

What is the True Religion?

Toward an Ecumenical Criteriology

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No question in the history of the churches and of religions has led to as many disputes and bloody conflicts, indeed, "religious wars", as has the question about the truth. Blind zeal for the truth in all periods and in all churches and religions has ruthlessly injured, burned, destroyed and murdered. Conversely a weary forgetfulness of truth has had as a consequence a loss of orientation and norms so that many no longer believed in anything. The Christian churches, after a history of bloody conflicts, have learned to moderate the dispute concerning the truth and to come to common answers in an ecumenical spirit, which of course in the end should lead to practical results. The same lies in the future for the relationship between Christians and other religions. And yet some ask whether there can in any sense be a theological, responsible way open to Christians by which they can accept the truth of other religions without giving up the truth of their own religion, and thereby their own identity?

A PRAGMATIC SOLUTION?

Some ask conversely whether for us descendants of the Enlightenment this

is still a question at all? Are we not fighting rearguard battles in intellectual history simply because we are still anxious about a diffusion of our own identity? But has not a solution long since been available on the pragmatic level? "Of these three religions only one can be the true one," insisted the Sultan Saladin in Lessing's famous "Dramatic Poem", and, turning to the wise Nathan, he added: "A man like you does not remain standing there where the accident of birth has placed him; or if he remains, he remains because of insight, reasons, the choice of the better (3/5)".

On what, however, does this insight rest? What are the reasons for the choice of the better? Lessing's solution is, as is known, expressed in the parable of the three rings: If — and that is the presupposition — the theoretical clarification of the truth question does not succeed, if "the correct ring is not truly discoverable", what then? The answer: Praxis alone! Let each one "freely be zealous . . . in his love, unburdened by prejudices!" Then the power of the genuine ring will disclose itself: "With gentleness, with heartfelt peaceableness, with good deeds, with the inmost submission to God." Con-

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firmation therefore only through a God-granted humanness in life itself! For our problem this means that every religion is genuine, is true, insofar as it *de facto* and practically shows forth the "wondrous power" to make us pleasing before God and human beings. Is this a standpoint which is as clear as it is simple, which spares us having to face the fateful truth question?

It was in our century that above all the Americans Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey, put forth a pragmatic solution to the question about truth. Accordingly, in regard to the true religion, it is simply asked how a religion as a whole "works", what practical consequences it has, what factual value for the personal formation of life and social living together it has — in history and here today.

Who can dispute that such an interpretation of the function and the usefulness of a religion contains much truth? Do not theory and practice flow into one another precisely in religion? Must not the truth of a religion *de facto* show itself in praxis? Must not what "value" a religion has show itself completely in practice, in line with the scriptural citation: "By their fruits shall you know them?"

The question is only whether the truth can be simply equated with practical usefulness. Can the truth of a religion be reduced to usefulness, serviceability, satisfaction of needs, indeed if necessary be sacrificed to tactics, to commercial or political exploitation? Could not a religion which is little practised nevertheless be true? A programme, which is constantly violated, nevertheless be correct? A message, which finds little or no belief, nevertheless be a good message?

Of course here it should be reflected whether there is not a deeper under-

standing of pragmatism than its utilitarian variant expresses, which is not a mere reduction of religion to a practical reality, but rather is concerned with its binding of a truly good life to praxis. However, in any case the question is posed: According to which criteria should such complex phenomena as the great religions be judged? Would the effects of Buddhism in Asia or of Catholicism in Europe over millennia simply be designated as good or as bad? Do not all contemporary religions have their credit and debit sides? And cannot such a manner of viewing mislead one time and again to compare the high ideals of one's own religion with the low reality of the other: For example, a real Hinduism or a real Islam with an ideal Christianity?

Thus, the question must be repeated: What is the true religion? William James, at the beginning of his classic work on the *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), mentioned as a useful criterion for the judgment concerning a genuine religion not only "ethical corroboration", but — alongside of immediate certitude — also "philosophically demonstrable rationality". But what does "philosophically demonstrable rationality" mean in this connection? In any case, one does not get around the truth question only with a praxis orientation. In order to prepare a constructive answer I would like in this second section to present a view of four fundamental positions.

FOUR FUNDAMENTAL POSITIONS

No religion is true

Or All religions are equally untrue!

The atheistic position (which in its variant forms are critical of religion are not here our theme) should not simply be suppressed here. Rather, it is an ongoing challenge for all religions. Normally the lamentable condition of

a religion is itself sufficient basis for the supposition that its doctrines and rites amount to nothing, that religion is nothing other than projection, illusion, a means of consolation — in short, that there is no truth in this, or indeed any, religion.

Now I cannot and will not try to prove that religion in fact is focused on a reality, indeed, a most primordial-ultimate Reality. However, the atheistic opponent of religion is likewise obliged on his side to provide proof that religion in the end focuses on nothing. Just as God is in no way to be demonstrated, so also this “nothing” is indemonstrable. Our pure, theoretical reason is bound to this world and simply does not reach far enough in order to answer this question; in that Kant was correct for all time. Positively said, we are concerned here with the famous “Gretchen” question of religion which deals with no more and no less than the great question of *trust* in our lives: Contrary to all apparent contradictions in this world we nevertheless utter a yes in a tested, illusion-free realistic trust in an ultimate ground, ultimate content and ultimate meaning of the world and humanity which are presumed in the great religions — a completely reasonable yes insofar as it has good reasons at its base, even though they may not strictly speaking be proofs.

Whoever says *no* will have to answer before history. The ancient religious history of humanity — traced back at least as far as the interment rites of the Neanderthal people — which greatly relativises the atheistic positions, closely bound to the specifically Western culture and intellectual history (Nietzsche’s “God Is Dead” presumes 2,500 years of occidental metaphysics!) as they are. Whether one views humanity diachronically in

its many-thousand-year history, or synchronically in its global dispersion, no tribe will be found in which the belief in a transcendent is lacking. Globally viewed, large-scale atheism is a typically Western “accomplishment”, even if it has likewise spread to the Orient. It is, consequently, an affair of a cultural minority in our century.

