

THE ENCOUNTER OF RELIGIONS: THE UNAVOIDABLE DIALOGUE

By Raimon Panikkar

mê phylax tou adelphou mou eimi ego?
Are we perchance responsible for our brethren?¹
(Genesis, IV, 9)

Tat tu samamvayât.
Yes! Due to the mysterious and all-embracing harmony.²
(Brahma Sûtra, I, 1, 4)

Summary

The Encounter of Religions is:

I. A vital necessity

1. At the personal level
2. At the level of religious traditions
3. At the historical level

Therefore the dialogue of religions has to be:

II. Open

1. Nobody is excluded *a priori*
2. Nothing is left out on principle
3. It is constitutively open

III. Interior

1. It is an innermost questioning
2. It strikes to the innermost heart of the partners
3. It takes place at the heart of reality

IV. Linguistic

1. Logos-freighted
2. Duologue
3. Bilingual

V. Political

1. It is not a private affair
2. It is of a political nature
3. It has political contents

VI. Mythical

1. It pierces through the *logos* and leaves the *mythos* open
2. It strives to participate in the *pisteuma*
3. The *mythos* sets the limits of dialogue

VII. Religious

1. Experience of one's own inadequacy
2. Purification of religions
3. A religious act

VIII. Whole

1. A holistic activity
2. Liturgical nature
3. Cosmic role

IX. Unfinished

1. Always provisional
2. Trinitarian
3. Constitutively incomplete

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Although both the concept and the name 'religion' are relatively modern and one-sided, human beings have always known something like religion. Man is *homo religiosus*, insofar as the human race has always posed ultimate questions to itself. Such questions bring about the deepest communication between people, and questions always aim for dialogue.

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

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

It is about this dialogue we wish to speak.

To be fruitful, *the dialogue of religions* must be a genuine dialogue.⁴ The following *sûtras*, which portray several qualities of this dialogue, are like nine threads (*sûtra*) woven into a single garland (*mâlâ*), which ought to be taken as a whole.

The dialogue of religions is:

I. A vital necessity

Of course the religions of the world do encounter one another, sometimes even peaceably, though more often in confrontation and conflict. This kind of encounter is generally due to political activities. Wars, migrations, trade, as well as the personal encounters of travelers, slaves, merchants and missionaries, have all contributed to the reciprocal influences of religions upon one another. The meeting of religions is so vital that, in fact, nearly all of today's great religions are the fruits of such encounters. What would christianity today be without the deep syncretism stemming from its jewish, greek, roman, irish, and germanic religious roots? What would what we call hinduism be without the contributions of the numerous religions of the indic subcontinent?

But what formerly took place though slow assimilation, through osmosis and reactions to encounters either spontaneous or consciously sought, has in our times radically accelerated and widened. In some cases, discerning minds have guided the dialogue. But today dialogue is not a luxury or a side-issue. The ubiquity of modern science and technology, of world markets and international organizations and transnational corporations, as also the countless migrations of workers and other population strata, along with millions of refugees -- not to mention tourists! -- renders the dialogue of cultures and religions indispensable, unless we all want to fall into a uniform monoculture which can only impoverish life. Our current problems of justice, ecology, and peace-keeping require the mutual understanding of human beings. But understanding is impossible without dialogue.

This vital necessity may be expressed at three distinct levels:

1. *At the personal level*

Modern individualism which, mainly in western countries, has seeped slowly and unobtrusively into human consciousness to become an essential ingredient of the modern myth, is gradually giving way -- in the West itself -- to what has been called dialogical philosophy: "*Esse est co-esse*," "*Sein ist Dasein*," "I and Thou are essentially interrelated," "*Mensch is Mitmensch*," "*Welt ist Umwelt*," "*Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia*," "Ecology is ecosophy," "Thinking is dialogical thinking," "Man is androgynous," "Freedom grows with the recognition of responsibility," "There is no private language," "Reality is cosmotheandric" -- are just some brief formulations which point to the recovery of an ancient consciousness, although on a new level indeed.⁵

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

In so many words, without dialogue, without a dialogical life, Man cannot attain a fully human condition. Man is *animal loquens*. But linguisticity is not only external communication; it is most of all inner communion.

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

Nor can dialogue be limited to minor topics. The ultimate questions of human existence demand more than polling the opinions of others; they require us to enter deeply into the very mystery of reality. And precisely for this, dialogue is necessary. It includes meditation. In a word: Man is a dialogical being. Dialogue is a necessity for being human. To be sure, this does not mean just empty chatter, but genuine religious dialogue.

2. At the level of religious traditions

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

We might prefer things to be otherwise, but it cannot be denied that modern life challenges each of us in the religious depths of our being. To maintain a superficial peace of mind, religious questions are often banished, and religion excluded from the school, the office, the parliament, the marketplace -- in a word, from public life. The religious urge then seeks outlets in sports, works, drugs...

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

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

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

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

There have always been mutual influences. But now the winds are blowing not only from the most diverse corners, and often in opposing directions, but they are redoubling their force to the extent that no single compass can be relied upon to guide us safely through the squalls on today's ocean of faith.

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

Dialogue takes the middle way between the old and the new and makes possible a creative transformation of historical traditions. Without dialogue, religions become tangled up in themselves or slip their moorings altogether. Indeed, one sees more and more clearly today that no tradition has sufficient power within itself to fulfill its own self-acknowledged role. Either they open up to one another, or they degenerate. And when dialogue is thwarted -- maybe because it is taken for treason to a given tradition -- old and new species of fundamentalism instantly crop up. Dialogue is in fact a vital necessity.

3. At the historical level

Man is an essential dimension of the cosmos. Human beings cannot live, in the deepest and widest sense of the word, without religion. The destiny of humankind depends on whether a genuine religiousness at once links (*religat*) people with the entire reality and safeguards their freedom (*ontonomy*). But the fate of the Earth is also at stake in human destiny. Nowadays human wars kill not only people and their cultures, but also wreak havoc upon the natural world. Modern warfare is no longer a solely human concern. It is ecologically irresponsible to mobilize an army of half a million soldiers to defend some political or economic status quo. The justified alarms of ecology are today audible everywhere on the planet.

