

CRISIS CONSCIOUSNESS

AND THE FUTURE

THE FUTURE OF RELIGION,
THE FUTURE OF MANKIND,
THE DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS

Like Caesar's Gaul, my essay is divided into three parts, according to the subjects mentioned in the subtitle. The "crisis consciousness" of the main title forms less a subdivision of the essay than a *leitmotif* accompanying all the parts as well as the whole.

The sociological writings of the past few generations have been deeply concerned and in part also worried about this problem. This concern was of course shared by both the theologians and the faithful, just as it was hailed by the so-called anti-religionists. I refer here mainly to sociologists since they claim to have approached the problem with scientific methods and a scientific, *i.e.* post-Illuminist, mentality. The less naive among them realize, of course, how much their analyses and projections, including all their futurologist exercises, are biased

Translated by Johanna Pick Margulies.

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by ideologies. After all, we are living in the Golden Age of the so-called critical sociology, critical of everything except perhaps of itself. However, even research into the future has its own troubles and a well-known American sociologist gave his noteworthy essay a title at once justified and full of humor: "Does futurology have a future?"

Attempts to treat the problem of the future of religion usually form part of the wider discussion about the essence of secularism and the so-called modernization process. Altogether we can discern two principal currents. On the one hand are those who foresee that, in its encounter with the irresistible progress of modernity, religion will one day decline and disappear. Contemporary theories concerning this "great disappearance" are, of course, presented with more sophistication than in Comte's simplistic and somewhat rough positivism. But the message is the same. Others, however, believe that religion's disappearance will not be unlike Marx's well-known disappearance of the State. On the basis of a multitude of manifold combinations and permutations of sociological, psychological and philosophic-anthropological arguments, these authors maintain that the "essence" of man and/or of society possesses a religious dimension which renders complete secularization absolutely impossible, even though religion's institutional as well as its philosophic and artistic expression will doubtlessly change (as they have always done—and any historian of religions can furnish abundant proof of that fact). In other words, specific religions can disappear, as they often did in the past; but our analytic efforts should be devoted to the modalities of religion's transformations and to the new elements these changes produce in our era defined as modern or even post-modern. Succinctly, the essential subject of future research should be not the approaching end of religion but its transformation. This might be the wishful thinking of sociology. For my present purpose, it is sufficient to ascertain the existence (at least up to now) of new as well as traditional religious forms; these might play now and in the future a not unimportant role and in their best expressions they are motivated not so much by the thought of their own self-perpetuation as by a feeling of responsibility towards mankind and the world.

The elaboration of the "Future of religion" theme seems almost

childish if not frivolous when we face the more encompassing question of the future of mankind. And here, I cannot, all well-justified critics notwithstanding, avoid the subject of futurology. After all, every plan, project, warning, decision, and exhortation of ours (never mind whether inspired originally by pragmatic, moral or religious considerations) is based in the end on our evaluation of future trends, probable developments, risks and possible options. The trouble is that a great part of mankind lost its cheerful and optimistic belief in irreversible progress towards a better and more harmonious future and fell prey instead to an apocalyptic mood which foresees the approaching end of the world and of mankind. What makes this mood so ominous is its claim to scientific evidence as, for example, in the well-known study *The Limits of Growth*, ordered and then published by the Club of Rome in 1972.¹ An enormous number of variables had been programmed into the M.I.T. computer and of course the theological scholar might well ask how many apocalypses and end-of-the-world prophecies could be said to be inspired not by the Holy Ghost but simply by the print-out of a computer which commands—for the modern mind—an aura of the maximum legitimacy. The nemesis for our transgression (*i.e.* the material, social, and spiritual mismanagement of ourselves as well as of our world and its resources) is reaching us and will accomplish its gloomy work even before the year 2100. Just as in the discussion of the future of religion so also in this one we can never be sure what constitutes a realistic evaluation of future trends and the inevitable result of our misdeeds and what is crisis ideology and panic propaganda. But suppose that the computer took over the role of prophet—of a Jeremiah, so to speak, as opposed to the false prophets of hope and trust in men—then we must indeed face the awesome future of untold suffering and downfall

¹ The original publication was followed by other specialized studies, e.g. *Towards a New International Order: an Appraisal of Prospects*. (Report on the joint meeting of the Club of Rome and the International Ocean Institute, held in Algiers from 25-28 October, 1976). The Roman publications are mentioned here only as an arbitrary but characteristic example. There are many publications and innumerable research institutes involved with these problems at various levels. Worthy of particular attention is the Aspen Institute (USA) and other research organizations.