**Only a single religion is true
Or All other religions are untrue!**

The traditional Catholic position already anticipated in the early Christian centuries by Origen, Cyprian and Augustine, and defined already in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), is well-known: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus!* Outside of the church there is no salvation! Fifty years before the discovery of America the Ecumenical Council of Florence in 1442 unambiguously issued the following definition: “The holy Roman church . . . firmly believes, confesses and proclaims that no one outside of the Catholic church, neither pagan nor Jew nor unbeliever or one separated from the church, will have a part in eternal life, but rather will be condemned to that eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels if he does not before his death join it [the Catholic church]” (Denz. 1351). Is not the claim of the other religions to truth and salvation thereby once and for all eliminated? It was, so it appeared, at least from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

Already during the Age of Discovery of new continents Catholic theology attempted to understand anew the “extra” dogma, which for the most part meant to reinterpret, indeed, ultimately to reverse things into its opposite. It would never openly correct it because it was “infallible”. Indeed, even the Council of Trent, and theologians such as Bellarmine and Suarez

recognised an unconscious "desire" (*desiderium*) for baptism and the church as sufficient for eternal salvation. In the seventeenth century Rome in opposition to rigorist French Jansenists condemned the statement: "*Extra ecclesiam nulla gratia*" (outside of the church no grace; Denz. 1295, 1379). In 1952 the Roman Sanctum Officium (Congregation of the Faith) found itself, paradoxically, obliged to excommunicate the student chaplain at Harvard University who along with the ancient church Fathers and the Council of Florence maintained the damnation of all human beings outside of the physical Catholic church. Again without formal correction, the Second Vatican Council finally declared in its Constitution on the Church (1964) that on the basis of God's all-embracing will and plan of salvation "those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience — those too may achieve eternal salvation" (Art. 16). And in the declaration concerning non-Christian religions the acknowledging description of other religions reaches its high point in the sentence: "The Catholic church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions" (Art. 2).

That means that the traditional Catholic position is today no longer the official position. Because the human being is indeed bound to the historical-socially shaped forms of religion, even the non-Christian religions can be ways to salvation. Perhaps not the normal, completely "ordinary", but perhaps nevertheless historically "extraordinary" ways. In fact, in contemporary Catholic theology on

the basis of this reversal, one makes a distinction between the "ordinary" (= Christian) way to salvation, and the "extraordinary" (= non-Christian) ways to salvation (sometimes also between "the way" and the various "paths").

However one may judge this theological solution and terminology, what is important is that for the first time in its history the Catholic church has clearly spoken *against* a narrow-minded pretentious *absolutism*, which makes its own truth "absolute", "dis-connected" from the truth of others. It has turned away from that standpoint of exclusivity which had condemned the non-Christian religions and their truth and had opened the gate and door to every kind of apologetic, incorrigibility and self-righteousness. In short, it has turned away from that dogmatism which imagined that it from the beginning had the complete truth in its own possession and held out to the other positions only condemnations or demands of conversion. No, the disdain of the religions should now be followed by their high appreciation, their neglect by their understanding, their being "missionised" by study and dialogue.

With this the Catholic church took a step twenty years ago which many Protestant theologians still hesitate to take today. Following in the tracks of the younger Barth and dialectical theology — often without a very informed knowledge or analysis of the world religions — they can only proceed dogmatically with its truth claim: "Religion" is nothing other than "natural theology" and thus a self-empowered sinful uprising against God — unbelief, pure and simple. Christianity, for its part, however, is no religion at all, because the Gospel is the end of all religion. I suggest, however, that such

a “dialectical theology” must be more dialectical!

No, the world religions may neither be dogmatically condemned nor ignored, as some theologians do. A high-minded *ignoramus* (“we do not know”) is more than ever irresponsible. And if Christian theology has no answer to the question of the salvation of the majority of humanity, can it wonder that people today, as in the time of Voltaire, heap their scorn upon its arrogation of “salvation alone”, or contents itself with an enlightened indifferentism? Therefore, the bifurcated stand of the World Council of Churches is likewise unsatisfactory for neither in its “Guidelines for Dialogue with Persons of Other Religions and Ideologies” (1977-79), nor at its most recent Plenary Assembly in Vancouver (1983) was it able to take a stand on the question of salvation outside of the Christian churches because of contradictory positions held by the member churches.

Consequently an intensification in the posing of the question is unmistakable today. Since the discovery of the gigantic continents the world religions were first of all an external, *quantitative* challenge to Christianity. Now, however, they have become — not only for a few enlightened persons, but for the Christian churches themselves — an inner *qualitative* challenge. Now it is no longer simply the fate of the world religions which stands in question, as during the “Christian” colonial period. The fate of Christianity itself hangs in the balance in this period of post-colonialism and post-imperialism.

The question is posed differently now: What is the Christian proclamation today when it finds not the poverty of religions, as earlier, but rather a wealth — what does it then have to offer? If it now perceives light all

round, how can it intend to bring “the light”? If all religions contain truth, why should specifically Christianity be *the* truth? If there is already salvation outside of the church and Christianity, why should there be the church and Christianity at all? The third position provides a simple answer to these questions.

Every religion is true

***Or* All religions are equally true!**

Whoever really knows the religions will hardly maintain that all are the same. For thus the fundamental differences between the basic types of mystical and prophetic religion would be glossed over, as would also all the contradictions among the individual religions. The fact that even an individual religion does not simply remain the same throughout the course of its history, as has been pointed out especially by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, but rather — often to an astonishing degree — develops and complexifies.

Moreover, must not *objective* religion (the various myths, symbols, doctrines, rites and institutions which are often contradictory in different religions) be distinguished from *subjective* religion, from religiosity, from the fundamental religious experience of the All-One and Absolute which is to be found at the foundation of all religions? However, even recourse to the fundamental religious “mystical” experience, which is allegedly everywhere the same, does not resolve the truth question. Why? Because there never is a religious experience in isolation, never one “in itself”, never one “free” of all interpretation. Religious experience from the beginning is interpreted experience and is therefore shaped by the religious tradition in question and its various forms of expression.

Further, this too is still not every-

thing. Whoever maintains that in principle all religions are equally true specifically excludes from the religious area any capability of error, and from humanity any moral fallibility. Why should it not also be true for religion: *errare humanum est*? Is there a religion then which does not have human forms? Or should, for example, all religious statements, all myths and symbols, all revelations and confessions, and finally all rites and customs, authorities and appearances in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity be in an equal manner true and valid? No, the reality of the one experiencing in no way guarantees the reality of that which is experienced. There is a difference between religious and pseudo-religious experiences, and one cannot place magic or belief in witches, alchemy or credulity in wonders and all irrationality on the same level with belief in the existence of God (or in the reality Brahman), in salvation and liberation. There can be no talk about "religious experiences" being equally true.

