

DANIEL SEEGER **Quaker Universalists**



Quaker Universalists:
Their Ministry Among Friends
And In The World

Daniel Seeger



FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING ADDRESS
QUAKER UNIVERSALISTS FELLOWSHIP
APRIL 16, 1988

THE QUAKER UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP is composed of seekers, mainly, but not exclusively members of the Religious Society of Friends.

QUF seeks to promote open dialogue on its issues of interest. It writes in its statement of purpose:

While being convinced of the validity of our own religious paths, we not only accept but rejoice that others find validity in their spiritual traditions, whatever they may be. Each of us must find his or her own path, and each of us can benefit for the search of others.

In the selection of both its speakers and manuscripts, QUF tries to implement those ideas.

Notes

1. Message offered at the Fifth Anniversary celebration of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship, held at Providence Meetinghouse in Media, Pennsylvania on April 16, 1988.
2. John Hick, "The NonAbsoluteness of Christianity". from *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, editors. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987) page 29.
3. Quoted in Regina Bechtle, "C. G. Jung and Religion," in *Psyche and Spirit*, John Jay Heaney, editor. (New York: Paulist Press, 1973) page 69.
4. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (sic), (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) page 127.
5. Paraphrased from John Hick, "The NonAbsoluteness of Christianity," from *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, John Hick and Paul Knitter, editors. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987) page 29.
6. *Ibid.*, page ix.
7. Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985) page 13.
8. Ellen Zubrack Charry, "A Step Toward 'Ecumenical Esperanto'", from *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, Leonard Swidler, editor. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987) Pages 222, 223.
9. Homer A. Jack, editor; *Religion for Peace*. (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1973), page ix.
10. Quoted by Paul F. Knitter, *op.cit.*, page 20.

We should be one organ through which Friends are kept attuned to and can help advance a growing universalist spirit in religious communities outside of the Religious Society of Friends. It should be a vehicle through which Friends can experience directly the resources of sanctity, including different modes and traditions of worship, available through both Christian and non-Christian religious communities outside of Quakerism.

A Quaker Universalist spirituality strives for reconciliation among the different religious communities of the earth; it seeks to heal any overt or covert power struggles among them. It does not expect simply to eliminate religious institutions, nor necessarily to invent a new religion, but sees that each of the great spiritual traditions of humankind can be enriched if their members develop an active sympathy with, and a willingness to learn from, others on a different spiritual path. It recognizes that to make exclusive claims is not the best way to love our neighbors as ourselves. At the same time it recognizes that all people must know something of Jesus of Nazareth in order to grasp the full content of God's presence in history. It thinks optimistically about the possibilities of salvation in all the world's great spiritual traditions. Instead of cataloging the errors and the evil which has sprung up in the guise of religiosity, it practices forgiveness and seeks a new beginning. Its first concern is to cooperate with and to encourage anyone who is already promoting the Realm of God on Earth. It anticipates the day when all humankind's great spiritual traditions will participate full-heartedly in a mutual building up of a civilization of love. It recognizes that while spiritual life in its externals often presents us with a bewildering diversity, the capacity to apprehend the One in the many constitutes the special character of love. Let this capacity to apprehend the One in the many, and the love it expresses, be our special gift as Universalists to all other Friends, and to people of faith everywhere!

QUAKER UNIVERSALISTS

Their Ministry Among Friends And In The World¹

The Renaissance writer Giovanni Pica della Mirandola, in his *Oratory on the Dignity of the Human Person*, offers us an interesting variation on the Genesis myth. His formulation is one which illuminates some of the dilemmas faced by people interested in universalist spirituality, and so is a useful place to begin this reflection. Pica suggests that as the Creator completed the fashioning of the cosmos he (sic) longed for someone to reflect on the beauty, intricacy and majesty of so great a work, and to share with him the joy of its accomplishment.

