Paul F. Knitter
Xavier University, Cincinnati

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND THE UNITY OF HUMANITY

In a recent book, Hans Küng voices a challenge and outlines a program that the nations and religions of the world can ignore only at their own peril. (Küng 1991). With his usual thoroughness and passion, he argues that if the nations of the world are going to be able to confront and resolve the crises threatening humankind today, they are going to have to agree, in theory and praxis, on some kind of a "global ethics" (*Weltethos*); but such agreement cannot be reached unless the religions of the world cooperate among themselves in this undertaking. As he pithily summarizes his "kerygma:" there can be no peace, unity, dialogue among the nations unless there is peace, unity, dialogue among the religions.

If there are many people who will agree with the *truth* of Küng's proposal, I'm not so sure how many of them would be able to affirm its *possibility*. Küng may be entirely correct in the challenge he lays out for the nations of the world; but can such a program ever be realized?! In order to bolster his program for peace among the nations through peace among the religions, I would therefore urge Küng to say more about the main obstacle which, in the eyes of many, makes his program impossible: the historical fact that the religions of the world, over the course of the centuries, have been greater causes of conflict and war than of peace and unity. If the historical record of the religions has been one of division and bloodshed rather than one of unity and cooperation, why should we believe that things can be any different today? In what follows, I would like to support Küng's project by addressing this problem.

The basic content of my suggestion is somewhat paradoxical: the undeniable fact that the religions have primarily been sources of conflict and disunity has, at our present moment in history, helped create a situation that can free or "redeem" the religions from this sad and sordid past. In other words, the past has brought us to a point where we can see and hope that the future *must* be different! From *necessity*

one can more resolutely and hopefully move to *possibility*. Confronting the results of their historical records, the religions of the world have an opportunity to rediscover the potential, the vision, the "grace" contained within their own traditions whereby they may transform their past records of conflict into a future promise of cooperation.

World Religions: A Cause of Disunity and Lack of Peace

I would suggest that one of the major reasons why there is so much disunity and lack of peace in today's world is because the religions of the world have not done their job. If there are any energies available within the course of history that might provide not only a clear vision of unity and harmony but the empowerment to follow that vision, one would expect to find such energies in the religious traditions that sprang up at the origins of human history and have survived the centuries. As some historians and philosophers of religion have argued, despite the dazzling differences and contrasts between the major world faiths, all of them propose, in differing ways, that human life can best be lived when the center of gravity within the individual and community is shifted from self-centeredness to what in Western terms might be called "Reality-centeredness." We are at our best when we are living, not centripetal, but centrifugal lives; such other-centered lives constitute the best way of promoting our own individual lives. (Hick 1981, 467, 464-65; Tracy 1987, 84) All the religions, again in vastly different ways, hold up the ideal of love, compassion, unity, embodied in either the Golden or the Silver Rule: one must do, or withhold, from others that which one would wish others to do unto or withhold from oneself. (Starkey 1985; Küng, 1991, 58-59) Not only do the world religions hold up such a vision, they also proclaim that it can be realized, for all of them affirm that there is present or available within the universe a force or presence or deity that is ready to empower humans to live such a vision – whether that Reality is symbolized in the personal features of Jahweh or Abba or Allah or in the transpersonal image of the Brahman, Tao, Tien, Buddha-nature, or Spirit of Mother Earth.

Such is the vision and the message of the world religions. The historical record is quite another matter. In the role the religions have played in the history of humanity, they have, all too often if not for the most part, *not* lived up to their vision or responded to the unifying energy they proclaim; or, they have applied their ideals of unity and

mutual love only to their own kind - their own tribe or nation or fellow believers. This is true not only of the distant past and the religious wars and crusades that bloody the history of both Western and Eastern civilizations. Still today the battle cries of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, of Muslims and Jews in the Middle East, of Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka, of Sikhs and Hindus and Muslims in India are sad testimonies that religions continue to be more effective at motivating war than peace.

