

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND DIALOGUE

LEONARD SWIDLER

Professor, Ph.D., Temple University, Pennsylvania

Full freedom of religion did not come into existence until the end of the 18th century, and authentic dialogue only in the 20th century. All civilizations had at their heart a religion which shaped and reflected that civilization; all problems had to be resolved within the thought-structures of the dominant state-enforced religion. Those thought limitations sooner or later prevented arriving at the necessary solutions, and thus led to the decline of every civilization – except ***Christendom***-*Become*-***Western Civilization***-*Becoming*-***Global Civilization***, which has exponentially surpassed all previous civilizations. The separation of religion from the power of the state has allowed the "infinite" spirit of humanity ("Image of God") to continually resolve the always new problems. Dialogue, meaning being open to learn from the "other," moves Globalization from destruction toward construction.

I. SOMETHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

Religious freedom is a relatively new phenomenon in human history. It was a goal of Christian thinkers and writers before Constantine in the early fourth century C.E. —but not afterwards when Christianity became the state religion. It was not a desideratum even in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Despite a more benign attitude at times and places in the history of the other large monotheistic religion, Islam, the now largely Muslim world from Dakar to Mindanao did not become so without Muslim armies.

Religious freedom as a human right and a social reality did not appear on the human stage until the latter part of the eighteenth century, most clearly in the inception of the United States of America and in the French Revolution. It was one of the core human rights – if not the most fundamental – that were declared simultaneously in 1789 in the French *Declaration des droits des hommes et citoyens* and the American *Bill of Rights.1*

Dialogue among religions is an even newer idea to rise in prominence in the story of humankind. Dialogue, as we use the term today – meaning to talk, in the broadest sense, with those who think differently from us so *we* can learn—is a new consciousness born slowly in the twentieth century. One can see its beginning in the 1893 Chicago *World Parliament of Religions* and followed by the launching in 1910 and 1912 of the *Ecumenical Movement* among Protestants and Orthodox Christians, and joined by Catholics at the *Second Vatican Council* (1962-65), and then gradually by other religions and ideologies as well.

Freedom of religion or belief – or even more specifically, disconnecting religion (or ideology) from the *power* of the state, for that is the essence of religious freedom – and *dialogue* are two of the most powerful, transformative concepts in the history of humanity, matching in magnitude the influence of the invention of writing millennia before. I would like to reflect a little on each of these key insights separately and then on their relationship to each other.

II. DISCONNECTING RELIGION FROM THE *POWER* OF THE STATE

1. Union of Religion and State All-Pervading

In all past civilizations, religion has been an integral, a constitutive element. Among other things, religion supplied the ethical basis on which the authority of the state and law was built. As a result, in all past civilizations there has been a very intimate relationship between religion and state. Very often that relationship was so close that one could speak of the union of religion and state. In that close relationship, at times religion tended to dominate the state, and at other times the state tended to dominate religion. We have seen both in recent times and still even today. The Soviet state's domination of Orthodox Christianity was an example of the former and the Ayatollahs' and Mullah' domination of the state in Iran is an example of the latter. The emergence of a neutral state committed to the recognition of freedom of religion or belief is a unique phenomenon in human history which occurred first in the modern West – more about that below.

In the early centuries of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world Christian writers were strongly in favor of religious liberty. After the Constantinian embrace of the Christian religion in the fourth century, however, they quickly switched to the position that the state had the responsibility of seeing that the truth was protected and favored – and of course Christian-

ity had the truth.2 In theory of course no one was to be forced to accept Christianity, but not infrequently the theory was not translated into practice. With the development of medieval Christendom in the western half of the former Roman Empire, almost everyone became Christian, with the exception of the Jews, who for the most part were allowed to continue a separate existence, often in ghettos.

The history of Islam was not very different: in theory no individual or community was to be forced to embrace Islam. But in practice the *Jihad*, in the sense of a Holy War against non-Muslim states, not infrequently was in fact launched aggressively. Although the *millet* system allowed non-Muslims within a Muslim-conquered state to practice their religion, the non-Muslims were clearly second-class citizens – which fact doubtless encouraged conversion to Islam, and surely not the contrary.

At various times during the intertwined history of Christianity and Islam one side or the other pointed, usually with justification, an accusing finger at the other as a brutal aggressor. In fact, neither Christianity nor Islam can claim to have been predominantly the victim and the other the aggressor; the acid of history dissolves any such claim from either side. *Jihad* and the Crusades easily match each other in gratuitous aggressiveness.

2. Development of the Disconnection of Religion from the Power of the State

Something unique in history, however, began to take place in Western Christianity, Christendom: the gradual, painful move toward disconnecting religion from the power of the state. Some might trace its beginnings to the Gregorian Reforms when Pope Gregory VII (1021-1085 A.D.) attempted dramatically and substantially to separate the Catholic Church from the power of the Holy Roman Empire and other civil powers. Of course no one at the time promoted the notion of the separation of church and state. Rather, each side attempted to wrest power to his side; witness the thirteenth-century "imperial interregnum" manipulated by the popes (when for fifty years the popes effectively prevented the election of a Holy Roman Emperor), followed soon by the imprisonment of that most authoritarian of all popes, Boniface VIII, by the king of France, Phillip the Fair, at the beginning of the 14th century.