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which might threaten every form of higher life on this earth. Perhaps I should not have mentioned Jeremiah but Cassandra instead, since Jeremiah, in his sublime and biblical faith, saw a bright vision of hope beyond all destruction and catastrophe.

Modern catastrophe consciousness feeds on the knowledge of the acceleration of the historical process, galloping towards self-destruction. As far as I know, this acceleration, characteristic of modern progress, was first clearly perceived and formulated by the Frenchman, Turgot, often placed among the so-called physiocrats. As I said, it is not simply a matter of *Naberwartung* (a short waiting span) as in Ernst Benz's very interesting, but slightly mistitled recent work,² but of the accelerating dynamics of specific modern technological development. This acceleration has different but closely linked aspects which in the end form a single phenomenon or syndrome: the acceleration of population growth, of industrial production, of energy exploitation, of world trade volume; of the velocity and frequency of communication, of scientific and technological progress, of the exhaustion of available resources and the resulting tensions between the rich and the poor;³ of the accumulation of constructive, as well as of destructive, power in the hands of men *etc.*, *etc.* However, Turgot viewed these symptoms in an optimistic perspective and we consider them threatening. There is in particular one serious and problematic aspect of acceleration which is extremely important and yet hardly considered—the educational one, pointed out recently in one of Edwin O. Reischauer's books.⁴ Education means to prepare the generation which will have to manage the immediate future—to prepare it *really* and *truly* for *tomorrow*—if we want to survive, that is. But the education is imparted *today* by parents and teachers who are *by definition* older than their pupils; *i.e.* by educators formed *yesterday* as far as knowledge, mentality and even the perception of reality are

² E. Benz, *Akzeleration der Zeit als geschichtliches und heilsgeschichtliches Problem*; Mainz, 1977.

³ According to the World Bank's latest report, 800 million people are living in dire *poverty* right now, *i.e.* undernourished and without access to even the most elementary public services.

⁴ Edwin O. Reischauer; *Toward the 21st Century: Education for a Changing World*, New York, 1973.

concerned. How can we, yesterday's people, properly prepare tomorrow's mankind for their existence in an era of accelerating progress?

This sense of impending catastrophe is contrary not only to head-in-the-sand optimism but also to certain complexes of religious ideas (even supposedly totally secularized ones), of God's salvation plans or purposes concerning His creation, *i.e.* mankind, the world and history. Western civilization has often had its fantasies about the impending end of the world, but in its heart of hearts it lacks—maybe because of Christian influence—the ability to experience the course of time in the form of *Kalpas** which, in accordance with cosmic law, destroy themselves to the point of nullity. We know that modern crisis experience has killed religious liberalism, too, because classic liberalism lacked any crisis consciousness at all; this lack may almost be said to be implicit in its definition. What killed it was not the consequence of immanent dialectics but the impact of reality's crisis-and-catastrophe character.

Allow me to remind you here briefly and somewhat arbitrarily of some items (patterns and samples, so to speak) out of the catastrophe catalogue: the widening and deepening North-South split,⁵ the growing militarization of the world (international) and of political regimes (on the national level). Let us not forget that about half the world's scientists are employed in some kind of "defence" work, meaning military projects—in research, industry, production, *etc.*; the world is divided into 150 egocentric sovereign national States, every single one of them obsessed by its "security"⁶—and I must confess I am a member of a nation suffering particularly from this obsession, though, I fear, for a very good reason. Biological and ecological systems deteriorate at a terrible rate: soil erosion, the destruction of tropical forests,

* Translator's Note: "Kalpa" (Hindu). One of the ages of the world, the present one being the fourth.

⁵ See Jagdish N. Bhagwati ed.: *The New International Economic Order; The North-South Debate*, Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 1978.

⁶ See Lester R. Brown: *Human Needs and the Security of Nations*, Headline Series N-238, February 1978. The writer treats the security problem from all points of view: the idea of "national security", population, energy, biological systems, climatic changes, global alimentation insecurity, etc.