Just as everything is not simply one, so also is everything not simply equally valid, not even in one and the same religion! The slogan "anything goes" least of all can quiet the basic questioning of human life for *truth*, ultimately binding and trustworthy. Or should perhaps, precisely in the religious sphere, everything be legitimate because it happened one time ("the power of the factual") and possibly comes down to us picturesquely clothed (religion in the garment of folklore)?

If it is the "truth" and only the truth which — to follow the Gospel of John — "makes us free", then we must search further.

Together with exclusivistic absolutism, that crippling *relativism*, which makes all values and standards the same, must be avoided. This incident-

tally was also true for Lessing. For that arbitrary pluralism — already developing in his time and which has become intellectually "in" today — which approved its own and other religions in an undifferentiating manner, can call upon Lessing as little as that indifference for which all religious positions and decisions are equally unimportant, and which thereby saves itself the effort of "distinguishing the spirits".

**One religion is the true one
Or All religions participate in the truth of the one religion!**

If the standpoint of exclusivism which acknowledges no truth outside of its own is equally as unacceptable as a relativism which "relativises" all truth and is indifferent toward all values and standards, which affirms and approves in undifferentiated manner its own and other religions, would not then the standpoint of a generous, tolerant inclusivism be the real solution?

We encounter this above all in the *religions of Indian origin*: All empirical religions represent only the various levels, partial aspects of the one universal truth! The other religions are not untrue — simply preliminary. They participate in the universal truth. By calling upon the mystical experience a "higher knowledge" can thus be claimed for one's own religion. The consequence? Every other religion is *de facto* degraded to a lower or to a partial knowledge of truth, while one's own religion is raised up to a super system. Every other religion is designated a preliminary stage or a partial truth; a proper, special claim is denied them. What looks like tolerance proves in practice to be a kind of conquering through embrace, an assimilation through validation, an integration through relativisation and loss of identity.

A variant form of this inclusivism is found — paradoxical though it may

sound — *also in Christianity*. Karl Rahner's theory of an "anonymous Christian" is ultimately still dependent upon a (Christian) *superiority standpoint*, which starts out with the assumption that one's own religion is the true one. For according to Rahner's theory, which attempts to resolve the dilemma of the "extra" dogmas, all Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists will thereby be saved not because they are Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, but because they are ultimately Christians, indeed, "anonymous Christians". No, the embrace here is no less subtle than in Hinduism. The will of these persons, who are not Christians and who do not wish to be Christians, is not respected, but rather is interpreted according to one's own interests. However, one will not find a serious Jew or Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist around the world who does not feel such a claim that s/he is "anonymous", and indeed an "anonymous Christian", as an arrogation. This is without taking into consideration the completely distorted use of the word "anonymous": as if these human beings did not know what they themselves are! Such a speculative assimilation of the conversation partner blocks off the dialogue before it has even begun. We must affirm: Men and women in the other religions are to be respected as such, and are not to be subsumed in a Christian theology.

What then is demanded of a Christian fundamental attitude toward the world religions today? Instead of an indifferentism for which everything is equally valid: somewhat more *indifference* toward alleged orthodoxy which makes itself the measure of the salvation or lack of salvation of human beings and wishes to make good its truth claim with instruments of power and force; instead of a relativism for

which there is no absolute: more sensitivity for the *relativity* in every human setting up of absolutes, which hinders a productive co-existence of the various religions, and more sensitivity for *relationality* which allows every religion to be seen within its own web of relationships; instead of a syncretism where everything possible and impossible is "mixed together", melted into one: more commitment to *synthesis* of all confessions and religious oppositions which still take their daily toll of blood and tears, so that instead of war, hate and dispute, *peace* should reign among the religions.

In face of all religiously motivated impatience, one cannot demand enough patience, religious freedom. In any case, there should be no betrayal of freedom for the sake of truth. But at the same time, there should be no betrayal of truth for the sake of freedom. The truth question must not be trivialised and sacrificed to the utopia of a future world unity and one world religion, which — especially in the third world where the history of colonisation and the history of the missions bound up with it are in no way forgotten — would be feared as a threat to one's own cultural, religious identity. On the contrary, as Christians we are challenged to think through anew in a Christian-based *freedom* the question of *truth*. For freedom, other than arbitrariness, is not simply freedom *from* all bindings and obligations — that is, purely negative. Rather, it is at the same time a positive freedom *for* new *responsibility* toward one's fellow human being, one's self, the Absolute: true freedom, therefore, is a freedom for truth.

THE QUESTION OF THE CRITERIA OF TRUTH

One could proceed with long and complicated discussion on the question of

what truth is and take a position on the various theories about truth in the present day (correspondence, reflection, consensus, coherence theories). However, the question about the true religion must remain very much in the foreground. As a presupposition for everything that follows concerning the lack of truth in religion I offer the following thesis as a starting point: The Christian also possesses *no monopoly on truth*, and also of course no right to forego a *confession of the truth* on the grounds of an arbitrary pluralism; dialogue and witness do not exclude each other. A confession of the truth indicates the courage to sift out untruth and speak about it.

It would certainly be a gross prejudice to identify ahead of time the border between truth and untruth with that of the border between one's own and other religions. If we are serious, we would have to grant that the *borders between truth and untruth* run through each of our religions. So often are we both correct and incorrect! Criticism of the other position therefore is done responsibly only on the basis of a decisive self-criticism. Likewise only thus is an integration of the values of the other responsible. That means that *likewise in the religions not everything is equally true and good*; there are also elements in the teachings of the beliefs and customs, in the religious rites and practices, the institutions and authorities which are not true and not good. It goes without saying that this also applies to Christianity.

It is not without reason that there is often a strong criticism of Christianity by the world religions because Christians are much too unclear:

Despite its love and peace ethic, Christianity comes across to the members of other religions in its appearance and activity as

extremely exclusive, intolerant and aggressive;

It comes across to other religions not as wholistic, but rather, because of its orientation to the afterlife and its negative attitude toward the world and the body, as inwardly split;

It exaggerates almost pathologically the consciousness of sin and guilt at the core of allegedly corrupt humanity in order all the more effectively to bring into play its need of redemption and dependence upon grace;

From the start it falsifies through its Christology the figure of Jesus — which the other religions almost universally view positively — into an exclusively divine figure (Son of God).