But it was precisely this mammoth power struggle that encouraged a weariness with the unquestioned assumption of the union of church and state. The Renaissance with its shifting of interest from the divine to the human provided a further basis for the gradual questioning of the wisdom of the union of church and state. This questioning manifested itself visibly in the so-called left-wing of the sixteenth-century Reformation: the Anabaptists and related sects clearly and vigorously rejected the idea of the union of church

and state, for which, of course, there were viciously persecuted by Catholics and mainline Protestants.

In the end it was the pitting of Catholics and Protestants against each other that magnified the incipient weariness with the consequences of the union of church and state - induced by the earlier struggle between the pope and civil rulers – to the point of the full embrace of the principle of the disconnection of religion from the power of the state during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Antecedents began to emerge in the Netherlands and Britain, but it was the 1789 U.S. Constitution that for the first time raised religious freedom to constitutional rank. From that time it spread throughout the West in various juridical expressions, and from there increasingly around the globe.

3. Developments in Islam

Like all previous civilizations, Islam (speaking now of Islam as a civilization which has the religion Islam as its vital source) initially grew vigorously, sustained a level of dominance for a time and then, as many Muslim scholars themselves have descried, began losing its dominance. The loss of dominance became increasingly apparent from the eighteenth century onwards. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries much of the Islamic world fell under Western colonialism and was increasingly dominated by Christendom, now largely become "the West."

The observation of the decline of the dominance of Islamic countries vis a vis Christian ones cannot be a warrant for Christian arrogance. Doubtless many Christians attribute the unprecedented advances of Western Civilization mainly to Christianity, but that is because they do not recognize that it is more the **dis**-engaging of Christianity (and all religions and ideologies) from the power of the state that is the main source of those ongoing advances.

In fact, Muslim scholars have increasingly been articulate about the depressed state of Islamic countries. For example, in Dr. Seyed Othman Alhabshi's book3 explaining the background of the newly founded "Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia" we find the following strong statement: "The Muslim world is currently plagued with almost nothing but negative attributes of a civilization." He then went on to list some of the "plagues": "underdevelopment, backwardness, poverty, inequitable income and wealth distribution, high inflation, acute illiteracy and serious unemployment, economic and political instability." If possible, even clearer was the comment: "Although eight hundred years was long enough to accumulate a wealth of experience to ward off various human ills, the Muslims declined almost without any rebound till this day."4

Then recently several Muslim nations, e.g., Iran, Sudan, have tried to regain their former Islamic glory by reuniting religion and state through the embrace of "Islamism,"5 (the term Muslim scholars use rather than the perhaps less accurate Western term, "funda-

mentalism'); the same goal is being sought by radical Islamists within other Muslim countries, e.g., Egypt and Algeria. Unfortunately, rather than regaining former "Islamic Glory" the Islamists are thereby insuring that their nations will remain backward societies. That fact seems to be dawning slowly even on that bastion of Muslim religious conservatism, Saudi Arabia – judging from recent tentative moves to suppress Islamism and start down the path toward democracy.

4. The Unique Quality of Western Civilization

When historians like Arnold J. Toynbee survey the total history of humankind they find that there have been a number of civilizations which have come into existence, flourished, and then declined (Toynbee discerns 26 civilizations in human history). Many of them achieved admirable accomplishments, the Greco-Roman Civilization being the one best known to Westerners. Its achievements were indeed great, so much so that during the late Renaissance there was a lively debate about whether the Ancients (meaning the Greeks and Romans) or the then moderns had attained greater cultural heights. But doubtless the Greco-Roman accomplishments were in many regards matched, and in some surpassed, by the Chinese and Islamic Civilizations.

However, it is no cultural hubris to be aware that the rising arc of Western Civilization (which is largely of a synthesis of [1] the Judeo-Christian tradition, [2] the Greco-Roman tradition, [3] the Germanic tradition, [4] with a significant influence of medieval Islam, and [5] modern science and thought) has reached far beyond where any of Toynbee's other twenty-five civilizations have gone, whether in culture, science, politics, economic prosperity, technology, etc. Moreover, Western Civilization together the rest of the World's existing civilizations are now being transmorphed into Global Civilization in a way that had never occurred before, and this process of globalization appears to be intensifying in exponential fashion. This is not to discount "Western-cum-Other-now-becoming-Global Civilization's" defects, blind spots, and seething problems – some of the most critical of which are largely a result of its very accomplishments, e.g., the population explosion (because of, *inter alia*, medical and agricultural advances), the ecological crisis (because of, *inter alia*, technological advances and the population explosion). But even that illustrates the main point: Western Civilization-transforming-into-Global Civilization's greatest problems flow not from its weaknesses, but from its even more awesome, unparalleled achievements.