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the threatening exhaustion of fossil fuel sources, the endangered stratospheric ozone layer (spray cans, etc.), chemical pollution of the environment (e.g. by detergents, phosphates, insecticides, industrial waste); herrings, once the food of the poor masses, might in the not-too-distant future beat caviar as a luxury symbol of the rich; noise, and, last but not least, the threat of nuclear catastrophe.⁷

I must add a personal note concerning this last point. I belong to a people that lost six million brothers, sisters and children in a gruesome combination of human malice and human indifference, by means of a relatively simple technology. I cannot think of Hiroshima without thinking of Auschwitz too. Without trying to play down the dangers of nuclear energy (even for peaceful purposes), I must emphasize the possibility of genocide even without the atomic bomb in this nasty world of ours (as proven again and again in Africa and Cambodia) and of the way to mankind's destruction even without the nuclear bang, atomic waste or radioactive fallout.

Population experts predict that at the present birth rate—which, on a global level (though not in all countries), is not only the highest in all history but also starts from the highest baseline—we shall have to nourish and, what is even more difficult considering the economy and capital investment, to find jobs for eight billion people in 2050, even if there were no further growth of the birth rate but merely reproduction; 1.5 billion in India, 100 million in Nigeria, 260 million in Brazil. In other words, with an increment of 200,000 a day, we may count on a tripling of today's population by the year 2050. Over 30% of this population growth will take place in the so-called "Third World" and they will be the first and the most seriously affected by the scarcity of food as well as by a possible worsening of the climate. Half the world will live in cities of over one million people, nearly everybody else in towns with over 100,000 popula-

⁷ For information concerning the biosphere, the ecological systems and the topsoil erosion see John M. Storer: *The Web of Life*, 1956; Pierre Samuel: *Ecologie: détente ou cycle infernal*, 1973; V.G. Carter and T. Dale, *Topsoil and Civilization*, revised ed., 1974; C.S. Hicks: *Man and Natural Resources*, 1975.

tion.⁸ Should these predictions prove even approximately correct, they would imply that urbanization and schooling as such do not by themselves automatically reduce the birth rate. More is required: a structural transformation of our social and cultural system. However, we fear, and for perfectly good reason, that “social engineering” could be just as disastrous as an atomic catastrophe.

The climatologists join the demographers and I mention this complex problem (about which I am as ignorant technically as I am about demography), only because it concerns developments completely beyond our own behaviour and activities. The experts tell us that the climate changes rather more rapidly than we think. When the higher latitudes cool off quickly—as they say was the case in the Arctic as well as sub-Arctic zones during the last three decades—the monsoon winds either do not develop or shift in their course; and the first victims are again the poorest and most densely populated lands. They say that the cycle of favourable temperature ended in about 1945 A.D., that the average temperature of the North Atlantic has decreased, that the average temperature of the northern hemisphere is diminishing, that the Gulf Stream has shifted southward, that in England for example, the yearly growing period has become a fortnight shorter, that the U.S. also has had more frost in mid-summer than ever before, that in many places the desert “swallows” fields or pasture lands, that the monsoon winds have shifted nearer to the Equator—and not only in India—which has

⁸ According to the latest evaluations of the ILO we may expect that within the next 25 years Mexico City will have 32 million inhabitants and thus become the largest city, followed by Sao Paolo with 26 million. The population of the capitals of Columbia, the Philippines, Pakistan and Indonesia will triple, and the capitals of Zaire and Nigeria quadruple. Once more the Third World and its poorest people will suffer most from this “urbanization”. According to a recent study not only the cultivatable soil diminishes with a terrifying rapidity but also the farming population (see the Worldwatch Institute report published by Lester R. Brown). True, many symptoms seem to indicate that the birth rate tends to become steady and that our contemporary neo-Malthusians are spreading exaggerated panic, but the World Bank in one of its recent publications still presupposes a double birth rate within the next 25 years. True again, Europe registers a minimum growth and in some countries even a decrease; but in Africa the birth rate increase is 72%, in Asia 48% and in South America 47%. The average life span is 71 years in Europe, but 42-45 in Africa.

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experienced increasing periods of drought as well as devastating floods—and not only in Africa. If all this is true, it is ominous enough. The combination of population explosion, disappearance of resources from the earth and the seas, and the impossibility of mass migration to some promising, tempting and still accessible future paradise is so threatening that the concern about the near future—*i.e.*, the 21st century, not the year 5000—seems perfectly justified. The “green revolution” seems to be only a temporary palliative and the problem must be viewed not only in absolute terms (how much is there actually?) but also in relative ones (how do we divide the available resources?). It becomes again a problem of priority of values, of motivation patterns (above all, consumption patterns), and finally of the social and ethical system.

All this shows the difficulty of defining unequivocally the crisis of mankind and of stating exactly just what are its components. To me the quest for such precise definition seems unnecessary. It is a matter of a diffuse consciousness of crisis being fed by different sources: political, economic, biological, ecological, technological, cultural and spiritual. All together they form a crisis syndrome.