Whatever may be justified in this criticism, it is clear that the question about the truth of a religion concerns more than pure theory. What the truth is shows itself never only in a system of true statements about God, humanity and the world, never only in a series of propositional truths over against which all others would be false. It always at the same time likewise concerns *praxis*, a way of experience, enlightenment and endurance as well as illumination, redemption and liberation. If religion accordingly promises an ultimately comprehensive meaning of our life and death, proclaims a highest, indestructible value, sets unconditionally binding standards for our behaviour and suffering, and shows the way to a spiritual home, then this means that the dimensions of the *true (verum)* and the *good (bonum)*, the meaningful and the valuable merge together in religion, and the question about the (more theoretically understood) truth or meaningfulness of religion is at the same time the question about its (more practically understood) goodness or value. A "true" Christian or Buddhist is the "good" Christian or Buddhist! To this extent the question about what

is true and what is false religion is identical with the question of what is good and what is bad religion.

The fundamental question about the true religion must be posed as follows: How can one distinguish between the true and the false, the valuable and the valueless, in the religions themselves? In this one may not focus only on the Hindu caste system, the Shakti form of tantric Buddhism with its sexual practices, and the "holy wars" and cruel punishment in Islam; one must also recall such appearances in Christianity as the Crusades, the burning of witches, the Inquisition and the persecution of Jews. Thus one can easily see how delicate and difficult the question about the *criteria of truth* is if these are not merely to spring from subjective arbitrariness or to be used simply to hit others over the head.

Naturally no religion can completely forego applying its very *specific* (Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist) *criteria of truth* to the other religions (more about this later). Dialogue indeed does not mean the repudiation of one's own self. However, in every religion one must be clear about the fact that these criteria first of all can be relevant and indeed binding only for one's self and not for the others. Should each of the others likewise absolutely insist on their own criteria of truth, a genuine dialogue is already from the beginning without hope. Thus, for example, the Bible can fulfill its criteriological-liberating function only in discussion amongst the Christian churches, and at most in discussions between Christians and Jews. However, already in conversation with Muslims, and certainly with Hindus and Buddhists, a direct appeal to the Bible as a criterion of truth would be inappropriate. What, however, then remains if in the dialogue

with the religions Christians can no longer simply appeal to the Bible (or the Muslims to the Qur'an, the Hindus to the Gita or the Buddhists to their Canon) as an indisputable authority in order to stand vis-à-vis the other in the right, in the truth? With due caution another way will be *attempted* here and presented for discussion: We move inwardly so to speak in a spiral fashion in three thought movements, namely, from a generally ethical to a generally religious, and only then to a specifically Christian criterion.

THE HUMANUM AS A GENERAL ETHICAL CRITERION

When we compare our religion with the others, and also when we reflect on the misuse of our own religion, the question is posed for all religions concerning the criteria of the true and the good, that is, concerning *general criteria* which analogically are applicable to all religions — this is important, it seems to me, not least of all for question concerning national and international law. Neither the descriptive comparative study of religion (little interested in normative criteria) which, however, itself (often untested) presumes specific understandings of humanity, nature, history and the divine (as for example with a covert predilection for the "mystical"), has carried out this difficult criteriological work, nor has Christian theology, which until now has hardly seriously compared itself with other religions and for the most part has avoided this difficult problematic. It is precisely this defect in theory, however, which calls for a suggested solution.

With this the indissmissible beginning question must be posed: Can all means be sanctified by a religious purpose? Is everything, consequently, allowed in the service of religion —

even the misuse of economic-political power, of sexuality or of aggression? May religion command what appears to be *unhuman*, what obviously injures, damages, perhaps even destroys the human person? A fullness of examples (not all anachronistic) is at hand in every religion: Are human sacrifices acceptable because they are offered to a god? May, for reasons of faith, children be slaughtered, widows burned, heretics tortured to death? Does prostitution become a worship service because it takes place in a temple? Are prayer *and* adultery, ascetism *and* sexual promiscuity, fasting *and* the consumption of drugs to be justified in like manner if they serve as means and ways to "mystical experience"? Is chicanery and miracle-swindle and all kinds of lies and trickery allowed because it is for an allegedly "holy" purpose? Is magic, which attempts to force the divinity, the same as religion, which petitions the divinity? Are imperialism, racism or male chauvinism to be affirmed where they are religiously based? Is there even no objection to be raised against mass suicide as in Guyana because it is religiously motivated? I believe not!

Even institutionalised religion, whichever it is, is not automatically in each and every thing "moral"; even some collectively developed customs are in need of reconsideration. Alongside of specific criteria which every religion has for itself, there is need therefore today more than ever for a discussion of *generally ethical criteria*. We can in this connection of course not enter into the increasingly complex hermeneutical questions in connection with the fundamental forms of present-day ethical argumentation (empirical, analytic or transcendent-anthropological argumentation) and the grounding of norms. An orienta-

tion on the *Humanum*, on the genuinely human, does not in any case mean — and this is said in the beginning to avoid any misunderstanding — a reduction of the religious to the "merely human".

Religion has always shown itself most persuasive precisely there where — long before all of the modern strivings for autonomy — it succeeds in effectively realising the *Humanum* precisely before the horizon of the Absolute — the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, the Qur'an, the speeches of Buddha and the Bahgavagita need only be mentioned as examples.

In general of course it is precisely Christianity — which polemicalised so long against freedom of belief, conscience and religion — that has profited from the fact that in its area of influence through the modern processes of emancipation a (certainly often secularist and anti-church) humanism critical of religion secluded itself from it; the result of the whole process was that in a new manner the realisation of values — which are at basis so fundamentally Christian, such as freedom, equality, fraternity and "human dignity" (the quintessence of the *Humanum* which has been codified in law, as for example in Article 1 of the constitution of West Germany) — can be demanded of the (often so little Christian) churches. For precisely because the *Humanum* religiously and ecclesiastically emancipated itself in modern autonomy, could it once again find itself at home within the borders of Christianity above all religions.

Christianity, and religion in general, on the other hand is able — precisely in a time of a loss of orientation, an atrophication of obligation, a widespread permissiveness and a diffuse cynicism — to establish for the con-

science of the individual beyond all psychology, pedagogy and even positive law, why morality, ethos is more than a matter of personal taste and judgement or social convention, why morality, ethical values and standards oblige *unconditionally* and thus *universally*. In fact, only the Unconditioned itself is able to oblige unconditionally; only the Absolute can bind absolutely; only religion is able to establish an unconditioned and universal ethos and at the same time to concretise it, as it has been doing now for millenia, sometimes badly, sometimes well.