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

In a word: If a truly religious encounter between ourselves and with the Earth does not take place, we shall end by annihilating life on this Earth. The dialogue of religions is not merely an ecclesial or an officially 'religious' affair, nor is it just an academic subject-matter, much less some new vogue because maybe church services have become dull or their attendance fallen off. This dialogue is the field in which the historical destiny of humankind may be played out in a peaceful way. It is a vital necessity, a necessity for life.

I stress this first *sûtra*. Without such a dialogue of religions, the world actually will collapse. Here the praxis is decisive, and each of us must contribute to it. But the urgency of the task should not make us neglect other important aspects of dialogue. We must consider these with all due serenity. Good will alone is indeed not enough.

Thus the dialogue has to be:

II. Open

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

1. Nobody can be excluded a priori

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

In this sense, the expression "encounter" or "dialogue" of "religions" should not be mistaken for the undertaking of any special group or closed-door assembly. Religion here must at least mean *agora*, *arena*, *kuruksetra*, the place where human beings -- together with the Earth below and the Sky above -- gather to sincerely discuss what matters most to them, their ultimate (and ultimately common) concerns. All are invited, by rights and by their own lights, to the feast of Life.

2. Nothing should be left out on principle

The community of dialogue is not a professional society for experts. It has to do with the most deeply human concerns. Dialogue may implicitly aspire to

certain answers, but cannot exclude any answer *a priori*. You have to let all possible questions arise and take shape whatever shape they will take within the dialogue itself.

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

Undoubtedly dialogue represents a real risk. You could lose your own standpoint, you could even reverse your own position. Conversion is possible, but also confusion. Everything is at stake. So dialogue requires an enormous confidence in Man -- and in that power, order, or reality that lets Man be Man. One can easily understand, and even approve, the warnings made by official institutions against the dangers of dialogue. Reverends, Eminences, and Holinesses are well within their rights and duties to utter such warnings. Maybe people were indeed happier before they knew how to read and write, as the Pharaoh once upon a time complained and Socrates knew all too well. But once we have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, once we have been condemned by God to be a philosopher... Or should I invoke Prometheus? There are paths you can't double-back on, as Job remarked!

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

3. The dialogue remains constitutively open

Dialogue is not some provisional device intended to help people reach unanimity. The goal of dialogue is not the removal of diverse opinions, or the uniformity of the world, or the creation of a single world religion -- as if reality itself could or should be reduced to a single principle. This might be an unexpected outcome of the dialogue, but it cannot be an assumption. Something would be lost if the pluralistic constitution of truth were to be questioned. Truth can be reduced neither to unity nor to multiplicity. Truth is always relation, connection, and admits neither singularity nor plurality.¹⁰

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

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

III. Interior

Dialogue is not mere talk. It comes from a deeper and more internal source than stimulation by others. This source might be called silence, or maybe just the human thirst for truth. Its very heart is our human awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. Without such interiority, dialogue will be trapped in a superficial exchange of opinions. If dialogue is to be any more than manipulating ideas, it has to issue from the deepest recesses of our

being. In so many words: The *intra*-religious dialogue is a necessary foundation for *inter*-religious dialogue. And this interiority is also threefold:

1. *Dialogue begins with an innermost questioning*

The buddhist tradition calls this attitude the Great Doubt, the christian *compunctio cordis*, *pentos*, and *mumuksutva* is the hindu name. A philosophical concept that would serve is humility (*De-mut*), the courage (*der Mut*) to be the servant of a truth that does not belong to you alone.

In other words: If I do not question myself, if I do not feel that *quaestio nihi factus sum* (I have become a question to myself) of an Augustine; or if I lack a Shankara's fervent longing for liberation; i.e., if I am not ready to give up my security or lose my life, as the Gospel would say; if I do not cast myself down at the feet of the master, as in vedanta; if I am not aware of my contingency or sinfulness, ignorance, or desires, and am not ready to trust in truth with my whole heart and mind, then I am not ready for dialogue. Dialogue is nothing to trifle with. It requires discipline, maturity, humility. If you already know everything, you don't need dialogue.

Genuine dialogue begins with the sincere questioning of all my certainties -- because I have realized, on the one hand, that I am a fragile vessel and, on the other, that there are in this world other vessels at whose contents I can scarcely guess. Dialogue is a basic human attitude. Certainly its ultimate content is not just doctrine. Religion is neither objective doctrine nor subjective viewpoint. Religious dialogue is neither the comparison of two objective states of affairs, nor the confrontation of two subjective opinions; neither scholarly exchange alone, nor solely ecclesial confession. It arises rather from the innermost core of our self, when we discover we are neither absolute nor alone in this world. You begin dialogue with yourself. In a certain sense it requires the loss of innocence, of the first (pre-reflective) innocence. No wonder dialogue presents itself as a way to salvation, transfiguration, enlightenment... We discover it is not the work of our ego, since it is this very ego which must be called into question.

If you have no doubts, if your opinion is already set, if you presume that you have already grasped the whole truth, or that you need never lose your (first) innocence, nor hold your peace in the face of mystery, then you surely have no need for dialogue. Dialogue requires inner awareness.

2. Dialogue touches the innermost heart of the partners

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

Something happens in dialogue before the logos takes center stage. In every genuine dialogue there is a silent moment which lets the dialogue spontaneously emerge. Real dialogue is made possible by this previous mood, this atmosphere which conveys us to where thoughts have their source, where words take their power, where we meet each other as we truly are. All in all, one could say that a certain sympathy must be there. When I am deeply moved by reading a book, I want to get to know the author. Where I am taken only by the thoughts, I might be curious to ask the author something further, but the desire to get to know him better would not arise. Dialogue is not merely teaching, as we have already said. Dialogue can produce "under-standing" only when it "stands under" both grounds, as it were, letting the subterranean streams flow freely. Dialogue breaks new ground by journeying into both the background and the underground, the underworld. Not Hermes but Orpheus is its *devatâ*.

