



AP/Wide World Photos, Pier Paolo Cito

*Rabbi Netanel Teitelbaum welcomes Pope Benedict XVI to the Cologne synagogue, Aug. 19, 2005. This was the second visit in modern times of a pontiff to a Jewish synagogue, following the historic first visit by Pope John Paul II to the Rome synagogue in April 1986. The Cologne synagogue was rebuilt after being destroyed during the Nazis' Kristallnacht rampage in 1938. Pope Benedict XVI was in Cologne to take part in the Roman Catholic Church's Twentieth World Youth Day.*

# Interreligious Dialogue and Jewish-Christian Relations

by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger \*

*The religions can encounter one another only by delving more deeply into the truth, not by giving up. Skepticism does not unite. Nor does sheer pragmatism.*

In the year 1453, just after the conquest of Constantinople, Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa wrote a remarkable book entitled *De pace fidei*.<sup>†</sup> The crumbling empire was convulsed by religious controversies; the Cardinal himself had taken part in the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to reunite the Eastern and Western Churches, and Islam was back on the horizon of Western Christianity. Cusanus learned from the events of his time that religious peace and world peace are intimately connected. His response to this problem was a kind of utopia, which, however, he intended to be a real contribution to the cause of peace. “Christ, the judge of the universe, summons a heavenly council, because the scandal of religious plurality on earth has become intolerable.”<sup>1</sup> At this council “the divine Logos leads seventeen representatives of the various nations and religions to understand how the concern of all the religions can be fulfilled in the Church represented by Peter.”<sup>2</sup> “In the teachings of the wise you do not find,” Christ says, “diverse faiths, but all have one and the same belief.” “God, as Creator, is triune and one; as infinite, he is neither triune, nor one, nor anything that can be said. For the names that are ascribed to God come from creatures, whereas he himself is ineffable and exalted above everything that can be named and predicated.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> A translation of *De pace fidei* (“On the Peace of Faith”) appears on page 55 of this issue.—Ed.

1. H.U. von Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln, 1963), 10.
2. R. Haubst, “Nikolaus v. Kues,” in: *LTbK<sup>2</sup>* VII, col. 988–991, citation in col. 990.
3. *De pace fidei* 7, 11, 16, 20, 62 (Op. omnia VII. Hamburg, 1959), cited in Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, 10f.

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\* Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, prior to his election as Pope Benedict XVI in April 2005. This article is reprinted with permission from the Spring 1998 issue of “*Communio*,” of which Cardinal Ratzinger was one of the founders. © 1998 by *Communio: International Catholic Review*.

# 1. From Christian Ecumenism to Interreligious Dialogue

Since Cusanus' time, this ideal heavenly council has come down to earth, and, because the voice of the Logos can be heard only fragmentarily, has inevitably become much more complicated. The nineteenth century saw the gradual development of the ecumenical movement, whose original impetus came from the experience of the Protestant churches in the missions. Having discovered that their witness to the pagan world was seriously handicapped by their division into various confessions, these churches came to see that ecclesial unity was a condition *sine qua non* of mission. In this sense, ecumenism owes its birth to Protestantism's emergence from the bosom of Christendom onto the world scene.<sup>4</sup> In order to make a case for the universality of their message, Christians could no longer contradict one another or appear as members of splinter groups whose peculiarities and differences were rooted merely in the history of the Western world. Subsequently, the impulse behind the ecumenical movement gradually spread to Christianity as a whole. The Orthodox were the first to associate themselves with the movement, though initially their participation was carefully delimited. The first Catholic overtures came from single groups in countries particularly affected by the division of the churches; this situation lasted until the Second Vatican Council threw open the Church's doors to the quest for unity among all Christians. As we have seen, the encounter with the non-Christian world had at first acted as the catalyst only for the search for Christian unity. It was only a matter of time, however, before Christians began to appreciate the distinctive values of the world religions. After all, Christians were not preaching the Gospel to a-religious people who had no knowledge of God. It became increasingly difficult to ignore that the Gospel was being preached to a world deeply imbued with religious beliefs, which influenced even the minutest details of everyday life—so much so, that the religiosity of the non-Christian world was bound to put to shame a Christian faith that here and there already seemed worn out. As time went on, Christians realized the inadequacy of describing the representatives of other religions simply as pagans or else in purely negative terms as non-Christians; it was necessary to become