In any case it is unmistakable that in the search for the *Humanum* a process of reflection has developed in other religions as well. Thus the question of *human rights*, for example, in Islam is being intensively discussed, especially after it has been increasingly shown that the Shari'a, the Islamic law, often stands in stark contradiction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (1948), especially in regard to equal rights for women (the right to marriage, divorce, inheritance and work) and for non-Muslims (in regard to the limitation of profession, etc.), which of course contains questions directed back to the Qur'an itself. The hope is not unfounded that despite all the difficulties in the question about human rights and ethical *structural criteria*, with time a foundational consensus on the "fundamental premises of human life and living together" (W. Korff) among the world religions could be built upon the heights of modern-humane consciousness: "*Key convictions*" of human fundamental values and fundamental demands, although they arose in human consciousness, only in the course of historical development then — exactly as the

Copernican worldview — attained lasting, irreversible unconditioned validity, indeed, often even experienced legal codification (as "human rights" or "fundamental rights"). Of course, they are still time and again in need of new expression.

Progress in the direction of humanness within the various religions — despite the various lags in consciousness — is in any case unmistakable. One thinks, for example, of the elimination of the evil practice of the Inquisition's use of fire and torture, which lasted within Roman Catholicism until well into the modern period, or of the new humane interpretation of the doctrine of "holy war", and the reform of the penal law in more progressive Islamic lands, or of the elimination of human sacrifice and the burning of widows (from the beginning rejected by Indian Buddhists and Christians) which were carried out in individual areas of India until the English occupation. Numerous conversations in the Far, Middle and Near East have convinced me that in the future in all the great religions a vigorously growing consciousness concerning the guarantee of human rights, the emancipation of women, the realisation of social justice, the immorality of war will be seen. The world movement of religions for peace has made especially significant progress. All these religious motivations and movements have become political-social factors which are to be taken very seriously — concerning which one has become conscious not least in connection with Poland, Iran and Afghanistan. Therefore, my question: Should it not be possible to formulate a general ethical *fundamental criterion* with an appeal to the *common humanity of all* which rests upon the *Humanum*, the *truly human*, concretely on *human dignity*

and the *fundamental values* accorded to it?

A new reflection about the human is in process among the religions. An especially clear example is the declaration of the "World Conference of the Religions for Peace" in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970: *

As we were together in concern for the overriding subject of peace, we discovered that the things which unite us are more important than the things which divide us. We found that in common we possessed:

A conviction of the fundamental unity of the equality and dignity of all human beings;

A feeling for the inviolability of the individual and his conscience;

A feeling for the value of the human community;

A recognition that might does not make right, that human power is not sufficient unto itself and is not absolute;

The belief that love, compassion, selflessness and the power of the spirit and of inner sincerity ultimately have greater strength than hate, enmity and self-interest;

A feeling of obligation to stand on the side of the poor and oppressed against the rich and the oppressor;

Deep hope that ultimately good will be victorious.

The fundamental question in our search for criteria, therefore, is: What is *good* for human beings? The answer: What helps them to be truly human! The fundamental ethical norm is accordingly that human beings should not live inhumanly, but humanly; they should realise their humanness in all its regards! That is morally good, then, which allows human life in its individual and social dimensions to succeed and prosper in the long run, which enables us an optimal development of human beings in all their levels and dimensions. Human beings should accordingly realise their humanness in all their levels (including the level of feeding and instinct)

and dimensions (including their relationships to society and nature) both as an individual and in society. That means, consequently, that at the same time humanness would be flawed in its core if the dimension of the "trans-human", the unconditioned, the encompassing, the ultimate were denied or eliminated. Without this dimension humanness would be but a torso.

Good and evil, true and false can be distinguished according to the fundamental norm of authentic humanness; so too can what is fundamentally good and evil, true and false, in *each individual religion*. This criterion might be formulated in regard to a particular religion as follows:

1. Positive criterion: Insofar as a religion serves humanness, insofar as in its credal and moral doctrines, its rites and institutions, it *fosters* human beings in their human identity, meaningfulness and value, and helps them gain a meaningful and fruitful existence, it is a *true* and *good* religion.

That means: Whatever clearly protects, heals and fulfills human beings in their physical-psychic, individual-social humanity (life, integrity, freedom, justice, peace), whatever, therefore, is humane, truly human, can with reason call itself "divine".

2. Negative criterion: Insofar as a religion spreads inhumanness, insofar as in its credal and moral doctrines, its rites and institutions, it *hinders* human beings in their human identity, meaningfulness and value, and thus helps them fail to gain a meaningful and fruitful existence, it is a *false* and *bad* religion.

That means: Whatever clearly suppresses, injures and destroys human beings in their physical-

psychic, individual-social humanity (life, integrity, freedom, justice, peace) whatever, therefore, is inhumane, not truly human, cannot with reason call itself "divine".

There are ambivalent cases in every individual religion: I have merely indicated that in the history up until now of neither Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity nor Islam is there a lack of clear examples of good and evil, true and untrue. Wherever the dignity of human beings or of a race, class, caste or sex is devaluated by a religion, wherever individual human beings or whole groups are physically, psychically or spiritually denigrated, or indeed annihilated, we are dealing with a false and bad religion. With this it is to be reflected that precisely in the area of religions my self-realisation and the realisation of others are at stake; however, our common responsibility for society, nature and cosmos are likewise at stake in an indissoluble bond.

All religions must reflect anew, therefore, on the requirements of being human. This *Humanum* which is given to all human beings is a general ethical criterion which holds for all religions altogether. However, the religions must also constantly recall — and here our spiral turns inwardly — their own *primordial "essence"* ("nature", "*Wesen*") as it shines forth in their origins, in their authoritative scriptures, in their authoritative figures. And they will be constantly reminded by their critics and reformers, prophets and sages of these things wherever a religion becomes untrue to its "essence" ("un-nature", "*Un-wesen*"): the proper, original "essence" of every religion, its authoritative *origin*, or its normative *canon* ("measuring stick"), is a general criterion

for all religions against which they can be measured.

THE AUTHENTIC OR CANONICAL AS A GENERAL RELIGIOUS CRITERION

In the face of religiously false attitudes and false developments, in the face of religious decadence and deficiency, within its own sphere Christian theology especially always brought the *criterion* of its origin or canon into play — not because the old is automatically the better! It is no more automatically the better than is the new. Rather, it is because the *original* or *canonical* was from the beginning the normative: Primordial Christianity, the primordial witness of the Bible, the originator of Christian faith. Christians measure themselves against their origin. However, they are also often thus measured by non-Christians: "You appeal to the Bible, to Christ — and behave thus?" The Bible, especially the New Testament, serves Christianity as its *canon*, as its normative measure.