3. Dialogue takes place at the heart of reality

There is more still. Modern Man has become so anthropocentric and anthropomorphic that we need to be reminded that the hebrew *nefesh* means

at once life, heart and nature, as the Japanese *kokoro* means heart, soul, consciousness and feeling -- just to give two wholly independent examples. The *corpus Christi mysticum*, the *buddhakâya* and the *dharmakâya* could also be adduced here as examples of different cosmologies which believe that communication does not require computers, and that the transformation and renovation of reality follows other laws than solely those of propaganda and data processing.

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

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

IV. Linguistic

Man is nonetheless *homo loquens*. Language is our gift, and speaking our task. But human words are more than signs or signals for our feelings. This world is a symbolic universe, and language the main human organ for participating in the living symbolic reality of that universe. Here also we may make a threefold distinction.

1. *Dialogue is logos-freighted*

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

Dialogue is an activity of the human *logos*. It has to do with ideas, thoughts, interpretations, doctrines, views and insights. Each of us is, consciously or unconsciously, the carrier of a whole tradition, conveying an entire world. Dialogue makes this explicit. We do not say only what we guess or what occurs to us. Genuine dialogue is freighted with the burden and the dignity of the speaker's tradition. In dialogue I express my thoughts; but these thoughts, though thought by me, reveal a past and an environment of which I am scarcely even aware. The partner discovers that I live and speak with tacit presuppositions. And our speech also reveals the unspoken. When the village elder closes his address in the *palaver* of an african village, the headman says: "We understand both what you have said and what you have not said!" Here we should strongly emphasize that in no genuine religious dialogue can the *Anstrengung des Begriffes* ("struggle with concepts") be avoided. We are dealing with states of affairs whose intelligibility cannot be sacrificed. It would be irresponsible to involve oneself in dialogue about some religious view or other without being thoroughly versed in it. There cannot, for instance, be much fruitful dialogue about God, hell, *karman* or *sûnyatâ*, if we subscribe only to ridiculous caricatures of such notions. We speak words, but words have their own sense -- and even their own power. No responsible speaker can ignore this sense or neglect this power. Awe before the word is the gateway to its contents.

We cannot emphasize this point strongly enough. Man speaks about something. What is said does not completely 'cover' this something. The 'something' itself has an intelligible core. Man is not only reason, or only reasonable, but without reason humanness is not possible. Reason itself is participation in a supra-individual *nomos*.

2. Dialogue is also duologue

Dialogue requires the encounter, and may even demand the confrontation, of two *logoi*. 'Duologue' does not mean two monologues, but entrusting to the other (without talking down) ideas, thoughts, insights, experiences -- lives -- which really meet, although they derive from distant sources and may even clash. This requires that the dialogue go both ways from the outset. Dialogue is not a one-way street. Wanting to understand the other makes up only half the platform for a genuine dialogue. I myself have to be ready *to be understood* by the partner, and also prepared for possible misunderstanding. And the same goes for the other side. The other 'side' is neither a wall nor a projection of myself. She is a real 'I,' i.e., an autonomous source of self-consciousness, which reacts simultaneously to me in a mutual I-Thou and Thou-I relationship. But in order to recognize the other as a Thou, many an adventure must come to pass *between* us. "True dialogue is not a monologue of the lonely thinker with himself," wrote Feueurbach, in forging a place for the Thou.¹²

The vedantic tradition speaks of *sravana* (listening), *manana* (reflection), and *nididhyāsana* (active contemplation) as a threefold method for duologue. The christian may ask the buddhist why he does not acknowledge any God, but should also let himself be asked why he does not acknowledge any *sūnyatā* (emptiness). The hindu may ask the muslim how he can avoid theocracy, but she in turn must allow herself to be asked how she can overcome anarchy, especially moral anarchy. In other words: Dialogue actually has to run in two directions. It has to be inter-cultural and inter-religious. Duologue is not aimed at eliciting correct answers to a given set of questions. Questions are also addressed to us, although they may not be our own original queries.

The word duologue also contains another important and often forgotten meaning. We say duologue and not multilogue. A duologue is possible when a common field can be established in which the discussion is meaningful. Each language is dialogical, because it is directed to a listener -- or to those who understand that language. The hindu-christian dialogue, for instance, builds a language which is not suitable for a jewish-christian dialogue. Here we

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

3. *Dialogue means bilingualism*

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

Languages do not easily let themselves be dismembered into words. Each language is a way of living, a way of being in the world, and reflects an entire cosmology. If all people were to speak only a so-called *lingua universalis*, this would be a devastating cultural and human impoverishment. And here we are obliged to mention that lately the world is losing about a hundred languages a year. There are cultural genocides! Dialogue, I repeat, requires at least two languages to take part. No authentic dialogue can come about if the Thou does not show herself in it. Dialogue happens between people and not between ideas, still less between answering machines. But to discover the Thou one has to go to the very source of the dialogue. One has to really know the partner, not just hear what she says. Textual hermeneutics is not enough. Rather, one has to understand, which implies real communication, sympathy, and also love.

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

V. Political

In many countries of the world today, academics and churches enjoy the freedom they do provided they do not threaten the *status quo* of the state. Institutionalized religions can go on relatively undisturbed, so long as they acknowledge the unquestionable sovereignty of the state -- although, depending on the state, the scope of their freedom may vary drastically. Nevertheless, real religious dialogue cannot be satisfied with this. It cannot acknowledge the political *status quo* as something absolutely untouchable. Paradoxically enough, nothing enmeshed in space and time can be ultimate for the religious spirit. Religious dialogue is also political, and therefore neither politically neutral nor universal. Socrates was a religious sage, Jesus a religious Man, Al-Hallaj a religious mystic. All three were engaged in dialogue. And all three were (politically) sentenced to death.

Here also we may stress three points:

1. *Dialogue is not a private affair*

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

Dialogue changes the self-perception of the participants and so of the religions concerned, which in turn (together with other factors) shape the life of the *polis*. But dialogue is also a political activity in more direct ways. Dialogue

may have its roots in the human heart, but its fruits are visible and ready to be harvested in the *agora*. We need not think only of Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Palestine, Cuba, Ethiopia, the Vatican, and so forth, where religious dialogue is obviously political. We mean, rather, that in principle, every inter-religious encounter touches on human issues which directly influence the life of the *polis*. Trinity also implicates social relations; death requires burial; sacraments have equally to do with initiation, health, and weddings; God implies authority; justification includes justice; and so on. All this belongs to public and political life.