This, as J.W. Bowker has argued, is the "burning fuse" or the "unacceptable face" of every religion: its astounding capacity to promote violence and warfare. (1986) Or as Elise Boulding has pointed out, there is within every religion two contrasting cultures - that of the holy war and that of the peaceable garden; caught in the pull of inter-tribal or international tensions, the religions have generally played into the hands of kings and politicians and chosen the culture of warfare. (1986) Thus former USA Secretary of State Cyrus Vance expressed the anger and frustration of many religious believers and non-believers when at the Interreligious Peace Colloquium of 1975 he expressed his consternation that "given the presumed strength of the religious community throughout the world, we should go from crisis to crisis, from conflagration to conflagration - that the religious community should have such apparently ineffective input into the management of our global village." (in Gremillion 1978, viii)

Why is this so? Why have the religions not lived up to their potential - I would say, their mission - of clarifying and unifying a vision of ethics and values that would pacify, not fructify, humankind's warring inclinations? Why have the religions fought each other more than cooperated with each other? Why have they looked upon each other as rivals or competitors rather than as fellow-travelers and colleagues? From a Marxist perspective, one might answer that religions unavoidably become the ideological instruments of the ruling classes - the drugs whereby the masses may be put to sleep or raised to frenzy in order to either submit to or spill their blood for the prevailing power structures. Or, from a biological, Teilhardian viewpoint, one might argue that the religions of the world have been following a universal evolutionary pattern by which each religion must first go through a "microphase" of consolidation through self-interest before it can enter a "macrophase" of relationship and cooperation with others. (Berry 1980)

I believe there is truth in both these explanations. But I would suggest that there is a deeper reason why the religions have been such supple ideological instruments in the hands of kings and generals, or why they have been so sluggish in following the evolutionary impulse from the micro to the macrophase. It is because they are ignorant of each other! I know that sounds simplistic. But I think one of Buddhism's basic insights can be applied to the warring world of religions: the reason there is so much *dukkha* or conflict/pain between the religions, the reason why each religion is so full of *tanha* – that is, the self-centeredness that extols itself as the only or the final truth – is because of *avidya* – because they are ignorant of each other. True, religious believers may know each other's histories or doctrines or rituals; they may have taken courses in comparative religions. That is not enough. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith has observed, believers of different religious traditions know each other, for the most part, only from the outside, by looking over each other's back fences. Yet one can know another religion only from within, only by "passing over" personally and experientially into the other's world of experience and commitment, only by somehow believing and feeling the truth of the other way. (Smith 1981, 111, 125–26; Dunne 1972; Panikkar 1971, 225) Such an encounter, however, has not taken place. Despite the noble efforts, there has not been an effective, widespread dialogue among world religions.

One might and must ask further: why has such a dialogue not occurred? Again, many reasons might be given. Certainly, as I shall explain in greater detail below, it is extremely difficult to bridge the cultural-linguistic gaps that yawn between the different religious worlds. I would suggest, again somewhat simplistically, that the grounding reason why the religions of the world have not made greater efforts to reach across their cultural chasms and overcome their ignorance of each other is because they have not been properly motivated to do so! There has not been enough common inspiration, common concerns, common ground by which they could feel desirous or capable of making the always frightening and uncertain step into another religious world. All the talk of scholars and mystics about a common experiential or mystical core within the religions of the world, true though these claims may be, have not been sufficient to convince the majority of religious believers that there is truth in other religious traditions and

that it is *necessary* and *possible* to learn from and cooperate with those who follow other ways.

Here is where I want to make my central point: today our world has so changed that it *is* providing the motivation and the common ground whereby the world religions may overcome their ignorance and begin to cooperate in making their contribution to the formation of a global ethics and a global peace among nations. My point is paradoxical: it is the nature and degree of the lack of peace, caused in part by the failure of the religions to share their visions, that is enabling and pressing them to speak to each other, learn from each other, cooperate with each other as never before. The contemporary lack of peace and widespread suffering-the fears all of us feel about "what might happen" – all this is providing a new kairos for interreligious cooperation.

Lack of Peace: A New Kairos for interreligious Cooperation

I am not saying that the conflict and lack of peace in today's world are any greater than they ever were. I *am* saying that the possible effects of this conflict are greater, more menacing and horrifying than ever before. The ethical morass in which the nations of the earth are floundering has brought us to the state of such suffering and to the brink of such disaster that it has created, among many other things, what can be called a new "hermeneutical kairos" for interreligious encounter. By this I mean a situation that casts both its shadows and its lights on all corners of the globe and in doing so makes a new encounter of religions both *necessary* and *possible*. I call it a "kairos" because it is a unique constellation of events that constitutes both new opportunities and responsibilities; it is "hermeneutical" because it enables followers of different religious paths not just to feel the need for each other but to talk to and understand and engage each other as never before.