4. Cf. R. Rouse/St. Ch. Neill, *Geschichte der ökumenischen Bewegung 1517–1948*, vol. 2 (Göttingen, 1957), 58; H.J. Urban, H. Wagner, eds., *Handbuch der Ökumenik*, vol. 2 (Paderborn, 1986).

acquainted with the distinctive values of the other religions. Inevitably, Christians began asking whether they had the right simply to destroy the world of the other religions, or whether it was not possible, or even imperative, to understand the other religions from within and integrate their inheritance into Christianity. In this way, ecumenism eventually expanded into interreligious dialogue.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, the point of this dialogue was not simply to repeat nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship in comparative religion, which, from the lofty height of a liberal-rationalistic standpoint, had judged the religions with the self-assurance of enlightened reason. Today there is a broad consensus that such a standpoint is an impossibility, and that, in order to understand religion, it is necessary to experience it from within, indeed, that only such experience, which is inevitably particular and tied to a definite historical starting-point, can lead the way to mutual understanding and thus to a deepening and purification of religion.

## 2. Unity in Diversity

This development has made us cautious about definitive judgments. Yet it remains an urgent question whether there is a unity in all this diversity. We discuss interreligious ecumenism today against the backdrop of a world that, while it draws ever closer together, becoming more and more a single theater of human history, is convulsed by wars, torn apart by growing tensions between rich and poor, and radically threatened by the misuse of man's technological power over the planet. This triple threat has given rise to a new canon of ethical values, which would sum up humanity's principal moral task at this time in history in three words: peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. Though not identical, religion and morality are inseparably linked. It is therefore obvious that in a time when humanity has acquired the capacity to destroy itself and the planet on which it lives, the religions have a common responsibility for overcoming this temptation. The new canon of values serves as a touchstone, especially of the religions. There is a growing tendency to regard it as defining their common task and thus as the formula for uniting them. Hans Küng spoke for many when he launched the slogan "there can be no peace in the world without peace among the religions," thereby declaring religious peace, that is, interreligious ecumenism, to be

5. Cf. K. Reiser, *Ökumene im Übergang: Paradigmenwechsel in der ökumenischen Bewegung?* (Munich, 1989).

the bound duty of all religious communities.<sup>6</sup>

The question that now arises, however, is: how can this be done? Given the diversity of the religions, given the antagonisms among them that often flare up even in our own day, how can we encounter one another? What sort of unity, if any, can there be? What standard can we use at least to seek this unity? Difficult as it is to discern patterns amidst the bewildering variety of religions, we can make a first distinction between tribal and universal religions. Of course, the tribal religions share certain basic patterns, which in turn converge in various ways with the major tendencies of the universal religions. There is thus a perpetual interchange between the two sorts of religions. Although we cannot explain this interchange in detail now, it does warrant our posing the question of interreligious ecumenism first in terms of the universal religions. If we go by the latest research, we can distinguish two major basic types among the universal religions themselves. J.A. Cuttat has proposed the terms “interiority and transcendence” to describe these two types.<sup>7</sup> Contrasting their concrete center and their central religious act, I would call them—a bit simplistically, to be sure—mystical and theistic religions, respectively. If this diagnosis is correct, then interreligious ecumenism can adopt one of two strategies: it can attempt to assimilate the theistic into the mystical type, which implies regarding the mystical as a more comprehensive category ample enough to accommodate the theistic model, or it can pursue the opposite course. Yet a third alternative, which I would term pragmatic, has appeared on today’s scene. It says that the religions should give up their interminable wrangling over truth and realize that their real essence, their real intrinsic goal, is orthopraxy, an option whose context seems rather clear-cut in the light of the challenges of the present day. In the end, orthopraxy could consist only in serving the cause of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. The religions could retain all their formulas, forms, and rites, but they would be ordered to this right praxis: “By their fruits you shall know them.” In this way, they could all keep their customs; every quarrel would become superfluous, and yet all would be one in the way called for by the challenge of the hour.