The Creator realized that such a creature, if it was to appreciate with him the scope of the universe, could not be a member of one of the already created families of beings already subsumed totally in the cosmic dynamic. He thus began to consider the fashioning of human beings, creatures of undetermined nature, creatures which he eventually placed in the middle of the universe, saying to them:

Neither an established place, nor any special function have we given to you, and for this reason, that you may have and possess, according to your desires and judgement, whatever place, whatever form, and whatever functions you shall desire We have set you at the center of the world, so that from there you may more easily survey whatever is in it. We have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that, freely and honorably your own molder and maker, you may fashion yourself in whatever form you shall prefer To you it is granted to be whatever you will.

Thus, in terms of this parable, the meaning of human life, and the way human beings should live, is an open question.

One of the chief functions of the great religious traditions of humankind has been to draw people together around answers to this open question. Yet one of the intractable problems that we have faced through the ages is the strife engendered by competing visions of the purpose of human life. One of the great, and hopefully lasting, contributions of the liberal Enlightenment is that it established a consensus that putting an end to religious warfare and intolerance is morally good and is rationally preferable to protracted attempts at imposing our spiritual visions on others by force. But a by-product of this accomplishment is that people have been left to a large extent at sea.

It is perhaps the most salient characteristic of our society that we have in view no system of ends widely believed to be worth striving for *together*. We are left with a futile quest for purely private personal fulfillment which often ends in emptiness. Public discourse in such a context has been called “civil war carried on by other means.” Whether it be issues of war and peace, of nuclear weapons, of the various dimensions of social justice, of matters like abortion, sexual morality, or family policy, most of our public utterances are used to express disagreements, the most striking feature of which is their shrill and interminable character. What is significant about so much of contemporary culture is the absence of a shared sense among people of a point or purpose, of a final meaning to human life which can provide a context for understanding, and an opening to a mutually agreeable solution, to whatever maladies of spirit, of ethics, or of politics may confront us.

No amount of rational philosophy, nor of political debate, will ever convince us which faith is the true one,

Healing divisions in the Religious Society of Friends is an important mission for a person with a Quaker Universalist sensibility. A universalist is especially sensitive to cultivate a context in our Religious Society where all can give an authentic expression to their faith. Intolerance of Christianity, or of Christian vocabulary employed in expressions of faith, is not a form of universalism. But neither is an intolerant Christian dogmatism a form of Quakerism. We must help our Religious Society avoid both extremes. Members of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship should be attending Evangelical Yearly Meetings, Conservative Yearly Meetings, Yearly Meetings associated with Friends United Meeting, Yearly Meetings associated with Friends General Conference, and Independent Yearly Meetings, bringing back reports of whatever they found there that is good and true, and serving as a community building link among the various strands of Quakerism. We should incorporate within our ranks Friends of many different theological perspectives in a truly “universal” way. Our Fellowship should function in a way which nourishes the universalist leanings, however tentatively they may appear, of as broad a variety of Friends as possible.

Our Quaker Universalist Fellowship should seek to overcome the present perception which some people have that it represents a “pole” in the spectrum of acceptable Quaker beliefs – a pole which is the opposite of and which is opposed to Evangelical Friends. We should not have an image as the most “far-out” group of people who believe in as little as possible in the spiritual realm. Rather we should be seen to take an activist interest in the study of the diverse spiritualities and traditions of humankind, including those spiritualities which manifest within Quakerism, so as to build bridges and encourage sympathetic rapport, and so as to draw out those strands of common experience which are useful for the future and upon which a global spirituality can be built.

collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, to acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these persons.”

I would not argue that this is a fully developed Universalism, but it is a watershed of a kind, and represents a vast conversion experience for the institutional Roman Catholic Church, or at least for those of its members who attended the Council or who take its pronouncements seriously, a conversion experience which, in ways it would be beyond the scope of this consideration to document, both the liberal and evangelical wings of Protestant Christianity are lagging behind.

The crux of the matter for Christians is, of course, the concept of the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth and his dual nature as a human being and as one of the persons of the deity, an entity different in fundamental nature from any other earthly being. This troublesome and awkward concept is deeply imbedded in Christian faith and tradition, and represents a very difficult obstacle for Christians in facing Truth as the unfolding drama of the Creation is revealing it to us.