Today our world is facing crises that, willy-nilly, are confronting and demanding responses from all religions. I am speaking mainly about the widespread, persistent, undeniable reality of *human suffering* – suffering due to: 1) social-economic - racial-gender injustice and exploitation; 2) the reality and threat of military conflict and aggression; 3) exploitation and devastation of the ecosystem that sustains all life on our planet. Such suffering and such issues raise questions that transcend cultural and religious differences, and if they don't require

the religions to look at each other, they certainly require them all to look in the same direction. These issues touch *all* religions because they contain the kind of questions that not only demand immediate attention but that cannot be answered, so it seems, without some kind of transformation of the human species, without some kind of new vision or new way of understanding who we are as humans and how we are to live on this dizzying, threatened planet. In calling for a clarification of ethics and fundamental values and for a radically different way of viewing our world and acting in it, in confronting the limits of the human condition as we know it, these issues are *religious* questions–questions that every religion either has tried to answer, or will want to answer, or will be required to answer.

Let me try to be more precise: the reality of human and ecological suffering – and the structural injustice that sustains it – has brought about an ever more deeply and widely felt need for *liberation*. Our contemporary world is a world painfully aware of the need for liberation from suffering, for freeing from bondage, for preserving, restoring, fostering life. I am suggesting, therefore, that *liberation* – what it is and how to achieve it – constitutes a new arena for the encounter of religions.

If the need for socio-economic, ecological liberation is *the* "common human experience" painfully present to all religions, if in light of this experience representatives of the different religious traditions are looking into their individual soteriologies and realizing that they have a liberating message to announce to the world, then we can indeed claim that the religions today are standing on a common ground on which they can construct a more fruitful dialogue. And if we consider that this liberation cannot be realized piecemeal, in this or that culture or nation, but must be a worldwide, interconnected effort, then it becomes clear that a new dialogue among religions is not only possible, it is absolutely *necessary*. Worldwide liberation calls for a worldwide religious dialogue.

A New Kind of Interreligious Dialogue

I well realize that in proposing a shared concern for peace and this-worldly liberation as the common ground for interreligious dialogue, I am flying in the face of warnings from the so-called "anti-foundationalist" philosophers. Philosophers such as Richard Rorty (1979) and Richard Bernstein (1983), together with theologians such as George Lindbeck (1984), David Tracy (1987), and Raimon Panikkar (1987)

chide theologians or historians of religions for searching for a "foundation" or "essence" that is common to all religions and that will provide the common criteria by which the religions of the world can understand each other and adjudicate points of differences. As far as we can tell, these criticizms remind us, in this finite world of many cultures and religions and histories, there is no universal foundation outside the fray of history on which we can make universal judgments and assess diversity. Plurality is it ! It will not yield an Archimedean point outside of history by which we can lift ourselves beyond plurality to a final unity.

Between the religions of the world, therefore, there yawn "incommensurability gaps" - even between their mystics ! (Katz 1978) The anti-foundationalists tell us that although we can look at and speak to each other, although we can form some "picture" of who the other is, we can not really understand each other sufficiently to pass judgments on the truth or falsity, the goodness or harmfulness, of each other's religious beliefs and practices. That would require moving beyond our own historico-cultural perspectives or limitations and taking on, thoroughly, the religio-cultural perspective of the others. But that is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Since there seems to be no universal "foundation" beyond our particular "standpoints," every time we judge another's religion we are doing so from our own "standpoint" not theirs. We are doing so from outside their religion. And that's not fair. It fact, it bears all the trappings of imperialism.

I want to take such warnings to heart, for I agree with them. I am well aware (or, I think I am) that what I am proposing as a *center* or starting point for dialogue may sound like, or easily develop into, a *foundation*; and that opens the door to the danger of imperialism, for it is usually the people with the power who determine the foundation. So I want to stress that when I hold up a shared concern for suffering and a commitment to liberation as the starting point for dialogue, I am *proposing* not *imposing*. It is a proposal which I suspect representatives from all religious traditions have accepted or would accept, for I believe that not only is an awareness of oppression and of the need for liberation permeating and challenging the consciousness of all religions today, but also that all religions have a this-worldly liberative word, a message of "salvation" for the

suffering planet. I have tried to argue elsewhere that all religions can endorse a commitment to human liberation as a starting point for dialogue because all of them, in different ways and degrees, contain a "soteriocentric core," a concern and vision for the welfare of humanity in this world. The models for human welfare and liberation admittedly differ, often drastically; yet in all religions there is a shared concern that human beings be changed and saved, in this world. (Knitter 1988) Whether this is indeed the case, whether there is a soteriocentric core or concern within all religions that would enable a liberation-centered dialogue, can be known, of course, only within the dialogue itself.