In the final analysis, religion is not a private matter because Man himself is not a private 'thing,' and indeed not only morally, insofar as we bear social responsibilities, but ontologically, insofar as the human condition is not the private property of any individual. What is whispered in the ear is soon shouted from the rooftops. All the personal pronouns belong to each other: There is no I without Thou, and without 'Him' in the masculine, feminine, neuter, dual and plural -- and also vice-versa. Dialogue is a public activity between people who live in the *polis*. Indeed, religious dialogue is an activity of such a kind that it is related to the very foundations of any political action. To bar dialogue on political problems would render politics entirely barren and irrelevant. It would not only mean accepting the political *status quo*, but holding it in higher regard than any religion. Israel, Iraq, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and so many other states are not only geopolitical entities, they are also multireligious realities. The mistake of christian missionaries in India, for example, was to suppose that they might have a christian dialogue with indic religions without taking into account the fact of british colonial domination. By the same token, a hindu-muslim dialogue won't bear much fruit if it is uprooted from the current sociopolitical situation.¹³

2. Dialogue is a theory-laden praxis which produces new theories

The dialectic of theory and praxis is superseded in dialogue. Dialogue is a praxis stemming from a theory and leading to another praxis, which will in turn serve as the basis for a new theory. Theories are tested and appraised on the grounds of dialogical praxis, which in turn lets new theories arise. Dialogue is a praxis which not only deepens and transforms ideas, but equally

transforms actions and attitudes. The place of dialogue is not the lecture room or the temple, but the *polis*. Every dialogue, as an encounter of real people and not just a confrontation of concepts, has a political character. Every discussion between people engages the power, and has consequences for the life, of the *polis*. The religious dialogue is, moreover, political to a higher degree. It calls into question not merely minor means to minor ends, but the very foundations of human existence, on which political life is also based.

All this is relatively well known. But there is still more. Dialogue as a constitutive human activity corrects the neoplatonic ideal of the purely theoretical life as an end in itself, superior to practical life, which was considered to be merely a means directed toward a goal. The goal then was pure theory. In this sense, the purely contemplative life was not directly political. It stood above politics. It goes without saying that such a view of theoretical versus practical life would consider dialogue merely another means for preaching the truth, that is, for converting the partner. When christianity, for instance, recommended dialogue in the so-called mission lands, non-christians suspected this was merely a new strategy for the old proselytism. It must be clearly stated that such an attitude is remote from any truly dialogical spirit. Dialogue is not a technique in the hands of either partner. This is not to say anything against the primacy of contemplation. To the contrary, it means that contemplation is not pure theory. *Contemplatio* is indeed an action so penetrated by theory that they both, theory as well as praxis, converge in a non-dualistic harmony -- namely, the harmony of Being being what Being itself is: an act.

Dialogue in this sense means, on the one hand, that no single person can possess the whole truth and, on the other hand, that truth itself is not any purely objective 'thing.'¹⁴ In other words, human confrontation in the struggle for truth belongs to the human *polis*. Politics does not mean just applying the most effective means, but also the disclosure, realization, conquest, and discussion of the aim of human life.

3. The contents of religious dialogues also have a political context

If an uncritical mixing of religion and politics leads to totalitarian structures on either the religious side (theocracy) or the political side (state totalitarianism), their separation leads to otherworldly religion (purely abstract doctrines) and decadent party-politics (mere debate over means and power). The solution to the dilemma lies in a non-dualistic view of both.¹⁵

It is a fact that the most burning religious dilemmas of our day also have political contents. No religious dialogue can bypass the meaning of 'salvation' for Man, letting 'salvation' stand here for the meaning of life. But no dialogue on justification can leave aside the issue of justice, and no consideration of justice can overlook the socio-political-economic dilemmas of the present-day world. To discuss peace without considering the *pax civilis* is no longer acceptable, just as talks about *jihad* and 'just war' cannot ignore their respective political situation.¹⁶

Our lead sentence could equally be read the other way on: The political problems of the world also have a religious character. The dialogue of religions is not solely within the purview of religious institutions. The religious dimension of Man permeates each and every political activity. To claim, for instance, that the priests of the catholic church or the *mullahs* of islam or the buddhist *bhikkus* should not involve themselves in politics, is already a political decision regarding religion -- and, when issued by religious hierarchies, a religious interference in politics. Economic problems also have a religious character, and health, education, and human welfare as well, are never solely technical functions for bureaucracies to service. To go back to the controversy between Galileo Galilei and Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino: Heaven (the existential reality in which both believed) and the heavens (the movements of which Galileo first calculated) cannot be either totally split off from one another, nor can they remain wholly undifferentiated. There is no theology without some cosmological basis, just as there is no entirely untheological cosmology (in which people actually believe). Autonomy is as unsatisfactory as heteronomy. The healthy connection is *ontonomic*.¹⁷ The relationship is non-dualistic.

What I want to say is this: The dialogue of religions is not walled up in the enclosures of 'religious' institutions. It stands or falls in the midst of life. It is not

some special area of competence for so-called theologians or religious 'leaders,' much less for academic 'experts.' Shutting out religion from the public forum is as lethal as conceding the dominion of the clergy (just to give a name to the various religious hierarchies). The genuine dialogue of religions liberates Man from human fragmentation and hyperspecialization. Expertise in delimited fields is justified and necessary. But in the domain of dialogue, humanness itself is at stake.

