, 205, 217
Balasubramiam, R. 13, 64
Baum, Gregory 140-141, 146, 197, 205
Bryant, M. Darrol 53, 54, 91, 130,203,204, 205, 206, 220, 221, 223
Buddhist Ways 165-172
Carter, President Jimmy 80
Chatterjee, Margaret 15, 65, 70
Christian Ways in China 176-180
Civilization 8, 29,34-35, 56, 90, 169, 175, 181, 183, 195, 207-221
Confucian Ways 155-160
Conversionism 85, 87 93, 140, 150, 200
Dalai Lama 85, 92
Daoist Ways 160-165
Devadoss, T. S. 14
Dhalla, Homi 14
Discovery One 41
Discovery Two 41-42
Discovery Three 42-43
Discovery Four 43-45
Discovery Five 45-47
Discovery Six 47
Discovery Seven 48-51
Discovery Eight 51
Discovery Nine 51-53
Dogen, 95-97, 99-104, 111
Eliade, Mircea 26, 36, 70, 116, 131
Fundamentalism 85-86, 92, 150
Gandhi, Mohanda "Mahatma" 50, 63, 65-66, 70, 145, 178
Gopinath, Meenakshi 14
Goswami, Shrivatsa 13, 74, 113, 121-122, 127, 131
Gregorios, Paulos Mar 14, 217, 221, 224
Griffiths, Bede 14, 84

Guru Nanak 20
Hindus 7, 12, 20, 43, 73-93, 113-133, 141, 145, 195
Jesus Sutras 176, 179, 181
King, Ursula 31, 36, 53
Klostermaier, Klaus 82, 83, 91
Kumbha Mela 113-131
Li, Yan 8, 154, 168, 170, 180, 204, 207, 220
Mataji, Sister Vandana 14, 84, 217
Muslims 7, 8, 12, 20 42, 64, 73-93, 135-151, 183-206
Nambiaparambil, Fr. Albert 14
Nasr, Seyyed Hossein 24, 35, 36, 43
Note Number One: Transcendence 58-60
Note Number Two: Manifold Melodies 61-63
Note Number Three: Human Notes 63-65
Note Number Four: Dissonance & Discord 65-66
Note Number Five: Dancing in the Presence of the Divine/
Ritual 67
Note Number Six: Remembering 67-68
Note Number Seven: Communities Living the Melody 68-69
Note Number Eight: The Unfinished Symphony 69-70
Nishan Forum 9, 159, 169-170, 181, 187, 207
Nishiyama, Kosen 95-97, 99, 111
Panikkar, Raimundo 33, 36, 188
Parsees 7, 193
Pope Paul VI 190
Prague Spring 147, 190
Radhakrishnan, Dr. Sarvepalli 19
Rosenstock-Huessy, Eugen 70, 78, 91, 209, 217, 220, 221
Rothermund, Indira 15
Saint Peter's 190
Sera Monastery 11
Sikhs 7, 11, 20, 30, 141, 145
Singh, Mohinder 14
Smart, Ninian 22, 35, 41, 53, 58, 68, 70, 112, 129
Smith, Huston 28, 30, 36, 75, 90, 181, 220, 221, 223
Smith, Wilfred Cantwell 47. 61, 63, 92, 141, 150, 188, 204, 221
Sunim, Cho-ui 106-110
Sunim, Han Tap 104-109

Tibetan Buddhists 7, 14, 42, 192
Tulku, Venerable Doboomb 14
Vatican II 87, 143, 150, 185, 190, 204
Way of Muslims in China 174-176
Yungang Caves 168, 176, 207