Granting that significant numbers of representatives from various traditions can endorse a liberation-centered dialogue, how would it function ? I suggest that it might profitably follow the turns of Juan Luis Segundo's hermeneutical circle, which he proposed as a liberation-centered model for revisioning Christian theology. (Segundo 1975, 7-9)

First of all, what the liberation theologians say of Christian theology applies to interreligious dialogue - *dialogue is always a second step.* (Boff 1987, 23; Gutiérrez, 1973, 11) Here is the hinge-pin of a liberation-centered model for dialogue: the encounter begins not with conversations about doctrine or ritual, not even with prayer or meditation (though all these elements are essential to the effort to pass over to each other's traditions); rather, partners in dialogue begin with some form of *liberative praxis.* They engage in efforts to liberate themselves or others or the planet from whatever form of oppression seems most pressing in their immediate context – and they do so, not separately in their different religious camps, but *together.*

This will require that the dialogue partners – Hindus or Buddhists or Jews or Muslims or Christians – work together in trying to identify and understand the cause of the oppression or suffering they are facing; they attempt some kind of shared socio-economic analysis of the problem and what might be the solution; admittedly the solutions each proposes will be inspired by their different religious convictions. Then the dialogue partners roll up our sleeves together to act – to do whatever they think needs to be done. This will, of course, require that they work with and especially *learn from* those who are the

oppressed and suffering. Liberative praxis means identifying with and learning from *those who are suffering*, from those who are *victims*; it recognizes what has been called the "hermeneutical privilege" or the "epistemological priority" of the suffering – that unless one listens to the voice of their experience, one's efforts to understand the world and one's religious traditions will be vitally maimed. With the oppressed, then, and as members of different religious communities, partners in interreligious dialogue struggle together for justice or for peace or for ecological sustainability.

Then comes the second step of dialogue: shared liberative praxis, with its peaks and its pits, will be the matrix of – and imperative for – dialogical *reflection*. Under the momentum of praxis, the hermeneutical circle moves to reflection, discussion, study, prayer, meditation. But in a liberation-centered method of dialogue, such pursuits will not be done only in separated religious camps; they will be done together. Having acted together, Buddhists and Christians and Muslims now reflect and talk together about their religious convictions and motivations. Here is where the partners in dialogue can enter into their scriptures and doctrines and explain not only to themselves but to others what it is that animates and guides and sustains them in their liberative praxis.

What has been the experience of Christian theology of liberation might well be realized in interreligious dialogue – that when believers reflect on their religious heritage on the basis of a praxis of commitment to the poor and oppressed, they find themselves "bringing forth new treasures" from old treasures; they see and hear and understand their scriptures and their doctrines with new eyes and a new heart. In an ethical, salvation-centered dialogue, this will happen interreligiously – members of different religious communities can understand each others' scriptures and beliefs anew. Having heard and seen, for instance, how the Four Noble Truths or the nirvanic experience of *pratitya-samutpada* are enabling and directing Buddhist partners in the transformation of village life in Sri Lanka, Christians can come to appreciate and appropriate such beliefs/experiences in genuinely new and fruitful ways. And Buddhists will better grasp the Kingdom of God or resurrection-faith of Christians having experienced how it sustains their efforts for justice or their readiness to risk.

The base Christian communities of Latin America can serve as a practical model for carrying out a liberation-centered interreligious dialogue. In these small grass roots gatherings, Christians have met to re-read their scriptures and their beliefs in light of their oppression and their efforts to overcome it – and in the process what had been a perfunctory, ritualistic church is experiencing new life and vision. In the interreligious encounter, what can be envisioned and what are already taking shape in parts of Asia are *base human communities* – communities which gather people not of one religious tradition but people of different religious beliefs who share *one commitment* to working with the oppressed and overcoming suffering. In these communities, the same dynamic as that of the base Christian communities can and is taking place – scriptures are coming alive, doctrine makes sense, religious experience is deepened – between Buddhists and Christians and Hindus. Here is hope for a new form of interreligious dialogue, based on a *common conversion* to the victims and suffering of this world.