5. The Disconnection of Religion from the Power of the State a Vital Key

One of the *essential* elements in the advances of Western Civilization in culture, science, politics, economic prosperity and technology, the like of which, as said – for all of its problems, which are correspondingly massive – were never before experienced in hu-

man history, is the disconnection of religion from the *power* of the state. And religion here includes any "ideology" that functions like a religion, as, for example, Atheistic Marxism (it is clear to see today in Eastern Europe and the former USSR what disaster the union of state and the "religion" of Marxism led to).

Christendom in the Late Middle Ages began reaching the cultural level of the earlier Greek and Roman, and the then contemporary Islamic, civilizations. All historical data strongly suggest that Christendom would have plateaued at approximately that level for a longer or shorter period of time, and then slipped from dominance – *as had all other civilizations before then*, and as eventually the Chinese, the Greco-Roman, the Islamic, etc. Civilizations did as well.

That did not happen, however. Why? One very fundamental reason was that – starting with the Gregorian Reforms, through the Renaissance, the Reformation and on into the Enlightenment and beyond – religion and the power of the state slowly and very painfully began to be disconnected. This disconnection broke the forced quality of religion/ideology and consequently freed the human spirit and mind to pursue its limitless urge to know ever more, to solve every problem it confronts. This resulted in a series of what historians call revolutions in the West: the Commercial Revolution (sixteenth-seventeenth centuries), Scientific Revolution (seventeenth century), Industrial Revolution (eighteenth century), Political Revolution (epitomized in the eighteenth-century American and French Revolutions), and on into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with myriads of revolutions of all sorts occurring at geometrically increasing speed and magnitude.

As Christianity became less and less the religion of the state in the West, so too The West became less and less *Christendom* and was transformed into what is today usually called *Western Civilization*.

With the "exponential" advances in capabilities in the West, of course, the possibilities of destructiveness increased correspondingly – as the medieval philosophers said: The corruption of the best becomes the worst, *corruptio optimae pessima*. Nevertheless, because freedom is of the *essence* of being human, even though we may well destroy ourselves if we do not learn wisdom and live virtuously, we can never turn back to an unfree stage of human development – any more than an individual can roll back the transforming effects of puberty.

Hence, those societies which try to reunite religion/ideology with the power of the state prevent themselves from harnessing the almost unlimited energy that liberty releases. New problems and challenges will always arise in human societies. Humans, however, have a virtually limitless capability of intellect, imagination, and spirit (which is another way of saying what the book of Genesis in the Bible meant by recording that God made humans in God's image, the *imago Dei*) with which to address and overcome those problems and challenges ever anew. Unfortunately, when that innate human creative spirit is imprisoned in a

doctrinal strait-jacket ("ortho-doxy," "straight-doctrine," becomes in fact "strait-doctrine") imposed from above by the power of the state it will die or be severely weakened from spiritual strangulation. And then that society will fall behind, and perhaps even succumb to, those societies which retain their creativity.

That is why, for example, in India the present attempt of resurgent Hindu "fundamentalists," brandishing their *Hindutva* ("Hinduization"), seems so fraught with dangers for the progress and development of the second largest country of the world. The path to recovery lies not in trying to impose a narrow dogmatism by coercion but by finding ways to promote more open exploration of ways that core Hindu values can contribute to meaningful life in contemporary settings.

Of course, the same disastrous consequences would also result, e.g., if the efforts of Islamists to re-establish the Muslim law, the *sha'ia*, in the Muslim world succeeds—and China, North Korea and Vietnam will likewise always remain relatively "backward" as long as they maintain a union of ideology and state.

Extremist Jewish and Islamist apologists argue that Judaism or Islam is different from the West and its major religion, Christianity, because, unlike Christianity, Judaism and Islam are holistic religions which include politics as well as all other aspects of life. In this, unfortunately, they are forgetting that Christendom was exactly the same for well over a millennium – the Constantinian Era. It was only when Christendom became "the West" and began to break out of that mischievous marriage of religion/ideology and state (only allegedly virtuously "holistic") that it embarked on the path of human freedom with its limitless possibilities of creativity (and destruction).

As we know, however, at its best, the separation of religion and state did not, and does not, mean hostility between religion and state. Rather, it frees each, religion and state, to fulfill its respective function untrammeled by, but closely related to, the other. For the state, that function can be briefly described as the responsibility "to organize society so as to protect the rights of all, and promote the common good," and for religion, "to provide an explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly."

Clearly the West does not have the perfect solution to the question of the relation between religion and the state; it has many different imperfect solutions. The quite "anaemic" condition of a Christianity not completely disconnected from the power of the state in Germany, Scandinavia, England, and other European countries, vis a vis its turbulent but comparatively vital condition in the U.S. with its quite complete disconnection of any particular religion, or of religion as such, from the *power* of the state further bears out the thesis of this essay that the separate but creative relationship of religion and state is good for both religion and state, and hence, for humankind.

The "perfect" solution of the relationship of religion and state lies only in an "infinite" future, toward which humans are always striving. But also clearly, the

West – and countries such as Japan, South Korea, etc., inspired by the principles of democracy and religious liberty – have shown that the disconnection of religion (or ideology) from the *power* of the state is *essential* to the true full functioning of both religion and state, and to human progress to "Infinity." Said in other words: The disconnection of religion from the *power* of the state is a *necessary*, though not *sufficient*, cause of the unending creative development of humanity.