VI. Mythical

A *dia-logos* not only means going via the *logos*, dealing with the *logos* alone; it also means breaking through the *logos* -- *dia ton logon*, ferrying across the *logos* -- to the *mythos*. Maybe the weakest pillar of the so-called Enlightenment, held from Descartes to Kant to the modern natural sciences to Bultmann, is the naive belief that in principle, everything can be cleared up through reason, human or divine. Many people still dream of a *mathesis universalis*, holding to the theoretical possibility of grasping reality with mathematical language, as if reality could be apprehended by a supercomputer. Reason is the critical power of Man, it is what lets us be self-conscious. Kant spoke in an unconsciously self-defeating way about *pure* reason which, to begin with, is so pure that it stays above and beyond every critique.¹⁸ Reason is assumed from the start; it stands as a mythical Gestalt. One always forgets or overlooks one's own *mythos*. And, after all, *mythos* and *logos* belong together. The dialogue of religions, if it is at all alive, cannot leave the *mythos* outside the dialogue.¹⁹ Here also, three aspects may be stressed:

1. *Dialogue pierces through the logos and leaves the mythos open*

Concepts are important, even necessary, but never enough to bring about an integral encounter between people or between religious traditions. A dialogue with concepts alone remains merely dialectics. Dialogical dialogue is more -- not less -- than debate or rational encounter. We have to be conscious that the concepts we use spring from a deeper source. In the dialogical dialogue, I not only let the other know me but I come to know myself better, as I let myself be known by the other. In this way, I can get to know my own

mythos better through the critiques and disclosures of my partner. Dialogical dialogue strives neither for victory in the contest of ideas, nor for an agreement which would suppress real diversity of opinions. Rather, dialogical dialogue seeks to expand the field of understanding altogether, by each partner deepening their own field and opening up a possible place for the incomprehensible. This is not the scandal it was for Descartes, because neither party absolutizes their own standpoint.

Every religion lives out of its own *mythos*, the cauldron of magma from which the *logos* bubbles up to congeal in conceptual structures and doctrines. This *mythos* as a starting point is not a logical postulate. It makes thematic, rather, the tacit presuppositions which form each tradition's horizon of intelligibility, over against which its ideas are seen to make sense.

A dialogue of religions which doesn't take into account this disparity of horizons would find itself permanently enmired in misunderstandings, and would never reach the ground out of which each tradition takes its own self-understanding. What this means is that the encounter of religions cannot be reduced to a comparison of doctrines. Each religion is like a galaxy, simultaneously shaping its own criteria of thinking and its own criteria of truth and reality as well. In order, therefore, to draw valid comparisons, one must come to acknowledge what I call *homeomorphic equivalents*.²⁰

Strictly speaking, there can be no comparative science of religions, nor even a comparative philosophy.²¹ There is no neutral (a-religious or a-philosophical) standpoint.²² All this opens us to the *mythos*. But myths in this sense cannot be compared; they are literally incomparable. They are that which makes every comparison possible, by offering the horizon within which any comparison would have to be carried out. Of course concepts and doctrines can be compared, but only over against the backdrop of a previously accepted standpoint.

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

acts of sociability often turn out to be most important and empowering instances of dialogue.

2. *Dialogue between religions strives to participate in their respective pisteumata*

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

Stimulated by Husserl's phenomenology, which speaks of the *noêma* as the pure content of an eidetic consciousness, I have ventured to introduce the notion of *pisteuma*. We think (*noein*) the thought (*noêma*) through the act of thinking (*noesis*); that is, through the operation of *noêsis* we reach the *noêma* as the pure intentional content of our consciousness; but the *noêma* does not allow us to attribute any objective truth or existential reality to that thought. Paralleling this, the belief (*pistis*) is also really a *sui generis* awareness, pointing to the *pisteuma* of the believer. But the *pisteuma* of the believer will appear to the outsider as a *noêma*. In other words, the non-believer can perceive what the believer says (for instance: "Tara is the merciful divine mother who should be worshipped"), but he cannot understand, that is, carry out that belief. I perceive his *pisteuma* through my *noêma*. I cannot therefore speak meaningfully about his belief, his *pisteuma*. What I can describe is the contents of my own consciousness, namely my *noêma*, but not his *pisteuma*.

What the believer believes is not a rational *noêma* which could be mediated (by my outsider's understanding), but his own *pisteuma*, which is what he believes. If I do not penetrate to this *pisteuma*, I find not what he believes but only what I, from my viewpoint, suppose he holds to be true. But I

cannot reach the *pisteuma qua pisteuma* if I do not believe what the believer believes.

Should this mean that every treasure of belief (*thesaurum fidei*), as some religions themselves express it, will remain unmediated and incomprehensible? Not at all! It means only that without dialogue the way will be blocked. To reach the *pisteuma* of the other I must *somehow* hold that *pisteuma* to be true, that is, I also need to believe what the other believes. In other words, the belief of the believer belongs essentially to that which the believer believes. If I do not partake in this belief, we shall end up speaking at cross purposes from two incompatible platforms: my representation and his belief; my *noêma* and his *pisteuma*. In a word: The *noêmata* of religious phenomenology are in fact *pisteumata*.

We have said that I must *somehow* partake in the belief of the partner if I really wish to meet him. This 'somehow' means that I have to have access to his *mythos*.²³ Dialogue is the way in. A new religious phenomenology comes into view here. Many of the misunderstandings that have so often vexed the history of religions can thus be cleared away. From this follows not only religious tolerance, but a new interpretation of religion altogether.

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

3. *Sharing in the same mythos sets the limits of dialogue*

Genuine and deep dialogue with one another is not always possible. The partners have to share the same myth, they have to stand at least partially under the same horizon of intelligibility. Certainly, this common myth must emerge slowly in the encounter itself, but as long as we do not share it religious communication will not be possible. A tree is always a tree so long as people find it in the field of their sensory perception; but no deep understanding will

come about if for one person the tree is just a vegetable computer and for the other it is a body inhabited by a spirit. If they were to say they do not understand one another, they would come far closer to communicating than when one stigmatizes the other for 'talking nonsense,' or reduces him to their own categories. When they are aware that they do not understand each other, and then go at it again to find a new basis for possible understanding, this is a dialogical lesson. Success is never guaranteed, but the *attempt* itself is dialogue.