Is the Torah not also normative for Jews, as is the Qur'an and the figure of Mohammed (as an embodiment of the Islamic way) for Muslims, and the teaching ("Dharma") and the figure of Buddha for the Buddhists? What then does it mean to the search for criteria when for example Shakti tantrism (in all its striving for salvation) contradicts in essential elements the monastic way of life which according to Buddha is to be striven for? With its consumption of alcohol, its sexual practices? To what degree then is such a tantrism still (or was it ever) Buddhist? Here indeed an inner-Buddhist critique now also comes into play: The great majority of Buddhists agree with Christians that sexuality certainly has its own place and value — but precisely therefore it does not belong in

this meditation or worship, especially not in a cultic praxis with the exchangeability of diverse partners, where the religion of sexuality and the sexuality of religion is no longer distinguished and the door is opened wide to libertine misuse.

The criterion of the authentic (original) or canonical (authoritative) concerns then not only a Christian, but also *general religious criterion* which at least in principle is also applicable to other religions: a religion will here be measured against its *authoritative teaching or practice* (Torah, New Testament, Qur'ān, Vedas or Gita), and under certain circumstances also against its authoritative *figure* (Christ, Mohammed, Buddha). This criterion of "authenticity" or "canonicity" can therefore be applied not only to Christianity, but also to all the great religions — naturally *mutatis mutandis*, modified according to each religion, and in some religions easier than in others (for example, Hinduism). This religious criterion has, it appears to me, in a time of great social change and rapidly progressing secularisation, an enhanced significance likewise for the fundamental orientation of the non-Christian religions: What is "essential", what is "enduring", what is "binding", and what is not? It concerns one's identity! In this there is indeed unity among the religions: The primordial religious heritage should not be dissipated in the modern world; rather it should be once again made fruitful in it. And thus precisely the reflection upon the original (authentic) or authoritative (canonical) has given to the reform movements (which time and again break forth in all the great religions) an unusually strong impulse: religious *re-formatio* as recollection of the original form *and* at the

same time *re-novatio* as renewal for the future.

Often only the application of the criterion of authenticity or canonicity has brought the *quintessence* of every religion clearly into relief! Does that not convincingly answer the question of what in theory and in practice true Christianity, true Judaism, true Islam, Buddhism, and finally also true Hinduism is and what it is not? To be sure, this reconnection with the origin or the canon — the event, person or scripture — is of a completely other significance in the historically oriented religions. However, it is also by no means unknown in the mystical religions. This is briefly illustrated by the following:

True Hindu religion is in principle only the religion which bases on the revealed writings of the Vedic seer. Thus various though the religions and their gods may be even in India, and though the tolerance of Hindus is likewise great, nevertheless, because Buddhism (as also Jainism) rejected the Vedas it cannot for Hindus be the true religion and is therefore — as is Indian Islam — rejected. Something similar can be said from the perspective of the canon of the monotheistic religions of India such as Vishnuism or Shivism.

True Buddhism can only be that religion which takes its refuge in the Buddha (who had brought the "wheel of doctrine" into motion), in the "doctrine" (in "Dharma") and thus in the "community" (in the "Sangha"). As great as the differences between Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, and as numerous as the various Buddhist "sects" may be, religions which reject the Buddha, Dharma or Sangha (the monastic community) will not be accepted as the true way.

True Islam finally is only that religion

which can base itself on the Qur'an revealed to Mohammed. As far-reaching the differences for religion and politics, for example, between Shiites and Sunnites, might be, both nevertheless base themselves on the Qur'an which for them is the word of God; whoever deviates therefrom stands outside of the true religion and falls under "excommunication". Something similar, despite all its dogmatic tolerance and the different interpretations of the Law, can also be said about *Judaism*.

Even much clearer than with the mystical religions of Asia, with the historical religions the *origin* answers the question about what true religion is. And with that now — and here we take a second turn inwardly on the spiral — the general religious criterion for truth is concretised in a *specifically Christian* criterion for truth — for which there presumably is a corresponding specifically Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist criterion.

THE SPECIFIC CHRISTIAN CRITERION

What has been expressed up to this point? According to the *general ethical criterion*, a religion is true and good if and insofar as it is *human*, does not suppress and destroy humanness, but rather protects and fosters it.

According to the *general religious criterion* a religion is true and good if and insofar as it remains true to its own *origin* or *canon*: to its authentic "essence", its authoritative scripture or figure on which it constantly bases itself.

According to the *specifically Christian criterion* a religion is true and good if and insofar as in its theory and praxis it lets the spirit of Jesus Christ be felt. I apply this criterion directly only to Christianity: by use of self-crit-

ical questioning as to whether and how far the Christian religion is at all Christian. Indirectly — and without any presumptuousness — this same criterion of course is also to be applied to the other religions: for the sake of a critical clarification of the question of whether and in how far something of that spirit which we would designate as Christian is also found in other religions (especially in Judaism and Islam).

One can also view Christianity, as every other religion, completely *from outside* as a "neutral" observer, as a historian of religion, as a non-Christian, or a former Christian — without any special commitment to the Christian message, tradition or community. Then Christianity finds itself as one of the world religions and must satisfy the various general ethical and religious criteria of truth. From this perspective we shall find *many true religions*.

But this consideration from the outside (a kind of "foreign policy") does not exclude another internal perspective (a kind of "domestic policy"). And for the individual person it is perfectly honest and sincere to integrate both perspectives. Keep in mind: this external-internal relationship is valid not only for religion. E.g., when an international lawyer compares, as a scholar, various national constitutions with one another, or when he attempts to arrive at an understanding on a specifically disputed point in international negotiations, he likewise views his national constitution (and his state) "from outside". However, he views the same constitution (and his state) "from within" when as a loyal citizen among citizens he feels himself obliged precisely to this (and no other) constitution and holds himself bound to it in conscience.

Now if I, as a Christian (and as a theologian), view Christianity — just as every non-Christian can view his own religion — *from within*, as an adherent of this religion, and in my case, therefore, as a Christian, then Christianity — like every other religion — is more than a system to which I can attach myself intellectually. Then Christianity, like every religion (in distinction to every philosophy), is at once a message of salvation and a way of salvation. I encounter there not simply a philosophical-theological argumentation which demands my reflection, but rather a religious provocation, and in the case of Christianity, a prophetic message which calls for a completely personal stand, or following. Only thus does one directly understand this religion in all its depth.