III. DIALOGUE, A WHOLE NEW WAY OF THINKING

1. A New Consciousness for Humanity

Another concept essential to the full flourishing of humanity is *Dialogue*, not in any pedestrian sense, but in the sense of a **Deep-Dialogue**, a transformative kind of consciousness which seeks to primarily *learn* from rather than teach those who think differently from us.

The world is becoming ever more inter-dependent on all levels. Democratization and globalization are increasing at an exponential rate. Therefore, in order to become full citizens of our nation and the globe, espousing democratic and ethical values, we humans must develop to the fullest our core competencies of knowing and deciding/ loving, utilizing all our faculties (rational, emotional, physical). That means: 1) to intelligently hold a position, while being open to the Other; and 2) to think clearly and critically and decide/love with care – so the differing worldviews we humans build can be creatively related in a dialogic and critically reflective and caring manner.

These core human competencies, which I and my *Global Dialogue Institute* (GDI) names **Deep-Dialogue/Critical-Thinking** (one may of course use other names for the fundamental realities), must be developed as the ***new basic mentality***—and consequent practice – on which all education, cradle to the grave, indeed, all thought and action, is built. **Deep-Dialogue/Critical-Thinking** embodies democratic and ethical values, and thus ought to be both the all-embracing *matrix* of human thinking and being in the world within which all thought, action, and education needs to take place – as well as the *mindset*, the *consciousness* (and consequent practice)that all education, cradle to the grave, should seek to develop as its fundamental goal.

2. Why Dialogue Arose

One can, of course, justifiably point to a number of recent developments that have contributed to the rise of dialogue - e.g., growth in mass education, communications and travel, a world economy, threatening global destruction – nevertheless, a major underlying cause is a paradigm-shift in the West in how we perceive and describe the world. A paradigm is simply the model, the cluster of assumptions, on whose basis

phenomena are perceived and explained: For example, the geocentric paradigm for explaining the movements of the planets; a shift to another paradigm - as from the geocentric to the heliocentric – will have a major impact. Such a paradigm-shift has occurred, and is still occurring, in the Western understanding of truth statements which has made dialogue not only possible, but even necessary.

Whereas the understanding of truth in the West was largely absolute, static, monologic or exclusive up to the nineteenth century, it has subsequently become deabsolutized, dynamic and dialogic – in a word: relational. This relatively anew view of truth came about in at least six different but closely related ways.

0) Until the nineteenth century in Europe *truth*, that is, *a statement about reality*, was conceived in an absolute, static, exclusivistic either-or manner. It was believed that if statement was true at one time, it was always true, and not only in the sense of statements about empirical facts but also in the sense of statements about the meaning of things. Such is a *classicist* or *absolutist* view of truth.

1) Then, in the nineteenth century scholars came to perceive all statements about the truth of the meaning of something as being partially products of their historical circumstances; only by placing truth statements in their historical situations, their historical *Sitz im Leben*, could they be properly understood: A text could be understood only in context. Therefore, all statements about the meaning of things were seen to be deabsolutized in terms of time. Such is a *historical* view of truth.

2) Later on it was noted that we ask questions so as to obtain knowledge, truth, according to which we want to live; this is a *praxis* or *intentional* view of truth, that is, a statement has to be understood in relationship to the action-oriented intention of the thinker.

3) Early in the twentieth century Karl Mannheim developed what he called the sociology of knowledge, which points out that every statement about the truth of the meaning of something was perspectival, for all reality is perceived, and spoken of, from the cultural, class, sexual, and so forth perspective of the perceiver. Such is a *perspectiva*l view of truth.

4) A number of thinkers, and most especially Ludwig Wittgenstein, have discovered something of the limitations of human language: Every description of reality is necessarily only partial for although reality can be seen from an almost limitless number of perspectives, human language can express things from only one perspective at once. This partial and limited quality of all language is necessarily greatly intensified when one attempts to speak of the Transcendent, which by "definition" "goes-beyond." Such is a *language-limited* view of truth.

5) The contemporary discipline of hermeneutics stresses that all knowledge is interpreted knowledge. This means that in all knowledge I come to know something; the object comes into me in a certain way, namely, through the lens that I use to perceive it. As Thomas Aquinas wrote, "Things known are in the

knower according to the mode of the knower." (*Summa Theologiae*, II/II, Q. 1, a. 2) Such is an *interpretative* view of truth.

6) Further yet, reality can "speak" to me only with the language that I give it; the "answers" that I receive back from reality will always be in the language, the thought categories, of the questions I put to it. If and when the answers I receive are sometimes confused and unsatisfying, then I probably need to learn to speak a more appropriate language when I put questions to reality. For example, if I ask the question, "How heavy is green?" of course I will receive an non-sense answer. Or, if I ask questions about living things in mechanical categories, I will receive confusing and unsatisfying answers. I will likewise receive confusing and unsatisfying answers to questions about human sexuality if I use categories that are solely physical- biological: Witness the absurdity of the answer that birth control is forbidden by the natural law—the question falsely assumes that the nature of humanity is merely physical-biological. Such an understanding of truth is a *dialogic* understanding.