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

VII. Religious

The spirit of dialogue, today blowing ever stronger even as new and higher walls are erected against it, represents far more than a new fashion or a new strategy on the part of some old religious traditions to pull themselves out of a certain stagnation. It has itself a religious spirit. Dialogue in and of itself is an authentic manifestation of religiosity. And still more: Even the arch-conservatives who see in dialogue only danger for the established religions, are bearing witness to the revolutionary character of dialogue. The dialogue of religions in fact pulls down the walls of 'creedism' and religious 'nationalisms.' In spite of latter-day changes, the old saying -- *cuius regio eius religio* -- is still valid: Religion goes along with whoever holds the power. The dialogue of religions frees spiritualities from rigid doctrinal frames and creates new connections which vault over all these boundaries so finely drawn between religions. For too long religions, while claiming to connect (*religio*) us to the divine, have tended to neglect the human connections. One all too easily

forgets the "religion of Man."²⁴ Religion has to do not only with God, but also and preeminently with Man. This opens up the way for a new religiosity whose forms are yet to be found. By no means does this demean the genuine religious spirit.²⁵

1. An ultimate source of dialogue is the experience of one's own inadequacy

We have already mentioned the experience of contingency, that is, our touching (*cum-tangere*) of the boundaries, the experience of our own inability to know the human condition fully. This does not mean that a person cannot find their own salvation in their own, relatively isolated tradition. Not everybody is obliged to explicitly undertake dialogue. But since the traditions themselves are the fruits of past dialogues, the roots of religious dialogue grip down to the very origins of humankind itself.

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

2. The new dialogue contributes to the purification of religions

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

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

3. Dialogue is itself a religious act

When we engage ourselves in the dialogue of religions we are also undoubtedly striving for the salvation -- the healing and making whole -- of the entire world. Love for one's fellows, patience, humility, gentleness, forgiveness, asceticism, renunciation, belief, trust, honesty -- the list is endless -- are essential virtues for performing an authentic religious dialogue. Is this in itself not enough to demonstrate the religious character of dialogue?

In this sense, dialogue has its own meaning and it is impossible to turn it awry or misuse it as some sort of strategy for proselytism. Dialogue is itself a kind of conversion, not a means for winning the other over to our point of view. I strive for truth and am even inclined to believe that I have found the truth in my religion. But I am not the only seeker of truth. If in my seeking I am humble, that is to say honest, I will not only feel respect for the others' search, but would even like to join them -- not just because more eyes see better than

two, but for a deeper reason: The others are not only seekers of truth, but sources of knowledge. Man is not only an object or a bare subject looking for objectivity; Man is also a microcosm and a *microtheos*, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a vessel able to give and receive, a contributor to the shaping of reality, someone who can, just as I can, receive enlightenment and revelation. I am not interested in the others out of idle curiosity. The pilgrimage of the others crosses my own path. The search for truth is not about stalking an object, it is about letting oneself be known and, as far as possible, partaking in the fate of all the others.

I would go one step further still. For many people, if not for all, bringing about peace among the religions and promoting mutual trust amounts to a genuine religious activity, undisturbed by the fact of one's belonging to a particular tradition. Whether the highest name be *tao*, *kami*, *sûnyatâ*, God, Shiva, Allah, Yahweh, Truth, Justice, Freedom or Humanity, is important and helps us keep our identity. But it is no less important to avoid invoking those names which bring people to hate, to fight, and to slaughter one another. Beyond this, many people today do not feel capable of sorting out all those names and may fall prey to an indifference which is not always healthy. But the one thing they are sure of is that all this bickering between religions is not salutary, and that peace and harmony are human imperatives of the highest order. Maybe we have here a new myth *in statu nascendi*. Again, dialogue is a manifestly religious activity.

VIII. Whole

From what we have said so far, it should be clear that the encounter of religions is not a task for specialists. The praxis of dialogue is a way of being religious, it is a religious activity, and this also applies to reflections on the theory of dialogue. In our day, when so many human concerns have been hyperspecialized, this ought to be properly stressed. Here again, three headings will suffice:

1. *Dialogue is a holistic activity*

Nobody is an expert at dialogue, because each dialogue is unique. You cannot specialize in religious dialogue. It belongs to religious life in the present. It is the whole Man, precisely as Man (*anthropos*), who is engaged in dialogue. In a genuine dialogue, you do not defend ideologies or orthodoxies. You stand there, as you are -- naked, vulnerable, without preconditions or hidden agendas. We are people standing before, that is to say encountering, other people. We express our deepest convictions and we try to adapt ourselves sufficiently to the worldview of the other to make ourselves understood. We may even tremble at the prospect of such a dialogue, or maybe bow out if the challenge seems too great or too risky for us -- just as some prophets took fright at their own calling. The dialogue of religions is not a parliament where party discipline is the rule and each member speaks for their party or coalition. In the dialogue of religions, as we have said, everything is at stake. The stage of dialogue is life; life holds its own risks, and rewards. We are wholly there. It is about life. All the rest is playacting, psychological or sociological role-playing -- if not mere careerism. Whoever is not ready to lose their life, whoever balks before these dangers, should not be entering the *agora* of dialogue.

Of course none of these considerations preclude establishing a certain order, or setting a topic for a given dialogue. But first, the business of sticking to the topic should be voluntary on both sides, so that a partner might well depart from the topic if it seems appropriate to do so. In the second place, and more importantly for us: Although the topic may be very specific, every participant comes to the dialogue as a whole person.

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

2. Dialogue has a liturgical nature

Modern western desacralized languages do not have a suitable word for this. If I were to say that dialogue should be a rite or represent a cultic act, I

should still have to explain what I mean by 'rite' or 'cult.'²⁶ I prefer to speak of a liturgical act, fully aware that this word also requires explanation. Liturgy, properly understood, means the work (*ourgia*) of the people (*leit-*), where this work is inspired by the spirit. It is a synergy that gathers all the three worlds.

I mean the following. The dialogue of religions as a liturgical act manifests the non-duality of theory and praxis, of individual and community, politics and religion, the divine and the human. Dialogue is not a new religion. It is a liturgy to which everybody and everything is invited, and which would hope -- as do traditional rituals, after all -- to transform all things while retaining the identity of all the parts and participants. Every liturgy is a process of transformation, a transfiguration.