At this point I would like to stress once more that the designation “global mankind” is a product of science and technology and not of religion. The concept of *humanitas* we have inherited from the stoics; religious traditions contributed to the formation of the *oikoumene* and world community ideas. However, the realization of the world community is a product of modern times. The superpowers may confront each other threateningly or suspiciously in cold wars or other encounters, but Soviet Russia needs the corn silos of the U.S. and the associated commercial treaties. Precious days are wasted seeking or chartering sufficient airplanes to carry vaccine to epidemic-stricken districts or to spray the breeding grounds of locusts that are going to cause another famine period in some part of Africa tomorrow. Meanwhile the skies are full of military aircraft transporting men and materials from one end of the world to another—not to speak of tourists or participants in international congresses. These too become ethical questions since social and economic problems are also moral ones requiring solutions, and decisions are made

according to criteria and priorities of values. For the *Homo religiosus* such decisions are also matters of religion.

Before I pass on to the specifically religious part of my meditations, allow me to repeat what has become a platitude: the world we live in is determined by science and technology. No matter how our religious ideas influence our choices between various possibilities and competing options, the scientists must first tell us what are the possibilities and options facing us or available to us, what are the risks involved in each choice, which the avoidable and which the unavoidable consequences, and how to calculate the degree of responsibility. Locusts or chemical sprays? So-called test tube babies or telling a woman she can never be a mother? (By the way, "test tube baby" is a journalistic, altogether false and misleading definition, conjuring up half magical images of *homunculi*). A self-imposed moratorium on certain experiments was proposed by a working group of microbiologists and not by theologians or other "charlatans". Unfortunately we discover the negative effects of many eagerly welcomed scientific achievements only *post-factum*, after they have produced their fatal consequences. Such was the case with several contraceptives; how many pregnant women found relief with the new tranquilizer before the first thalidomide babies were born? How many people were saved by DDT before we noticed its damaging effect on the ecological system? The difference between pre-meditated and unpremeditated consequences of our actions might be fundamental but their limits are not always defined. The former are the direct subject of moral judgements or of social and economic, cultural and spiritual priorities; the latter require exercises in prognostics to define the possibilities among which we have to choose. An example illustrating modern scientific activity as a whole: the somewhat apologetic habit of contemporary Buddhist philosophers to emphasize constantly the conviction that their religion is the only one in perfect agreement with modern science, whereas Christianity and science are wholly incompatible. I am not going to transform this essay into a seminar on Max Weber but I must ask in good clear fun how did it happen that the West, formed by Christianity, produced modern science (even though unintentionally) whereas Buddhism has not yet absorbed it *in concreto* to this day?

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Futurology is a series of tentative predictions obtained by extrapolation of present trends, more or less well analyzed; it is essential to admit that it is not mere soothsaying, but rather a warning call to watch out for and, if possible, to avoid dangers, maybe even to achieve a more adequate understanding of our own being. As a historian of religion, may I be permitted to mention that many believers ascribed a similar role to astrology, not to speak of the ancient Israelite prophecies. Let's consider Jonah under the tree, sullenly nursing his grudge; not his sojourn in the whale's belly, but *this* moment is essential to the proper understanding of the biblical prophecy. Predictions of doom issued by a computer are extrapolations from data fed into it, not from man's inventive and creative gifts; this fact is essential for a future-orientated understanding of our own being. It is extremely difficult to predict changeability. Who realized in the year 600 that during the coming century Islam would arise and change the world? Critics of *The Limits of Growth* were many and severe: the data concerning our earth's resources are false, they said, and so are the suppositions concerning the cost of ecology control; the methodology of model construction is erroneous as well; the analysis as a whole fails to consider currently known technology and all the more the yet unknown but possible or even plausible new techniques. For instance, whenever the very serious issue of nuclear waste disposal is raised, adversaries of nuclear energy development resolutely and passionately ignore the possibility of new techniques, not for scientific but for ideological reasons. History is full of unexpected but epochmaking innovations; these also include great spiritual and religious movements—the Hebrew Bible, Christianity and Islam, the American and French Revolutions, Marxism—to mention only Western examples. Yet can we put our trust in such still unknown, innovative developments? Is it responsible to count on them?