When I, therefore, from this point onward express my understanding in the language of confession, that is not because I am retreating again into my religion out of anxiety over “ultimate consequences”, but rather because I presume that no religion can be grasped in its deepest reality if one has not affirmed it from within with ultimate existential seriousness. Only when a religion has become *my* religion does the discussion about the truth reach its moving depths. Truth for me, therefore, means *my faith*, just as for the Jew and the Muslim, Judaism and Islam, and for the Hindu and the Buddhist, Hinduism and Buddhism, is *their* religion, *their* faith, and thereby *the* truth. My religion, and also the other religions, are concerned not about a general, but an existential truth: “*tua res agitur*”! In this sense there is, for me as for all other believers, only *one true religion*.

That means, in the search for the true religion no one may abstract from

his or her own history of life and experience. There has never been a theologian or a historian of religion, a religious or a political authority, which stood over *all* religions so that she or he could “objectively” judge them all from above. Whoever thinks himself to stand “neutrally” above all traditions will never have any influence in any. And whoever (to take up an image used by Raimundo Panikkar), while looking out of *his own* window at the *whole* of reality along with the others who are likewise looking out of *their* window, hesitates to speak with them, whoever thinks he can float above all and judge all, he has clearly lost the ground under his feet: he will easily, as in days of old happened to Icarus, melt his wax wings in the sun of truth.

I profess myself then to hold to my historically conditioned standpoint: This one religion is *for me the true* religion, for whose truth I can give good reasons, which possibly may also convince others. For me Christianity is the way along which I go, the religion in which I believe I found the truth for my life and death. However, at the same time it is true that *other* religions (which for hundreds of millions of human beings are *the true* religion) are therefore *by no means untrue* religions, are by no means simply untrue. They not only have much truth in common with Christianity. They also have their own truth which we do not (“anonymously” or “implicitly”) already have. Now it must be left to the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist theologians (philosophers) to spell out why she or he is precisely a Jew, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. Christian theologians for their part must at least fundamentally be able to name the specifically Christian criterion and seek to answer the question about

what it is that concretely distinguishes, or should distinguish, Christians from non-Christians, what makes Christians to be Christians.

Why, therefore, am I a Christian? It would take more than one lecture to lay out within a new, comparative-religion context the reasons that I have for not being a Hindu or a Buddhist, also not a Jew or a Muslim, but rather precisely a Christian. Only the most decisive is alluded to here: I am a Christian because I, as a consequence of the Jewish, and in anticipation of the Islamic, faith in God, with confidence and in practice trust that the God of Abraham, Isaac (Ismael) and Jacob has acted not only in the history of Israel (and Ismael), and has spoken through his prophets, but also that he has disclosed himself in an incomparable, and for me a decisive, manner in the life and work, suffering and death of this Jew *Jesus of Nazareth*. About him already the first generation of disciples was convinced that, despite his scandalous death on the gibbet of the cross he has not remained in death, but was taken up into God's eternal life. He stands now for God himself ("at the right hand of God") as one sent definitively by God, as his Messiah or Christ, as his word become flesh, as his image, as his — an ancient royal title of Israel — son. In short, therefore, I am a Christian because and insofar as I believe in this Christ and attempt practically, now well, now badly, to follow him — in of course a changed period of the world and along with millions of others each in their own way — and take him as the one who shows me the way for my path: He is, therefore, according to the words of the Gospel of John, for us *the way, the truth, and the life!*

That means, however, in a self-critical address to Christians: Christians *do*

not believe in Christianity. Christianity is as a religion — with its dogmatics, liturgy and discipline — like every other religion, a highly ambivalent historical reality; Karl Barth was completely right in emphasising that point. From this it follows that it would be untenable to maintain that Christianity is the "absolute religion", as Hegel still thought he could do; as a religion Christianity appears in the history of the world just as relatively as do all other religions.

No, the only absolute in the history of the world is the Absolute itself. For Jews, Christians and Muslims this Ultimate Reality, of course is not ambiguous and indistinct, wordless, without a voice. It has spoken through the prophets. For believing Christians it is also not faceless, without a countenance. No, it has been revealed in the relativity of the human being Jesus of Nazareth. For the believers — and only for them — he *is* the word and image, he is the way, and for others at least the invitation to this way. Therefore, Christians do not *believe* in Christianity, but rather *in the one God*, who after many prophets and enlightened ones has sent this human being Jesus as *his Christ*, as his anointed sent one. Jesus Christ is for Christians that which is *decisively regulative*.

And insofar as concrete Christianity bears witness to this one God and his Christ can it — in a derived and limited sense — be called for believers themselves *the true* religion, which even Karl Barth said. Insofar, however, as that concrete Christianity ever and again deviated from this one God and his Christ, for this decisively regulative Christ, was it also ever and again *untrue* religion, was always, even after Christ, in need ever and again of the *prophetic corrective*, of the prophets in the church and — we see this ever

more clearly today — of the prophets and enlightened ones also outside of the church, among whom indeed in an outstanding manner the prophet Mohammed and Buddha may well be numbered.

Once again: The decision for the one God — who is not only the “God of the philosophers and the learned ones” (the God of the Jews), but finally and ultimately the “God of Jesus Christ” (the God of the Christians) — presents in the deepest possible manner a *decision of faith*. A reasonable trust, this decision of faith is in no way purely subjective and arbitrary, but is thoroughly *rationally responsible*. The detailed arguments for this decision to be a Christian — in comparison with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism — I have laid out elsewhere. If we do not wish simply to make a dogmatic postulate, we can as Christians not avoid the effort to give a substantive, empirical grounding for the significance of Jesus Christ. A reference to a dogmatically affirmed doctrine of the trinity and sonship of God is of little help here. It must be possible to show concretely from this person and his message and life’s praxis and fate why I am Christian, and we must do this today in a new manner — likewise in critical comparison with the other great religious figures. And for this the research of comparative religion is indispensable. Not the division of theology and the history of religion (as by Karl Barth), but also not its identification (and thereby *de facto* the reduction of theology to the history of religion, or the other way around) is demanded, but rather their critical co-operation. I would like here at least to refer to one — to be sure, extremely central — aspect of Jesus of Nazareth, which shows in a striking way that for Christian faith the specifically Chris-

tian criterion is congruent not only with the generally religious criterion of origin but also ultimately with the general ethical criterion of the *Humanum* — the spiral maintains its consistency. For, at what — as a consequence of the proclamation of the reign and will of God — does the Sermon on the Mount, the entire behaviour of Jesus, aim? At nothing more and nothing less than a new, *true humanity*: the sabbath, the commandments, are for the sake of humanity, and not the other way around.