Religions enter dialogue as they would a liturgy, to celebrate -- each in its own way -- the wonder of life (or whatever each religion would call it). Each may believe itself to represent the highest truth and to play the leading role, but each is also ready to listen to the others and to let the play of life play itself out, without violence or cunning. Something happens in dialogue that is not controllable from any one side. The risk is endured because there is confidence. Many slanders and suspicions are extinguished by themselves.

For several decades I have been stressing that every dialogue is a *communicatio in sacris*, a holy communion, without which no human community can truly be.²⁷

3. *Dialogical play takes on a cosmic role*

What is the encounter of religions really all about? Is it about my encounter, as an individual hindu, with islam? About all our beautifully printed books on the various religious worldviews? About a fad for young people or a crisis for their elders?

The recent divorce of epistemology and ontology, stemming from the so-called Enlightenment, makes it difficult for modern people to accept that the encounter of religions means something more than merely an encounter of ideas, systems or, at most, individuals. It is all of this, of course, but it is also

an encounter *of* religions, in the sense of the subjective genitive (muted in contemporary english). Religions themselves encounter one another as historical and cosmic forms. The encounter belongs essentially to religion. Each religion is an encounter. Religions are powerful forces in human history and the cosmos at large. The encounter of religions is like the encounter of galaxies; and it represents, likewise, an astrological event. The history of the world is touched by it; the very destiny of the world may be influenced by this encounter.

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

Each culture will use different ways of speaking. The main thing is not to absolutize any single cosmology. We are trying to say that the encounter of religions is more than small talk here and there, or a gratifying increase of tolerance between this or that group of people. I repeat: What is happening before our eyes has cosmic proportions! Do we need to cite here the metaphor of the 'butterfly effect,' so widely reported by modern 'chaos' theory in the sciences?

IX. Unfinished

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

Here also we may appreciate our *triloka*:

1. *Dialogue remains always provisional, a continuous process*

Because dialogue represents an end in itself, the goal is not to complete it -- and therefore render it, at some time or other, superfluous. The completion of dialogue is not a finale, but a continuous performance. This constitutive provisionality does not imply relativism, but relativity; nor does it mean that dialogue does not or cannot provide specific answers to particular questions. What it means is that every answer is relative to its question, and that the question itself only appears as a question in relation to a given state of affairs. Dialogue does not give definitive answers, because there are no definitive questions.

Dialogue is also provisional in the sense that there is never a completed dialogue. Not only does dialogue never finish, but it is never exhausted. This openness not only vouches for its dynamism, its tolerance and novelty, but also reveals the impossibility of absolutes. Answers are never definitive; there is always room for supplements, corrections, continuations. Dialogue is continuous. It remains ever incomplete, since dialogue is itself a genuine completeness. Need we mention here the scientific metaphor of a self-organizing universe?

2. *Dialogue is trinitarian*

Provisionality reflects the human situation. It is not properly a weakness of dialogue as such. Dialogue is duologue, and more: The relationship itself remains constitutively open, properly displaying a triadic structure. This is not because there may be three *logoi*, but because the process itself brings two participating *logoi* into an open space which will not permit the dialogue to collapse entirely or be utterly extinguished. The classical word for this openness is transcendence. And transcendence will be experienced, without further ado, in the ordinary course of dialogue. No single participant, nor even all the participants together, have the whole of reality at their disposal. We dialogue about something which transcends us, something we cannot dispose of at will. There is always something which lets the dialogue arise. This 'something' lies beyond the power of any participant. One could say that both partners are transcended by a third, whether called God, truth, *logos*, *karma*, mercy, compassion, or whatever. This 'third,' around which the dialogue flares up, thwarts any manipulation from either side. We are not the absolute rulers of religious dialogue. And the situation is all the more striking in that any judge coming from the outside is out of the question.

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

This 'third' dimension may be quite inaccessible to our thought, without this infringing on the laws of thinking. The 'third' element is not bound by our ways of thinking. Nevertheless, we raise the claim to have this 'third' in the dialogue. Each partner claims to have access to a revelation -- be it only through reason --, to an ultimate horizon over against which our words make

sense. *Anagkê stênai!*, said the greeks: We have to stop somewhere. This 'somewhere' is the mystery, the myth... Only by expressing our differences while attending to this third, is dialogue realized. In other words, Heaven and Earth also take part in the dialogue, and bear witness to all that we human beings have to say to one another.

It is this trinitarian structure which vouches for the openness and continuous provisionality of dialogue. The invisible third partner is not a free-standing Essence or an all-knowing 'God.' The partners should not be bound to platonic or theistic foundations. But this third element of dialogue is nonetheless there: A spirit blowing where, when, and however she will.

3. The ultimate character of dialogue is its incompleteness

The human constitution is dialogical. Polarity belongs to the essence of Man and reality alike. Dialogue is constitutive of the human situation. Religious dialogue brings up our deepest humanness.

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

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

We not only have to maintain a sense of (human) proportion, but also to think realistically: We may have the best of intentions, we may welcome all the positive steps toward tolerance and understanding made in dialogue; but

human nature, though not immutable, has never shown itself to be particularly peaceful or pure of heart. Dialogue is the manifest human way, but ways can be blocked or deliberately obstructed. And there can also be deserts, seas and mountains standing in the way. Sometimes dialogue falls apart, or just does not come about...

Another word appropriate to the ultimate dialogical constitution of Man is pluralism. Pluralism is the human attitude we adopt when it dawns upon us that it is impossible, without lethal reductionisms, to bring the whole of human experience into an unqualified unity. In other words, through dialogue we cultivate our humanness. Religious dialogue is the expression of this search. Man is *homo loquens*, because we partake so deeply of the Spirit in the Logos that we come to drink from the same source as that very Logos: Silence.