René Dubos has written: "Crises are nearly always a source of enrichment since they spur on the search for new solutions... True, civilizations are mortal but they can be revived by human imagination and will power... Chance or Providence provides the material elements out of which civilizations might be reborn or renewed, but it is the human spirit which chooses the proper elements and arranges them in order to shape them into human

form, thus continuing the creation of the world. The ability and will to make choices enables us to transcend genetic and environmental determinism. ...But I am convinced of the possibility of improving mankind's behaviour and environment, and therefore the quality of life itself, by rearranging social structures..."

This quotation leads me to final considerations. Several forecasts mentioned above have very profound theological and religious implications. For example, is every effort to improve, let alone to "save", our world doomed to failure *a priori* because of our sinfulness (Christian) or because of our ignorance of our own being (Eastern)? History furnishes sufficient examples of how efforts to heal an evil often bring a still greater evil into the world. Do religious images such as God's "grace", His saving presence or intervention, His "covenant" or "promise" represent a true basis for real "good hope" (*elpis agathe*) for the world and mankind (with or without dialectic somersaults about *spes contra spem*)? Or should we rather consider the Hindu concept of Kalpa, meaning succeeding epochs all running toward a zero hour and inevitable self-destruction? I think that this point is the *locus* of the inter-religious dialogue and the cornerstone of its validity and its relevance in spite of the danger of sinking to the level of a platitude so fashionable in this, our ecumenical, era. It is not a matter of substituting mutual understanding, respect (not to mention tolerance), and similar principles for the traditional polemics or the modern spirit of "competition" (meaning Peter Berger's "market pattern", *i.e.*, who can "make today's man a better offer"); it is a matter of a growing consciousness of common responsibility not only for our world and mankind but also for the dimensions of a spiritual existence as opposed to the limited horizon of a human condition brought about by contemporary secularization. One of my colleagues has called it "one-eyed scientism".

In the West, "dialogue" very often means exploring Eastern traditions for elements similar, or at least acceptable, to Christianity. This is a fatal deviation. The unalterable divergencies are of extreme importance. Religion as a separate entity is not

⁹ René Dubos: *Choisir d'être humain*, Denoel, "Regards sur le monde", Paris, 1974, p. 207.

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orientated towards a supposed unity of religions above and beyond the variance of their forms and rites and even less toward a common front against materialistic atheism—for who and what is really an atheist and where are the true materialists? Religion is based on that specific religious consciousness of our existential horizon; we could also call it our connection with the Transcendental, our relationship to the Absolute.

The motto, “know yourself”, applies to religions also. In the post-Enlightenment and contemporary periods, religion became humbler and renounced the ridiculous and/or naive and arrogant pretence to solve all the world’s problems. It knows its limitations, its interrelations with culture and its dependence on science insofar as analysis and plans of its own reality are concerned. Religion seeks a more adequate vision (but how can you define “adequate”?) and—without exaggerating its possible role in modern civilization—a clearer recognition of its possible contribution to the planning of perspectives according to which reality might be built and lived.

We must accept the inter-religious dialogue as it is: as yet asymmetric and historically tainted. A realistic look will need to reveal that the East-West contrast, even in religious matters, does not consist of philological exegesis and even less of theology-and-culture journalism reclining on a West-East sofa; it is a problem of relations between the spokesmen for the developed world and those of the so-called Third World. In this West, there prevails right now the fashion for Christian self-flagellation and for shouldering with evident masochism the sin of and responsibility for the destruction of the sacred unity of nature and exploitation of a God-deprived world; all this still in reference to a perverse interpretation of the commandment in Genesis to “subdue the earth”. This is a failure of nerve, as Gilbert Murray defined an analogous phenomenon in late classical antiquity, and it just calls for a sociological analysis. On the other hand, the Third World considers itself *a priori* exempt from the need of self-reproach and, what is more, compensates on all levels and in all fields by exaggerated apologetics. Therefore, in this situation, loaded on both sides with passionate feelings, it becomes rather difficult to identify the essential differences and to study and discuss them in a productive manner. It is even doubtful whether,

in the present situation, Eastern religions can really give their best and most characteristic values.