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6. On the problems with the “planetary ethos” that Küng calls for in this context, see R. Spaemann, “Weltethos als ‘Projekt,’” in: *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* (570/571), 893–904.

7. J.A. Cuttat, “Expérience chrétienne et spiritualité orientale,” in: *La mystique et les mystiques* (Paris, 1965); *idem.*, *Begegnung der Religionen* (Einsiedeln, 1956); cf. on the whole question of interreligious dialogue H. Bürkle, *Der Mensch auf der Suche nach Gott—die Frage der Religionen*, Amateca III (Paderborn, 1996). Also helpful is O. Lacombe, *L’élán spirituel de l’hindouisme* (Paris, 1986).

### 3. Greatness and Limitations of the Mystical Religions

In what follows, I would like to examine very briefly the three approaches that we have just mentioned. When we come to the theistic approach, I would like to reflect in a particular way, as befits the present occasion, on the relation between Jewish and Christian monotheism. For brevity’s sake, however, I must pass over the third of the great monotheistic religions, Islam. In an age when we have learned to doubt the knowability of the transcendent and, even more, when we fear that truth claims about transcendence can lead to intolerance, it seems that the future belongs to mystical religion. It alone seems to take seriously the prohibition of images, whereas Panikkar, for example, thinks that Israel’s insistence on a personal God whom it knows by name is ultimately a form of idolatry, despite the absence of images of God.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, mystical religion, with its rigorously apophatic theology, makes no claim to know the divine; religion is no longer defined in terms of positive content, hence, in terms of sacred institutions. Religion is reduced entirely to mystical experience, a move which also rules out a priori any clash with scientific reason. New Age is the proclamation, as it were, of the age of mystical religion. The rationality of this kind of religion depends on its suspension of epistemological claims. In other words, such religion is essentially tolerant, even as it affords man the liberation from the limitations of his being that he needs in order to live and to endure his finitude.

If this were the correct approach, ecumenism would have to take the form of a universal agreement consisting in the reduction of positive propositions (that is, propositions that lay claim to substantive truth) and of sacred structures to pure functionality. This reduction would not mean, however, the simple abandonment of hitherto existing forms of theism. Rather, there seems to be a growing consensus that the two ways of viewing the divine can be regarded as compatible, ultimately as synonymous. In this view, it is fundamentally irrelevant whether we conceive of the divine as personal or non-personal. The God who speaks and the silent depths of being are ultimately, it is said, just two different ways of conceiving the ineffable reality lying beyond all concepts. Israel’s central imperative, “hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is the only God,” whose substance is still constitutive for Christianity and Islam as well, loses its contours. In this view, it is ultimately inconsequential whether you

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8. R. Panikkar, *La Trinidad y la experiencia religiosa* (Barcelona, 1986).

submit to the God who speaks or sink into the silent depths of being. The worship demanded by Israel's God and the emptying of consciousness in self-forgetful acceptance of dissolution in infinity can be regarded basically as variants of one and the same attitude vis-à-vis the infinite.

We seem, then, to have hit upon the most satisfactory solution to our problem. On the one hand, the religions can continue to exist in their present form. On the other hand, they acknowledge the relativity of all outward forms. They realize that they share a common quest for the depth of being as well as the means to attain it: an interiority in which man transcends himself to touch the ineffable, whence he returns to everyday life, consoled and strengthened.

There is no doubt that certain features of this approach can help to deepen the theistic religions. After all, mysticism and even apophatic theology have never been entirely absent from the theistic approach.<sup>9</sup> The theistic religions have always taught that in the end everything we say about the ineffable is only a distant reflection of it, and that it is always more dissimilar than similar to what we can imagine and conceive.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, adoration is always linked to interiority and interiority to self-transcendence.