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NOTES

1. This chapter is a translation of the introductory article for a new journal, *Dialog der religionen*, Nr. 1, 1991, pp. 9-39. Hence its general character and manifesto style. Jordi Pigem did the first english draft, Scott Eastham sharpened up the style, but I have intervened in every draft. A final version appeared in *Jñanadeepa*, Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Vol. 3, No. 2, July 2000. The self-references are for brevity's sake. The word Man stands for *anthrôpos*, i.e., neither for the male nor for a member of a species of any particular kind of 'beings' of a zoological classification.
2. The reader will observe that these translations are already interpretations.
3. I have set forth a typology of the relationships between religions in *Religionen und die Religion*, München (Hueber) 1965; "Un mythe naissant," Preface to J. Langlais, *Le Bouddha et les deux bouddhismes*, Montréal (Fides) 1975, pp. 9-15; "Autoconciencia cristiana y religiones," in *Fe cristiana y sociedad moderna*, Vol. 26, Madrid, 1989, pp. 199-267.
4. Cf. R Panikkar, "The Dialogical Dialogue," in F. Whaling (ed.), *The World's Religious Traditions. Essays in Honour of W. C. Smith*, Edinburgh, 1984, pp. 201-221, for the philosophical background of this study.
5. Cf. H. H. Schrey, *Dialogisches Denken*, Stuttgart, 1983, for an overview of some of these currents.
6. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Singularity and Individuality: The Double Principle of Individuation," in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, Vol. 29, 1-2, 1975, pp. 141-166.
7. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Der Mensch - Ein trinitarisches Mysterium," in R. Panikkar and W. Stolz (eds.), *Die Verantwortung des Menschen für eine bewohnbare Welt in Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus*, Freiburg, 1985, pp. 147-190.
8. Cf. my book, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, S. Eastham (ed.), Maryknoll (Orbis) 1993; and my article, "Anima Mundi - Vita Hominis - Spiritus Dei. Some Aspects of a Cosmotheandric Spirituality," in E. Schadel (ed.), *Actualitas omnium actuum*, Festschrift für H. Beck, Frankfurt a.M., 1989, pp. 341-356.
9. Cf. my essay, "Have Religions the Monopoly on Religion?," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, XI, 3, 1974, pp. 515-517.
10. Cf. my essays in *Invisible Harmony*, Minneapolis (Fortress) 1995; "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel," in *Cross Currents*, XXIX, 2, 1979, pp.

197-230; "Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge," in L. S. Rouner (ed.), *Religious Pluralism*, Notre Dame, IN, 1984, pp. 97-115; "The Pluralism of Truth" (The 1989 Sir Francis Younghusband Lecture), in *World Faiths' Insight*, X, 26, 1990, pp. 7-16.

11. Cf. my essay, "Words and Terms," in M. M. Olivetti (ed.), *Esistenza, mito, ermeneutica*, in *Archivo de Filosofia*, Vol. li, 1980, pp. 117-133.

12. L. Feuerbach, *Sämtliche Werke*, W. Bolin & F. Jodl (eds.), Vol. II, Stuttgart, 1959, p. 319.

13. Cf. J. D'Arcy May, "Integral Ecumenism," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, XXV, 4, 1988, pp. 573-591: "Any breakdown of communication between or within communities of faith constitutes an ecumenical problem." (577) I would interpret "communities of faith" in the widest sense as natural human communities, because in the final analysis, religion is the soul of culture.

14. Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Existential Phenomenology of Truth," *Philosophy Today*, II, 1958, 1/4, pp. 13-21.

15. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Non-Dualistic Relation between Religion and Politics," *Religion and Society*, Bangalore, XXV, 3, 1978, pp. 53-63; and also my book, *Il 'daimôn' della politica: agonia e speranza*, Bologna (EDB) 1995.

16. Cf. my book, *Cultural Disarmament. The Way to Peace*, Louisville (Westminster/John Knox) 1995; and also my essay, "La pau política com a objectiu religiós," *Qüestions de Vida Cristiana*, 121, 1984, pp. 86-95, as a summary of an unpublished work entitled *The Religious Foundation of Political Peace*.

17. Cf. the description of this notion in my essay, "Le concept d'ontonomie," *Actes du XI Congrès International de Philosophie*, Louvain, 1953.

18. Cf. the far-reaching critique of M. Tanabe, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, Berkeley, 1986: "As far as the critique of pure reason is concerned, reason as the criticizing subject always remains in a safety zone where it preserves its own security without having to criticize the possibility of critique itself. Yet precisely because reason cannot thereby avoid self-disruption, the reason that does the criticizing and the reason that is to be criticized must inevitably be separated from each other... Reason must recognize that it lacks the capacity for critique; otherwise the criticizing reason can only be distinguished from the reason to be criticized. In either case, there is no avoiding the final self-disruption of reason. In other words, reason that tries to establish its own competence by means of self-criticism must finally, contrary to its own intentions, recognize its absolute self-disruption." (43)

19. Cf. my book, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, New York (Paulist) 1979; as well as my article, "Mythos und Logos. Mythologische und rationale Weltansichten," in M. P. Dürr/W. Zimmerli (eds.), *Geist und Natur*, Bern, 1989, pp. 206-220.

20. By *homeomorphic equivalent*, as noted in the Introduction to this book (pp. xxii-xxiii), I understand a third degree analogy which reveals a similar and corresponding function in the respective systems.

21. Cf. R. Panikkar, "What is Comparative Religion Comparing?," in G. J. Larson/E. Deutsch (eds.), *Interpreting Across Boundaries. New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Princeton, 1988, pp. 116-136.

22. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion," in *Man and World*, Nr. XIII, 34, pp. 357-383.

23. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Verstehen als Überseugtsein," in H. P. Gadamer/P. Vogler (eds.), *Neue Anthropologie*, Nr. 7, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, Teil II, Stuttgart, 1975, pp. 132-167.

24. Cf. Rabindrath Tagore, *The Religions of Man*, London, 1931.

25. Cf. R. Panikkar, "El futuro de la religión," in *Civiltà delle macchine*, XXVII, 4-6, 1979, pp. 82-89. English and french translations in *INTERculture*, Vol. XXIII, Nr. 2 (Cahier 107), 1990, pp. 3-21.

26. I have made an attempt at this explanation in my book, *Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum*, Freiburg, 1964; which later appeared, substantially revised, in french, *Le mystère du culte dans l'hindouisme et christianisme*, Paris (Cerf) 1970; and, again reworked, is also going to appear in english.

27. Cf. P. Puthanangady (ed.), *Sharing Worship. Communicatio in sacris*, Bangalore, 1988.

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