3. Meaning of ***Deep-Dialogue*** and ***Critical-Thinking***

In brief, our understanding of truth and reality has been undergoing a radical shift. The new paradigm which is being born understands all statements about reality, especially about the meaning of things, to be historical, praxial or intentional, perspectival, language-limited or partial, interpretive, and dialogic. Our understanding of truth statements, in short, has become "deabsolutized" it has become "relational," that is, all statements about reality are now seen to be ***related*** to the historical context, praxis intentionality, perspective, etc. of the speaker, and in that sense no longer "absolute." Therefore, if my perception and description of the world is true only in a limited sense, that is, only as seen from my place in the world. Then if I wish to expand my grasp of reality I need to learn from others what they know of reality that they can perceive from their place in the world that I cannot see from mine. That, however, can happen only through dialogue.

Thus, dialogue, in this sense of **Deep-Dialogue,** very simply means to:

1. Reach out in openness to the Other in the search for Truth and Goodness.
2. Be open to the Other *primarily* so **WE** can learn, find truth and goodness.
3. Perceive that for us to learn, to find the good, the Other must teach and open themselves – and vice versa.
4. Recognize that because Dialogue is a two-way project, we then *both* learn – and share the good.
5. Learn there are Other ways of understanding, of embracing the world than our own.
6. Learn to recognize our commonalities and differences – and value both.
7. Learn to move between different worlds and integrate them in care.

8. Learn that **Deep-Dialogue** thus gradually transforms our inner selves—and our shared lives.

Further, the converse, the flip side of the single coin of authentic humanity is **Critical-Thinking**,, which very simply means to:

1. Raise our **un**-conscious **pre**-suppositions to the conscious level.
2. After analysis, make a reasoned judgment ("critical," Greek *krinein*, to judge) about them.
3. Recognize that **our** view of reality is **one** view, shaped by **our** experience
4. Become aware of multiple worldviews.
5. Understand all statements/texts in **their** *con*-texts.
6. Only then apply them to **our** contexts.
7. See that each worldview is a new meaning network.
8. Again, only then can we reasonably critique them.
9. Understand and use very **precisely** each word and phrase so that our deliberations and decisions are informed with clarity and grounded in reality.

Thus, the relationship between **Deep-Dialogue** and **Critic**al-T**hinking** means:

1. **Deep-Dialogue** and **Critical-Thinking** are two sides of the one human reality.
2. **Deep-Dialogue** entails at its root clear, reflective, **critical** thought.
3. **Critical-Thinking** entails a **dialogue** within our own minds and lives – and hence, at its root is dialogic.
4. **Deep-Dialogue** and **Critical-Thinking** are thus two sides of the coin of Humanity.
5. **Deep-Dialogue/Critical-Thinking** eventually must become a **habit of mind and spirit**, traditionally known as a **virtue –** a **new basic mentality**, and consequent practice.

IV. DIALOGUE AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN PRACTICE

There of course are myriads of interreligious dialogues going on in the world today. Let me mention only briefly just a few that I personally have been involved in very recently as a small sample. For those interested in the basic *Ground Rules* for dialogue that I have found exceptionally practical and helpful since I first published them in 1984, they can be found in the added Annex.

1. Standing Up for Dialogue and Freedom: Morocco

The Muslim world today is under pressure from the radical Islamist states such as the Afghanistan, Sudan, and Iran (and increasingly Pakistan6) to reject positive relations with other religions and modernity. Both religious liberty and dialogue are anathema to them. In the face of this, and internal, pressure from Islamists, the new King Hassan of Morocco made a bold move as one of his first public profile acts. Through his Personal Advisor Andre Azoulay (who is

Jewish!) The king co-sponsored with the Spanish "Foundation for the Three Cultures of the Mediterranean" (Jewish-Christian-Muslim)a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue on "Religion, Tolerance and Modernity" at Al-Akawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco, October 14-16, 1999.

Though the organizers of the dialogue, and indeed, most of the participants, were clearly new at dialogue, the very fact that the conference was held was an extraordinary event in itself. In effect, the new king publicly rejected the extremists' three rejections: (1) dialogue with other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, (2) dialogue with "the West," (3) dialogue with "Modernity," and did so in the name of religious freedom and tolerance!