Nevertheless, there can be no identification of the two approaches nor can they be finally reduced to the mystical way. For such a reduction means that the world of the senses drops out of our relation to the divine. It therefore becomes impossible to speak of creation. The cosmos, no longer understood as creation, has nothing to do with God. The same is necessarily true of history. God no longer reaches into the world, which becomes in the strict sense god-less, empty of God. Religion loses its power to form a communion of mind and will, becoming instead a matter of individual therapy, as it were. Salvation is outside the world, and we get no guidance for our action in it beyond whatever strength we may acquire from regularly withdrawing into the spiritual dimension. But this dimension as such has no definable message for us. We are therefore left to our own devices when we engage in worldly activity.

Contemporary endeavors to revise ethics in fact readi-

ly assume some such conception, and even moral theology has begun to come to terms with this presupposition. The result, however, is that ethics remains something we construct. Ethos loses its binding character and obeys, more or less reluctantly, our interests. Perhaps this point shows most clearly that the theistic model, while indeed having more in common with the mystical than one might initially suppose, is nonetheless irreducible to it. For the acknowledgment of God's will is an essential component of faith in the one God. The worship of God is not simply an absorption, but restores to us our very selves; it lays claim on us in the midst of everyday life, demanding all the powers of our intelligence, our sensibility, and our will. Important as the apophatic element may be, faith in God cannot do without truth, which must have a specifiable content.

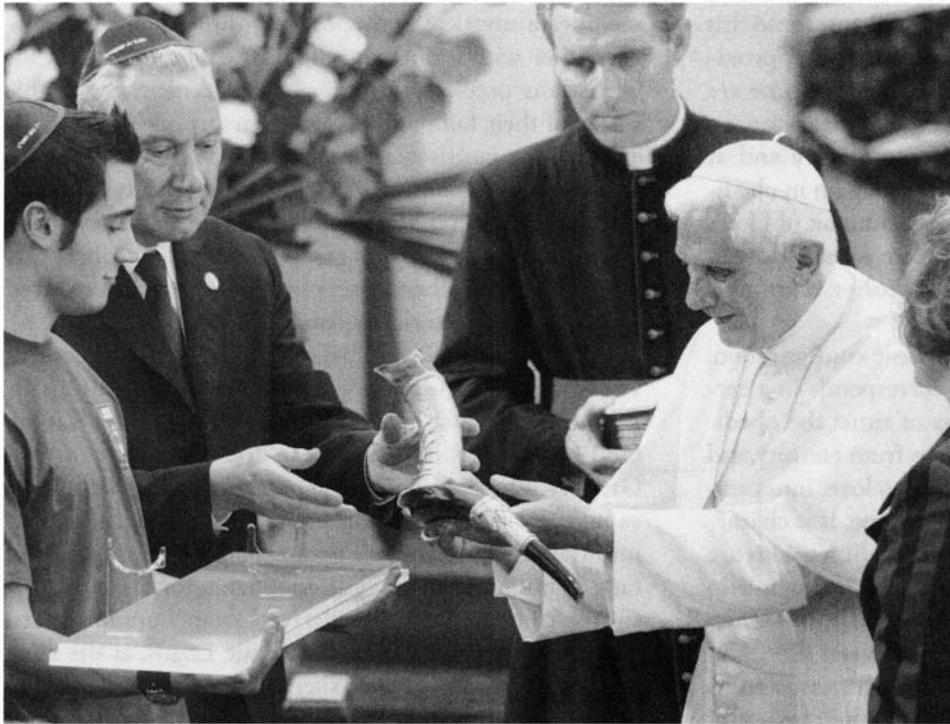
## 4. The Pragmatic Model

Is it not the case, then, that the pragmatic model, which we mentioned just now, is a solution that measures up equally to the challenges of the modern world and to the realities of the religions? It does not take much to see that this is a false inference. To be sure, commitment to peace, justice, and the integrity of creation is of supreme importance, and there is no doubt that religion ought to offer a major stimulus to this commitment. However, the religions possess no a priori knowledge of what serves peace here and now; of how to build social justice within and among states; of how best to preserve the integrity of creation and to cultivate it responsibly in the name of the Creator. These matters have to be worked out in detail by reason, a process which always includes free debate among diverse opinions and respect for different approaches. Whenever a religiously motivated moralism sidesteps this often irreducible pluralism, declaring *one* way to be the only right one, then religion is perverted into an ideological dictatorship, whose totalitarian passion does not build peace, but destroys it. Man makes God the servant of his own aims, thereby degrading God and himself. J.A. Cuttat had these very wise words to say about this a good forty years ago: "To strive to make humanity better and happier by uniting all religions is one thing. To implore with burning hearts the union of all men in love of the same God is another. And the first is perhaps the subtlest temptation the devil has devised to bring the second to ruin."<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, this refusal to transform religion into a political moralism does not