Peace Through Interreligious Dialogue

If such an ethical, salvation-centered dialogue among world religions is possible, and if it can be carried out, it will, I believe, provide a significant – perhaps determinative – contribution to peace-making, to fostering the unity of humankind, and so to saving our world from conflict and ecological devastation. There will be two principal ingredients to this contribution:

1. First, such an interreligious dialogue will itself be an *example of the method* by which nations and cultures might move toward redefining a global ethics that can save our world from destruction. Crucial to our efforts to redefine and clarify ethics and shared values is the method we use; method is as important as, or more important than, content. One of the greatest dangers to discussions on ethical values or conflict resolution is for the participants to enter the dialogue with absolute positions. Preconceived absolute claims are time-bombs that eventually and invariably blow apart the dialogue. Individuals or nations or religions who believe they have the absolute truth, the final word, the one-and-only way become tyrants not liberators; they promote ethical confusion not clarification. As Robert Vachon has said, ". . . in order to have Peace, we cannot assume that we know what Peace

is . . . Peace . . . can neither be reduced to any one notion we may have of it, nor even to the sum of these notions." (Vachon, 1985, 35–36)

The anti-foundationalist philosophers, it would seem, are right. There is no one foundation, no unchanging vision of truth in the light of which we can, easily and happily, resolve all our differences. Despite what fundamentalist religions announce, despite what enlightened capitalist or marxist economists may think, there is no one way that works always and everywhere for everyone. Therefore the only way we have for resolving our religious, economic, political, and ethical differences is *conversation*. The only way we are going to resolve our differences is to genuinely listen and speak to each other. Jürgen Habermas calls it "communicative praxis" – the messy, never finished, unsettling, but always exciting process of dialogue.

And this is where the religions can set the example for a task that many would call impossible. The kind of liberation-centered dialogue that I am proposing would be such communicative praxis between the religions of the world. In such a dialogue, absolute positions are no longer tenable. In a salvation or peace-centered encounter of religions, no religion will hold up its church or its savior or its deity as the absolute truth and only way to salvation or peace. Expressed in Christian terminology, the absolute in such a dialogue is not Christ or even God; it is, rather, the salvation or human welfare contained in the symbol of the Kingdom of God. But such a Kingdom, together with the peace it intends, is never fully realized; there is always more to come. Therefore, there can never be only one way, or a final way, of realizing it. I think this is something all religions can endorse – that the Absolute they are striving for consists of or is expressed in the liberation, or betterment, or welfare of human beings and, we must add, of the earth. The religious Absolute grounding all religions, therefore, can be described as the welfare or salvation of human beings (without necessarily being reduced to human salvation).

Yet each religion will have its own view of what constitutes salvation or peace and what is necessary to achieve it. Religious believers will be fully committed to their own understanding of human welfare and peace. At the same time, however, they will recognize that the kingdom or nirvana or moksha will never be fully understood or achieved. Therefore there will never be a final or full agreement among the religions as to what constitutes the Absolute of human salvation/liberation; each

religion may proclaim a vision or ideal that it feels is essential to such liberation and peace; but no religion will claim that its vision is the "one and only." And so the dialogue continues. As religious believers sit down to the table of dialogue in order to save our threatened world, they will be as fully committed to their own message of salvation as they are fully open to the messages of others. Just how these different views will blend. Whether they will lead to a greater unity of vision, how one religion may be confirmed or corrected by another – all this can be known only within and through the dialogue itself.

The communicative praxis of interreligious dialogue, therefore, calls for an absolute commitment to one's own relative view of salvation but at the same time, an absolute openness to the views of others. If such a dialogue can be realized, it would provide a mighty and inspiring example to the nations of the world – an example that would make possible a giant step toward resolving our present day ethical malaise and to fostering the unity of humankind.