2. Interreligious Dialogue Efforts at Peace and Freedom: South Asia and Indonesia

There are doubtless many organized efforts at promoting interreligious dialogue among persons of various religions in South Asia. I will mention only one which is easily accessible around the world through its web site—and recommend regularly visiting it. It is entitled the *Association for Communal Harmony in Asia* (ACHA). It was begun by a Hindu in Oregon, USA in 1993, but includes members from most of the world's religions.7

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, having more Muslims than all the Arab countries together! It is, despite the recent outbreaks of inter-religious and inter-ethnic violence (mainly fomented by former regime corrupt power-brokers who fear losing their power if democracy succeeds), recognized as the most dialogue- oriented, free-spirited living version of Islam. There have been a number of organizations that have been promoting dialogue among the religions for years. The latest integration of these manifold efforts is *MADIA (Masyarakat Dialog Antar Agama) SIDA (Society for Inter-religious Dialogue)*, which works on the adult-education and activist levels.8

There was already under the dictator Suharto a general freedom of religion, though not of belief in the form of Marxism or of Confucianism. Hence, there developed the series of inter-religious activities referred to above. Under the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid (a widely revered Muslim scholar and "Holy Man" who headed the 40 million strong Muslim organization, *Nadalul Ulama*) freedom of both religion and belief was promoted, as well as interreligious dialogue. For him the two went together. He was able to reinstate the official recognition of Confucianism and was attempting to do something similar about communism when he lost power. President Wahid also vigorously promoted interreligious dialogue, most prominently by hosting in the Presidential Palace in Jakarta the festive opening of the Jewish-Christian-Muslim sponsored by GDI February 2000.

Perhaps the potentially most far-reaching and interesting project in Indonesia at the present time is the education project undertaken by GDI in conjunc-

tion with UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, the *Whole Child Education* Project. This is a project designed to fundamentally change the teaching method from one which is authoritarian and student-passive to one that fosters a dialogic and critical-thinking *mentality*. It was substantively launched in the July 2001 initial training of the first batch of Indonesian school teachers and teacher trainers. Happily, the response of the teachers and trainers was extremely positive, and the commitment to making the project successful on the part of the leadership within the two ministries and the UNICEF staff is enthusiastic.

V. DIALOGUE AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE FUTURE

1. The Relationship between Dialogue and Religious Freedom

Religious liberty can become a reality only to the degree that religion, or ideology, is disconnected from the *power* of the state. Also, to the extent a dialogic mentality spreads, it will become apparent that no single religion or ideology is *absolute*, that is, can encapsulate all knowledge and goodness. Hence, the expansion of a dialogic consciousness will automatically promote religious liberty for it will be seen to everyone's advantage for all religions and ideologies to be free so all can learn ever more from each other.

2. Religion-In-Dialogue the Core of the Global Civilization

Since the beginning of history there has been at the heart of every civilization a religion which both reflected the core meaning of that civilization and foundationally shaped it: The Egyptian religion was at the core of Egyptian Civilization for millennia, Chinese religion was at the center of Chinese Civilization, Christianity at the heart of Christendom, Islam of Islamic Civilization – and Marxism at the core of Communist Civilization. But now the world is entering a new stage, the like of which was never seen before, the emergence of Global Civilization. While it is true that Western Civilization has been the precipitator of this emerging Global Civilization and has played a major role in shaping it, the latter will be not simply Western Civilization "writ large," but will be a pluralistic civilization with multiple centers. It will, indeed, be an *Unum e pluribus*, a unity made out of many.

But then, if this is really an emerging *civilization* – not just a congeries of disparate cultural elements, but a true civilization with an essential kind of unity (*not* uniformity) – what will be its heart? What will be the religion/ideology that both reflects and shapes it? The answer is at hand: The core of the emerging Global Civilization is *Religion-In-Dialogue*. And that *Religion-In-Dialogue* will be **Free!**

(*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*-JES, 1984)

Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue

Dialogue is a conversation on a common subject between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow. This very definition of dialogue embodies the first commandment of dialogue.

In the religious-ideological sphere in the past, we came together to discuss with those differing with us, for example, Catholics with Protestants, either to defeat an opponent, or to learn about an opponent so as to deal more effectively with her or him, or at best to negotiate with him or her. If we faced each other at all, it was in confrontation – sometimes more openly polemically, sometimes more subtly so, but always with the ultimate goal of defeating the other, because we were convinced that we alone had the absolute truth.

But dialogue is *not* debate. In dialogue each partner must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as s/he can in an attempt to understand the other's position as precisely and, as it were, as much from within, as possible. Such an attitude automatically includes the assumption that at any point we might find the partner's position so persuasive that, if we would act with integrity, we would have to change, and change can be disturbing.

We are here, of course, speaking of a specific kind of dialogue, an interreligious, interideological dialogue. To have such, it is not sufficient that the dialogue partners discuss a religious-ideological subject, that is, the meaning of life and how to live accordingly. Rather, they must come to the dialogue as persons somehow significantly identified with a religious or ideological community. If I were neither a Christian nor a Marxist, for example, I could not participate as a "partner" in Christian-Marxist dialogue, though I might listen in, ask some questions for information, and make some helpful comments.

It is obvious that interreligious, interideological dialogue is something new under the sun. We could not conceive of it, let alone do it in the past. How, then, can we effectively engage in this new thing? The following are some basic ground rules, or "commandments," of interreligious, interideological dialogue that must be observed if dialogue is actually to take place. These are not theoretical rules, or commandments given from aon high, but ones that have been learned from hard experience.