9. Cf. L. Bouyer, *Mysterion: Du mystère à la mystique* (Paris, 1986).

10. This is how the fourth Lateran Council (1217) expresses it: "quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda" [because it is impossible to recognize only likeness between the Creator and the creature without having to recognize an even greater unlikeness between them] (DS 806).

11. J.A. Cuttat, *Begegnung der Religionen*, 84.



*Pope Benedict XVI receives a shofar (ceremonial ram's horn) from members of the Jewish community during his visit to the Cologne synagogue.*

change the fact that education for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation is among the essential tasks of the Christian faith and of every religion—or that the dictum “by their fruits ye shall know them” can rightly be applied to their performance of it.

## 5. Judaism and Christianity

Let us return to the theistic approach and to its prospects in the “council of religions.” As we know, theism appears historically in three major forms: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We must therefore explore the possibility of reconciling the three great monotheisms before we attempt to bring them into dialogue with the mystical approach. As I have already indicated, I will limit myself here to the first split within the monotheistic world, the division between Judaism and Christianity. To deal with this division is also fundamental for the relation of both religions to Islam. Needless to say, I can do no more than attempt a very modest sketch regarding this far-ranging topic. I would like to propose two ideas.

The average observer would probably regard the following statement as obvious: the Hebrew Bible, the “Old Testament,” unites Jews and Christians, whereas faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Redeemer divides them. It is not difficult to see, however, that this kind of division between what unites and what divides is super-

ficial. For the primal fact is that through Christ Israel’s Bible came to the non-Jews and became their Bible. It is no empty theological rhetoric when the Letter to the Ephesians says that Christ has breached the wall between the Jews and the other religions of the world and made them one. Rather, it is an empirical datum, even though the empirical does not capture all that is contained in the theological statement. For through the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth the God of Israel became the God of the Gentiles. Through him, in fact, the promise that the nations would pray to the God of Israel as the one God, that the “mountain of the Lord” would be exalted above all other mountains, has been fulfilled. Even if Israel cannot join Christians in seeing Jesus as the *Son* of God, it is not altogether impossible for Israel to recognize him as the *servant* of God who brings the light of his God to the nations. The converse is also true: even if Christians wish that Israel might one day recognize Christ as the Son of God and that the fissure that still divides them might thereby be closed, they ought to acknowledge the decree of God, who has obviously entrusted Israel with a distinctive mission in the “time of the Gentiles.” The Fathers define this mission in the following way: the Jews must remain as the first proprietors of Holy Scripture with respect to us, in order to establish a testimony to the world.

But what is the tenor of this testimony? This brings us to the second line of reflection that I would like to propose. I think we could say that two things are essential to Israel’s faith. The first is the Torah, commitment to God’s will, and thus the establishment of his dominion, his kingdom, in this world. The second is the prospect of

hope, the expectation of the Messiah—the expectation, indeed, the certainty, that God himself will enter into this history and create justice, which we can only approximate very imperfectly. The three dimensions of time are thus connected: obedience to God’s will bears on an already spoken word that now exists in history and at each new moment has to be made present again in obedience. This obedience, which makes present a bit of God’s justice in time, is oriented toward a future when God will gather up the fragments of time and usher them as a whole into his justice.