This new humanity means a *more radical humanity*, which manifests itself in a *solidarity with fellow humanity*, even with one’s enemy. From the perspective of Jesus, the authentic, true human being, this more radical humanity of the Sermon on the Mount — today placed before a completely other world horizon — would be practised as a solidarity of fellow humanity with the men and women even from *other religions*. A solidarity of fellow humanity, then, which is entirely concrete:

Which not only foregoes religious wars, persecution, and Inquisition and practises religious tolerance, but also in its relationship to the other religions substitutes for its collective egoism (ecclesial-centrism) with a phil-anthropy, with a solidarity of love;

Which, therefore, instead of reckoning the history of guilt among the religions, practices forgiveness and dares a new beginning;

Which does not simply eliminate those (often humanly divisive) religious institutions and constitutions, but nevertheless relativises them for the welfare of humanity;

Which, instead of overt or covert power struggles among the religious-political systems, strives for successive reconciliation: No, no uniform religion for the entire world, but peace among the religions as a prerequisite for peace among the nations.

That means, the more human (in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount) Christianity is, the more Christian it is; and, the more Christian it is, the more it will also outwardly appear as true religion. And with this then the three criteria of truth have been sufficiently developed, and we can summarise the decisive elements in a concluding section.

ON THE WAY TO AN EVEN GREATER TRUTH

It should have become clear that if we wish to address the question of what is good for humanity, not only pragmatically or positivistically, but also fundamentally, not only abstractly-philosophically, but also concretely-existentially, also not only psychologically-pedagogically, but with unconditional obligation and general validity — then we cannot avoid dealing with religion, or, in its place, a quasi-religion. Nevertheless, conversely, every religion can be measured by the general-ethical criterion of the *Humanum*, and will therefore under modern circumstances not be able to overlook the results of psychology, pedagogy, philosophy and jurisprudence. This is not a vicious circle, but rather, as is so often the case, a dialectical mutual relationship:

1. On the one hand: *True humanity is the presupposition of true religion!* That means that the *Humanum* (respect for human dignity and fundamental values) is a minimal demand made on every religion. There must be at least humanness (that is minimal criterion) wherever one wishes to realise genuine religiosity.
2. On the other hand: *True religion is the fulfilment of true humanity!* That means that religion (as the expression of an encompassing meaning, the highest values, un-

conditioned obligation) is an optimal presupposition for the realisation of the *Humanum*: there must be precisely religion (this is a maximal criterion) wherever one wishes to realise humanness with unconditional and universal obligation.

What, therefore, is the true religion? To this complex question I have attempted to give a differentiated response in the greatest possible conceptual clarity and theoretical precision with the help of three different, and yet dialectically intertwined, criteria, namely, the general-ethical, the general-religious, and the specifically Christian, and with the help of two dimensions, the external and internal. This response includes an answer to the question of whether there is a true religion. In summary form the following can now be said:

Seen from *without*, viewed by the history of religion, there are *various true religions*: Religions which, with all their ambivalence, at least fundamentally meet the criteria (ethical as well as religious) that have been set up: various paths of salvation toward a goal which to some extent overlap and in any case can mutually fructify each other.

Seen from *within*, seen from the standpoint of a believing Christian oriented on the New Testament, there is for me *the true religion which, since for me it is impossible to follow all ways at the same time, is the way I attempt to go*: Christianity, insofar as it bears witness in Jesus to the one true God.

For me — and for us Christians — this one true religion in no way excludes the truth in *other religions*, but rather positively grants them validity. The other religions are not simply untrue, but also not unreservedly true. They are for me, rather, *condi-*

tionally ("with reservations" — or however said) *true religions*, which, insofar as they do not contradict the decisive elements of the Christian message, can indeed supplement, can very much correct and enrich the Christian religion.

From this long and detailed explanation it should have become clear that one need neither suspend one's belief convictions nor the truth question because of a maximal theological openness toward other religions. We should strive — in "fraternal striving" (Vatican II: "*fraterna emulatio*") for the sake of the true. However, one last caution: There are not only the two "horizontal" dimensions (external-internal), but there is a *third dimension*. For me as believer, for us as a believing community, Christianity, insofar as it bears witness to God in Christ, is to be sure the *true* religion. However, no religion has the *whole* truth; *God alone* had the *whole* truth — in this Lessing was correct. Only *God himself* — however named, *is the* truth! This is the third, the "vertical" dimension!

Therefore, a final remark: even Christians cannot claim to have comprehended him, the uncomprehendable, to have grasped him, the ineffable, unfathomable. Even in Christian faith we perceive with Paul the truth itself, which is God, only as in a mirror, in puzzle-like outline, piecemeal, in single facets, dependent at every time on our extremely specific standpoint and age. Yes, even Christianity is *in via*, on the way: *ecclesia peregrinans, homines viatores*. We are not alone on the way. We are together with hundreds of millions of other human beings from all possible confessions and religions who are going along their own way. With them we are in a *process of communication*, which the longer it lasts the deeper it becomes, wherein one should not dis-

pute about what is mine and yours, my truth, your truth, but wherein one should much more be infinitely open to learning, to taking up the truth of the others, and without jealousy sharing one's truth.

Some will ask, where will all that lead? History is open-ended, and likewise interreligious dialogue which, other than interconfessional dialogue has just begun, is open-ended. What the future will bring the Christian religion, which for me is the true religion, we do not know. And what the future will bring the other, non-Christian religions, we do not know. How Christology, Qur'anology or Buddhology, or indeed the Church, the Umma, the Sangha, of the year 2,085 will look — who knows?

What is certain about the future is only one thing: At the end of human life as well as the end of the world there will be no Buddhism or Hinduism, also no Islam and no Judaism. Indeed, at the end there will also be no Christianity. At the end there will be no religion whatsoever, but rather there will be the one Unutterable itself, toward which all religions are directed whom the Christians also, when the incomplete has given way to the complete, will know in fullness as they themselves are known: *The* truth face to face! Thus, at the end there will not any longer stand a prophet between the religions, or an enlightened one; there will stand no Mohammed nor the Buddha. Indeed, even the Christ Jesus, in whom Christians believe, will stand there no more, but rather he who, according to Paul, to whom all powers are subordinate (even death), will "subordinate himself" to God so that *God himself* ("*ho theos*") — or however one may name him in the East — truly will be not only in all, but also *all in all* (1 Cor. 15:28).



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