FIRST COMMANDMENT: *The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly.* Minimally, the very fact that I learn that my dialogue partner believes "this" rather than "that" proportionally changes my attitude toward her; and a change in my attitude is a significant change in me. We enter

into dialogue so that *we* can learn, change, and grow, not so we can force change on the *other*, as one hopes to do in debate – a hope realized in inverse proportion to the frequency and ferocity with which debate is entered into. On the other hand, because in dialogue *each* partner comes with the intention of learning and changing herself, one's partner in fact will also change. Thus the goal of debate, and much more, is accomplished far more effectively by dialogue.

SECOND COMMANDMENT: *Interreligious, interideological dialogue must be a two-sided project – within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities.* Because of the "corporate" nature of interreligious dialogue, and since the primary goal of dialogue is that each partner learn and change himself, it is also necessary that each participant enter into dialogue not only with his partner across the faith line – the Lutheran with the Anglican, for example – but also with his coreligionists, with his fellow Lutherans, to share with them the fruits of the interreligious dialogue. Only thus can the whole community eventually learn and change, moving toward an ever more perceptive insight into reality.

THIRD COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.* It should be made clear in what direction the major and minor thrusts of the tradition move, what the future shifts might be, and, if necessary, where the participant has difficulties with her own tradition. No false fronts have any place in dialogue.

Conversely—*each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners.* Not only will the absence of sincerity prevent dialogue from happening, but the absence of the assumption of the partner's sincerity will do so as well. In brief: no trust, no dialogue.

FOURTH COMMANDMENT: *In interreligious, interideological dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice,* but rather our ideals with our partner's ideals, our practice with our partner's practice.

FIFTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must define himself.* Only the Jew, for example, can define what it means to be a Jew. The rest can only describe what it looks like from the outside. Moreover, because dialogue is a dynamic medium, as each participant learns, he will change and hence continually deepen, expand, and modify his self-definition as a Jew – being careful to remain in constant dialogue with fellow Jews. Thus it is mandatory that each dialogue partner define what it means to be an authentic member of his own tradition.

Conversely—*the one interpreted must be able to recognize herself in the interpretation.* This is the golden rule of interreligious hermeneutics, as has been often reiterated by the "apostle of interreligious dialogue," Raimundo Panikkar. For the sake of understanding, each dialogue participant will naturally attempt to express for herself what she thinks is the meaning of the partner's statement; the partner must be able to recognize herself in that expression. The advocate of "a

world theology," Wilfred Cantwell Smith, would add that the expression must also be verifiable by critical observers who are not involved.

SIXTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are.* Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible while still maintaining integrity with his own tradition; where he absolutely can agree no further without violating his own integrity, precisely there is the real point of disagreement – which most often turns out to be different from the point of disagreement that was falsely assumed ahead of time.

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: *Dialogue can take place only between equals,* or *par cum pari* as Vatican II put it. Both must come to learn from each other. Therefore, if, for example, the Muslim views Hinduism as inferior, or if the Hindu views Islam as inferior, there will be no dialogue. If authentic interreligious, interideological dialogue between Muslims and Hindus is to occur, then both the Muslim and the Hindu must come mainly to learn from each other; only then will it be "equal with equal," *par cum pari.* This rule also indicates that there can be no such thing as a one-way dialogue. For example, Jewish-Christian discussions begun in the 1960's were mainly only prolegomena to interreligious dialogue. Understandably and properly, the Jews came to these exchanges only to teach Christians, although the Christians came mainly to learn. But, if authentic interreligious dialogue between Christians and Jews is to occur, then the Jews must also come mainly to learn; only then will it too be *par cum pari.*

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: *Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust.* Although interreligious, interideological dialogue must occur with some kind of "corporate" dimension, that is, the participants must be involved as members of a religious or ideological community – for instance, as Marxists or Taoists – it is also fundamentally true that it is only *persons* who can enter into dialogue. But a dialogue among persons can be built only on personal trust. Hence it is wise not to tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning, but rather to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground, thereby establishing the basis of human trust. Then, gradually, as this personal trust deepens and expands, the more thorny matters can be undertaken. Thus, as in learning we move from the known to the unknown, so in dialogue we proceed from commonly held matters – which, given our mutual ignorance resulting from centuries of hostility, will take us quite some time to discover fully – to discuss matters of disagreement.

NINTH COMMANDMENT: *Persons entering into interreligious, interideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions.* A lack of such self-criticism implies that one's own tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only un-

necessary, but even impossible, since we enter into dialogue primarily so *we* can learn – which obviously is impossible if our tradition has never made a misstep, if it has all the right answers. To be sure, in interreligious, interideological dialogue one must stand within a religious or ideological tradition with integrity and conviction, but such integrity and conviction must include, not exclude, a healthy self-criticism. Without it there can be no dialogue – and, indeed, no integrity.

TENTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within";* for a religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and "whole being," individual and communal. John Dunne here speaks of "passing over" into another's religious or ideological experience and then coming back enlightened, broadened, and deepened. As Raimundo Panikkar notes, "To know what a religion says, we must understand what it says, but for this we must somehow believe in what it says": for example, "A Christian will never fully understand Hinduism if he is not, in one way or another, converted to Hinduism. Nor will a Hindu ever fully understand Christianity unless he, in one way or another, becomes Christian."