Christianity does not give up this basic configuration. The trinity of faith, hope, and love corresponds in a certain respect to the three dimensions of time: the obedience of faith takes the word that comes from eternity and is spoken in history and transforms it into love, into presence, and in this way opens the door to hope. It is characteristic of the Christian faith that all three dimensions are contained and sustained in the figure of Christ, who also introduces them into eternity. In him, time and eternity exist together, and the infinite gulf between God and man is bridged. For Christ is the one who came to us without therefore ceasing to be with the Father; he is present in the believing community, and yet at the same time is still the one who is coming. The Church too *awaits* the Messiah. She already knows him, yet he has still to reveal his glory. Obedience and promise belong together for the Christian faith, too. For Christians, Christ is the present Sinai, the living Torah that lays its obligations on us, that bindingly commands us, but that in so doing draws us into the broad space of love and its inexhaustible possibilities. In this way, Christ guarantees hope in the God who does not let history sink into a meaningless past, but rather sustains it and brings it to its goal. It likewise follows from this that the figure of Christ simultaneously unites and divides Israel and the Church: it is not in our power to overcome this division, but it keeps us together on the way to what is coming and for this reason must not become an enmity.

## 6. Christian Faith and the Mystical Religions

We come, then, to the question that we have deferred so far. It is a question that concerns in a very concrete way the place of Christianity in the dialogue of the religions: is theistic, dogmatic, and hierarchically organized religion necessarily intolerant? Does faith in a dogmatically formulated truth make the believer incapable of dialogue? Is renunciation of truth a necessary condition of the capacity for peace?

I would like to try to answer this question in two steps.

First of all, we must recall that the Christian faith includes a mystical and apophatic dimension. The new encounter with the Asian religions will be significant for Christians precisely insofar as it reminds them of this aspect of their faith and breaks open any one-sided hardening of the positivity of Christianity. Here we must face an objection: are not the doctrine of the Trinity and faith in the Incarnation so radically positive that they bring God literally within our grasp, indeed, our conceptual grasp? Does not the mystery of God get caught in fixed forms and in a historically datable figure?

At this point it would behoove us to recall the controversy between Gregory of Nyssa and Eunomius. Eunomius, in fact, asserted that, because of revelation, God could be fully grasped in concepts. By contrast, Gregory interprets Trinitarian theology and Christology as mystical theology, as an invitation to an infinite path into the always infinitely greater God.<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, Trinitarian theology is apophatic, for it cancels the simple concept of person derived from human experience and, while affirming the divine Logos, at the same time preserves the greater silence from which the Logos comes and to which the Logos refers us. Analogous things could be shown for the Incarnation. Yes, God becomes altogether concrete, he becomes something we can lay hold of in history. He comes bodily to men. But this very God who has become tangible is wholly mysterious. His self-chosen humiliation, his “kenosis,” is a new form, as it were, of the cloud of mystery in which he hides and at the same time shows himself.<sup>13</sup> For what paradox could be greater than the very fact that God is vulnerable and can be killed? The Word that the incarnate and crucified Christ *is* always immeasurably transcends all human words. Consequently, God’s kenosis is itself the place where the religions can come into contact without arrogant claims to domination. The Platonic Socrates underscores the connection between truth and defenselessness, truth and poverty, especially in the *Apology* and the *Crito*. Socrates is credible because in taking the part of “the god” he gets neither rank nor possession, but, on the contrary, is thrust into poverty and, finally, into the role of the accused.<sup>14</sup>

12. Cf. most recently F. Dünzl, *Braut und Bräutigam: Die Auslegung des Canticum durch Gregor von Nyssa* (Tübingen, 1993); L. Bouyer, *Mysterion*, 225ff.; still important today is H.U. von Balthasar’s *Présence et pensée: Essai sur la Philosophie Religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1942).

13. Cf. B. Stubenrauch, *Dialogisches Dogma: Der christliche Auftrag zur interreligiösen Begegnung* (Freiburg, 1995), especially 84–96.

14. Cf., for example, *Apologia* 31 c: “And indeed I believe that I can produce a sufficient witness to the fact that I speak the truth, and that is my poverty”; *Crito* 48 c–d.

Poverty is the truly divine form in which truth appears: in its poverty it can demand obedience without alienation.