How about all those who see themselves and the whole material world framed within a religious horizon and for whom the cosmos (the moon included) means more than just a laboratory or a stepping stone to technological conquest: would they be able to discuss with each other the essential differences in their conception and interpretation of reality? The main points on the agenda¹⁰ would be *a*) the conception and interpretation of person and personality—God's as well as that of our fellow man; *b*) the idea of the world (as "creation" or otherwise). Other questions will follow, as for example the spiritual dimensions of the "human condition" or the world's blind run towards its own doom. Who and what is man and what is his proper place in the cosmos? Where does our sense of "responsibility"—for future generations, for our environment (including the so-called "endangered species"), for all living things lead? What kind of reflection could arouse the energies needed to accomplish the required re-orientation and to transcend "computer determinism?" Our prognostics, probabilities, options, means and techniques must, of course, be furnished by science, but the motivations, legitimations and sources of our decisions and involvements are determined by trans-scientific ideas and, for *Homo religiosus*, by religious ones as well. Can men of different religions help each other and their neighbours? Does the Western paradigm of constant activity, intervention and domination (see, for example "subduing nature" and similar linguistic symptoms) give us any reason to hope for survival or does it lead to destruction? The Chinese Taoist principle of non-action, *wu-wei*, called *mu* in Japanese and in Buddhist transformation identified with enlightenment, signifies a refusal of any "busybody" intervention;

¹⁰ There is a huge mass of literature on the East-West subject, and some periodicals, as for example the *Philosophy East and West* published by the University of Hawaii in Honolulu, are dedicated to it exclusively. For the above-mentioned points see P.K.K. Tong, "A Study of Thematic Differences between Eastern and Western Religious Thought" in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, X (1973) pp. 337-360 (the author is a Chinese Catholic) and John T. Marcus; "East and West. Phenomenologies of the Self and the Existential Basis of Knowledge" in the *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XI (1971), pp. 5-48.

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is this a meaningful answer to our miseries? If it is, the reason would not be because *wu-wei* is inertia or lack of involvement, but because it is based on the understanding of Tao's essence and on a deep aversion to disturbing it by brutal intervention and misguided machinations. No student of religion can help observing how the inter-religious dialogue, even—or rather, precisely—when it takes place not in conference rooms but in an apocalyptic twilight of anxiety and *mal-de-siècle*, always falls back on our holy scriptures: I mean on Max Weber. On one point they all seem to agree: whether it be sin or ignorance or *Karma*, all these can be overcome. But how to find a way leading not only into the future but penetrating mankind's social structures as well? Or, posing the same question in a less Utopian manner than used with such fatal facility by the heirs to the Western tradition (including the Ernst Blochs of this world), in the words of the Prajnaparamita's Heart Sutra: "Let us cross over, cross over, cross over all the way to the other shore." What message does it convey to a mankind that is seeking hope and a future on *this* shore and would like to save itself and the shore on which it lives? The *Mahayana**. Buddhist would answer that both shores are the same, for to the enlightened *samsara*** and *nirvana* do not differ; the Bodhisatva is bound to serve the *samsara* world just as did Sakyamuni Gautama and through active practice of *Karuna****, using the most appropriate, convenient and adequate means (*upaya*). However, this teaching might be managed too adroitly and superficially by ignorant or unscrupulous people, since it is a matter of knowledge originating in enlightenment, not in scholastic doctrine.

The Basle theologian, Heinrich Ott, once spoke correctly about the limits of science and the "open field" of religion. However, we should always remember, as complementary to the preceding statement, the historical fact of religion's restrictions, even its stifling narrowness, often similar to that of a prison, and—as opposed to that—the freedom and openness of science. But in the dialectic reaction, religion and science have reversed

* Greater Vehicle

** The illusory world of this earth

*** Compassion

their positions and now their situation is that described by Ott. If religions want to conduct a real conversation, instead of everybody flattering everybody else, they must and can ask questions of and about each other critically, openly and fraternally and in this way try to help themselves and post-modern man as well. Nowadays all religions know that they have got to get together in an open discussion, notwithstanding their inalienable and unchangeable divergencies in their ideas of man, the world, the Absolute, and the essence of truth—I repeat emphatically “essence of truth” for what is being discussed is not religious truth as such but its various interpretations. The dialogue must exist for the subject of their talks is not only themselves but the very future of the world.

Heidegger once correctly criticized Marx’s statement: “The philosophers have interpreted the world, but it is up to us to change it,” as almost childish from the philosophical point of view. For planned transformation presupposed an ideological change and that can only be achieved if the world is properly interpreted. As a matter of fact, Marx required a new world interpretation. We must change our world, or rather ourselves in this world, in order to survive and we cannot do it without a concept of mankind and the world that adequately interprets the world and man. This is the only possible meaning of and reason for religious dialogue today. Sometimes not only Hegel’s sayings but even the age-old folk wisdom of proverbs must be turned upside down. The moment has come to recognize, or at least to suspect, that today is *primum vivere, deinde philosophari*.

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