Interreligious, interideological dialogue operates in **three areas**: the **practical**, where we collaborate to help humanity; the depth or "**spiritual"** dimension where we attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within"; the **cognitive**, where we seek understanding and truth. Interreligious, interideological dialogue also has **three phases**. In the **first** phase we unlearn misinformation about each other and begin to know each other as we truly are. In phase **two** we begin to discern values in the partner's tradition and wish to appropriate them into our own tradition. For example, in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue Christians might learn a greater appreciation of the meditative tradition, and Buddhists might learn a greater appreciation of the prophetic, social justice tradition – both values traditionally strongly, though not exclusively, associated with the other's community. If we are serious, persistent, and sensitive enough in the dialogue, we may at times enter into phase **three**. Here we together begin to explore new areas of reality, of meaning, and of truth, of which neither of us had even been aware before. We are brought face to face with this new, as-yet-unknown-to-us dimension of reality only because of questions, insights, probings produced in the dialogue. We may thus dare to say that patiently pursued dialogue can become an instrument of new "re-velation," a further "un-veiling" of reality – on which we must then act.

There is something radically different about phase one on the one hand and phases two and three on the other. In the latter we do not simply add on quantitatively another "truth" or value from the partner's tradition. Instead, as we assimilate it within our own religious self-understanding, it will proportionately transform our self-understanding. Since our dialogue partner will be in a similar position, we will then be

able to witness authentically to those elements of deep value in our own tradition that our partner's tradition may well be able to assimilate with self-transforming profit. All this of course will have to be done with complete integrity on each side, each partner remaining authentically true to the vital core of his/her own religious tradition. However, in significant ways that vital core will be perceived and experienced differently under the influence of the dialogue, but, if the dialogue is carried on with both integrity and openness, the result will be that, for example, the Jew will be authentically Jewish and the Christian will be authentically Christian, not despite the fact that Judaism and/or Christianity have been profoundly "Buddhized," but because of it. And the same is true of a Judaized and/or Christianized Buddhism. There can be no talk of a syncretism here, for syncretism means amalgamating various elements of different religions into some kind of a (con)fused whole without concern for the integrity of the religions involved – which is not the case with authentic dialogue.

Notes

[1]For details see: Leonard Swidler, "Human Rights and Religious Liberty – From the Past to the Future", Leonard Swidler, ed., *Religious Liberty and Human Rights*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1986, pp. vii-xvi.

[2] In the second/third century the North African Christian Tertullian wrote: "It is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature, that all human beings should worship according to their own convictions; one human person's religion neither harms nor helps another. It is not proper to force religion. It must be undertaken freely, not under pressure". *Ad scapulam*, Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, I, p. 699.

In a way, a high point of religious liberty, and thus much of the basis of human rights, was reached publicly with the universal declaration for the whole Roman Empire in the Edict of Milan (A.D. 313) by Emperor Constantine: "We should therefore give both to Christianity and to all others free facility to follow the religion which they may desire". (From the Edict of Milan as contained in *De mortibus persecutorum*, in Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, VII, pp. 267f..) This moment of freedom was, however, short-lived, for in A.D. 380 the Edict of Thessalonica was issued by Emperor Theodosius, stating that: "It is our will that all the peoples who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans". (*Codex Theodosianus*, XVI, I, 2, in, Coleman J. Barry, ed., *Readings in Church History* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), vol. I, p. 142.)

[3] Seyed Othman Alhabshi, *An Inspiration for the Future of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, 1994), p. 8.

[4] Ibid., p. 12. One finds not only an acknowledgment of the present stagnation of Islamic nations, but also a determination to do something positive about it in certain leading Muslim circles, for example, in Malaysia: "None of the Muslim countries are considered to be developed or advanced, despite about ten are among the rich nations of the world.... Muslim countries Aare so weak politically, economically, socially and even educationally.... Muslims have become so weak and dependent on others in almost every field".

[5]See the excellent volume by the Moroccan/Spanish Muslim Khalid Duran: *The Children of Abraham. An Introduction to Islam for Jews* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2001). Duran provides a sympathetic and realistic presentation of Islam, including present-day Islamism and Jihadism. This latter earned him a

death contract (*fatwa*) from an Islamist extremist in Jordan, as well as innumerable letters of support and laudatory reviews.

[6] See the dozens of articles by the brilliant, irenic Indian Muslim scholar Asghar Ali Engineer, Founder and Director of the *Institute of Islamic Studies and Centre for Study of Society and Secularism* they are collected at: http://ecumene.org/IIS/csss.htm., web site designed and maintained by *Global Dialogue Institute* Web Editor, Professor Ingrid Shafer.

[7] See http://asiapeace.org/acha.htm, designed and maintained by *Global Dialogue Institute* Web Editor, Professor Ingrid Shafer.

[8] See http://ecumene.org/MADIA/MADIA.htm, designed and maintained by *Global Dialogue Institute* Web Editor, Professor Ingrid Shafer.