2. There is a second way in which the kind of interreligious dialogue I am talking about can contribute to liberation, peace and unity. It has to do with *content*. Among authorities in the human and the natural sciences and especially among spokespersons in art and literature, we witness a growing consensus that one of the most important ingredients, if not *the* essential ingredient, in the much desired redefinition of ethical values has to do with a "paradigm shift" in the way we define ourselves, both as individual persons and as nations. In our understanding of *what* we *are* and *how* we are to *act*, we must move from the present dominant paradigm that sees the components of all reality as primarily individual, separate, dualistic, competitive, and hierarchical to a model that envisions the world of persons and nations as essentially relational, interdependent, inclusive, cooperative, and holistic.

In other words, we have to redefine and feel ourselves, in our relationships to each other and to this earth, as a living organism whose parts live in each other rather than as a machine assembled from pre-existing components. (Capra 1982; Wilber 1982; Boehm 1983; McFague 1987) Or as Raimundo Panikkar puts it, we have to grow in the sobering awareness that to ask the question, "Who am I?" I must ask the question, "Who are you ?" (Panikkar 1979, 213, 203) I cannot know myself without knowing you. Or, I cannot promote

my own welfare, unless I also promote yours. I cannot be myself without being you. Wilfred Cantwell Smith calls for the same paradigm shift when he urges a redefinition of the word "we:" when we hear that word, we must understand and feel not just our fellow countrypersons or believers: rather, when we say "we" we must mean all peoples, nations, religions. (Smith 1978)

This paradigm shift, this different way of understanding and feeling what we are as persons and nations, is basically the vision and the message of all the major world religions as it is contained in the different ways (very different ways!) they call persons to move from an ego-centered to a "Reality-centered" existence. It is, however, a vision the religions have not really applied beyond their own borders. If, through a dialogue based on shared concern for our suffering race and globe, the religions can reappropriate their visions of global unity and love and compassion, they can play a significant role in clarifying ethical values and in advancing the unity of all peoples.

There are some scholars who would hold that the contribution of religions to the clarification of values and to the construction of peace in our divided world is not only important but necessary – a *sine qua non* for the future of humanity. Historians Arnold Toynbee and Wilfred Cantwell Smith argue that the ruts of warring selfishness are worn so deeply in the path of human history that humanity will be able to extricate itself from these ruts *only* through the vision, the motivation, the empowerment coming from religious symbols and experience; only through the hope and the self-sacrificing love born of religious experience, these historians maintain, will humans be able to "muster the energy, devotion, vision, resolution, capacity to survive the disappointments that will be necessary – that *are* (already) necessary – for the challenge. . ." of building a peaceful and just world. (W.C. Smith 1962, 127)

Others take a more scientific, biological perspective for making the same point. Ralph Wendell Burhoe and Donald Campbell suggest that biological evolution, which for the most part has been motored by the so-called "selfish gene" and sought the survival of the fittest, has arrived at *cultural evolution*, which must be motored by new values that will seek the survival of the most cooperative. Whereas previously, only the strong could survive – and so competition and

even aggression were genetically programmed into our species – today, in our global village armed with nuclear weapons, only the cooperative will survive. Evolution, in other words, must move forward based on new values, not of competition and aggression, but of mutuality and cooperation. But where find such "new values"? How make the quantum leap from "nature red in tooth and claw" to culture concerned with love and justice?

Burhoe turns to the religions and argues that they can serve as the "missing link between ape-man's selfish genes and civilized altruism." (Burhoe 1979, 135) He holds that only the religious traditions of the world can provide the " 'cultural genes' of love, unity, justice, self-sacrifice necessary to overcome the weight of our biologically selfish genes and so to insure the continued evolution of the species." Of course, to do this, Burhoe adds that the religions will have to give up their absolute, competitive claims and enter into a new era of dialogue and cooperation. (Burhoe 1976; 1986; Campbell 1976).

Burhoe's case may be overstated, both in its biological and religious claims. And yet there are two elements in his position that are hard to deny: 1) that the religions of the world, in the original messages of their founders and in their Scriptures, do hold up a vision that there is a unifying force or presence within the universe and that human beings are called and empowered to live in unity, love, and justice; and 2) that our contemporary world, given the devastating dangers of its ethical confusion, stands in need of hearing and believing and acting upon such a message.

Yet if the religions are to deliver that message in a way in which the wider world can hear and trust it, they themselves will first have to enter into a new way of living and cooperating with each other. I have tried to show that the communalism, the conflicts, and the threats to human and ecological life that the religions of the world have helped cause can now be the stimulus and basis for such a renewed interreligious dialogue. Much depends on whether that dialogue takes place.

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