## 7. Concluding Theses

A final question remains: what does all of this mean concretely? What can such a conception of Christianity be expected to contribute to interreligious dialogue? Does the theistic, incarnational model get us any further than the mystical and the pragmatic? Now, let me say frankly at the outset that anyone betting that interreligious dialogue will result in the unification of the religions is headed for disappointment. Such unification is hardly possible within our historical time and perhaps it is not even desirable. What can we expect, then? I would like to make three points:

1. The religions can encounter one another only by delving more deeply into the truth, not by giving it up. Skepticism does not unite. Nor does sheer pragmatism. Both are simply an opening for ideologies, which then step in with all the more self-assurance. The renunciation of truth and conviction does not elevate man, but exposes him to the calculus of utility and robs him of his greatness. What is required, however, is reverence for the other's belief, along with the willingness to seek truth in what I find alien—a truth that concerns me and that can correct me and lead me further. What is required is the willingness to look behind what may appear strange in order to find the deeper reality it conceals. I must also be willing to let my narrow understanding of truth be broken open, to learn my own beliefs better by understanding the other, and in this way to let myself be furthered on the path to God, who is greater—in the certainty that I never wholly possess the truth about God and am always a learner before it, a pilgrim whose way to it is never at an end.

2. Although we must always seek the positive in the other, union means that the other must help me to find the truth, we cannot and must not dispense with criticism. Religion contains, as it were, the precious pearl of truth, but it is also continually hiding it, and is always running the risk of missing its own essence. Religion can grow sick and become a destructive phenomenon. It can and should lead to truth, but it can also cut man off from it. The Old Testament's critique of religion has by no means become superfluous today. It may be relatively easy for us to criticize the religion of others, but we must also be ready to accept criticism of ourselves, of our own religion. Karl Barth distinguished between religion and faith in Christianity. He erred in wanting to separate them entirely, in regarding faith alone as positive and

religion as negative. Faith without religion is unreal. Religion is a part of faith, and by its very nature Christianity must live as a religion. But Barth was right in that even the religion of Christians can grow sick and become superstition. He saw correctly, in other words, that the concrete religion in which Christians live their faith must be unceasingly purified by the truth. This is a truth that shows itself in faith and that at the same time newly reveals its mystery and its infinity in dialogue.

3. Does this mean that missionary activity must cease and be replaced by dialogue, in which we do not speak of truth, but help one another be better Christians, Jews, Moslems, Hindus, and Buddhists? My answer is no. For this would be yet another form of the complete lack of belief. Under the pretext of fostering the best in another, we would fail to take both ourselves and the other seriously and would end up renouncing truth. The answer, I think, is that mission and dialogue must no longer be antitheses, but must penetrate each other.<sup>15</sup> Dialogue is not random conversation, but aims at persuasion, at discovering the truth. Otherwise it is worthless. Conversely, future missionaries can no longer presuppose that they are telling someone hitherto devoid of any knowledge of God what he has to believe in. This situation may in fact occur and perhaps will occur with increasing frequency in a world that in many places is becoming atheistic. But among the religions we encounter people who through their religion have heard of God and try to live in relation to him. Preaching must therefore become a dialogical event. We are not saying something completely unknown to the other, but disclosing the hidden depth of what he already touches in his own belief. And, conversely, the preacher is not simply a giver, but also a receiver. In this sense, what Nicholas of Cusa expressed as a wish and a hope in his vision of the heavenly council should take place in interreligious dialogue. It should increasingly become a listening to the Logos, who shows us unity in the midst of our divisions and contradictions.\*

—translated by Adrian Walker

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\* This text was prepared for a session of the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques* (Paris). Rabbi Szejnberg, who had suggested the topic, addressed it from the Jewish perspective. This circumstance accounts for the breadth of the issues treated, my specific points of emphasis, and the limits of the discussion.

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15. Important on the proper understanding of mission is H. Bürkle, *Missionstheologie* (Stuttgart, 1979); P. Beyerhaus, *Er sandte sein Wort. Theologie der christlichen Mission, I: Die Bibel in der Mission* (Wuppertal, 1996). Important observations in R. Spaemann, "Ist eine nicht-missionarische Praxis universalistischer Religionen möglich?," in: *Theorie und Praxis. Festschrift N. Lobkowitz zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1996), 41–48.