Some bold Christian theologians are doing a lot of work on the subject of the Incarnation. The various ways they are reinterpreting it in the light of our modern knowledge of the Truth and holiness in other faiths is more than we can discuss today. But it certainly is true that as Quaker Universalists we have a strong stake in the development of a new Christology, and should be participating helpfully in this process of exploration. An overly simple universalist Christology, such as one that claims that Jesus was simply another “prophet like Jefferson,” is inadequate to the reality that exists, and is scarcely helpful to Christians as they engage in one of the most fundamental of spiritual reappraisals since the Council of Jerusalem.

which conception of what it means to be a human being is valid. Our vision of our human destiny is one to which we can only be drawn by love, by enthusiasm. The great communities of faith, with their various scriptures and traditions, hold up for us our good possibilities, showing us their nobility and attractiveness, drawing us to them.

All the great sages of East and West, the great prophets, the great religious leaders, have understood that it is in relationship with others in communities of faith operating through history that human beings are enabled to make the godlike choices that establish their divine nature, that help them realize the magnificent potential within. It is the blindness to this process of spiritual realization and its possibilities, the vagueness and uncertainty about it, which gives our own time the characteristics of a dark age, with all its disorders.

In the face of this human predicament, we who are interested in the spirituality of universalism face the key question of whether the thrust of our universalism is to be constructivist, affirmative, and healing, or whether it will contribute further to the relativism, confusion, and disintegration in humankind’s spiritual landscape.

Religions and ideologies (one could very well include Marxism in this discussion) have in common that they offer answers to Pica della Mirandola’s great question. They tell us what we are meant to be as human beings, they offer explanations for the meaning of human existence, and they outline ways for us to live which are expressive of such meanings. They do this not only for individuals, but they aspire to orient whole cultures, and often succeed in doing so. They are comprehensive ways of life and thought.

It is probably fair to go so far as to say that not only Marxism, but all religions and ideologies are revolutionary, in that they are seeking to nurture a new kind of human being through their explanation of meaning and their

prescribed pattern of living, and to generate a society better than any thus far seen on earth. It is probably also fair to say that however brutal various religions and ideologies may have proven to be in actual practice, they are, in general, compassionate in *intent*, in that they seek to foster a right ordering of human life which would maximize happiness.

Throughout history different religions have succeeded to different degrees in their realization of these goals. As John Hick writes, religions have often

...provided an effective framework of meaning for millions of adherents, carrying them through the different stages of life, affording consolation in sickness, need, and calamity, and enabling them to celebrate communally their times of health, well-being, and creativity. Within the ordered psychic space created by a living faith, as expressed by the institutions and customs of a society, millions of men and women in generation after generation have coped with life's pains and challenges and rejoiced in its blessings; and some have gone beyond ego-domination into a transforming relation with the Eternal. Many have responded – again, in their varying degrees – to the moral claim of love/compassion mediated by the great traditions and widely formulated as the Golden Rule: “Let not any man do unto another any act that he wishes not done to himself by others, knowing it to be painful to himself.” (The Hindu *Mahabharata*, Shanti parva, cclx.21); “Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you.” (Confucius, *Analects*, Book XII, no. 2); “Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.” (The Buddhist *Udanavarga*, verse 18); “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” (Jesus, *Luke* 6:31); “No man is a true believer

abroad by the deceit of wicked men, that the eternal salvation of the soul can be won by the profession of any faith at all, provided that conduct conforms to the norms of justice and probity ... from this poisonous spring of indifferentism floats the false and absurd, or rather the mad, principle that we must secure and guarantee to each one liberty of conscience.”

Going back a little further to the Ecumenical Council of Florence in 1442, we find a proclamation that: “The Holy Church of Rome ... believes firmly, confesses and proclaims, that no one outside the Catholic Church, neither heathen nor Jew nor unbeliever, nor one who is separated from the Church, will share in eternal life, but will perish in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, if this person fails to join the Catholic Church before death.”

Nevertheless, the Second Vatican Council declared unmistakably in its “Constitution on the Church” that “those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – they too may achieve eternal salvation.” In the Council’s Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions it affirms the universality of grace and salvation, stating that even expressed atheists who follow their conscience are moved by grace and can partake in eternal life. For the first time in the history of official Church statements, the religions of the world are singled out and praised for the way that they have answered the “profound mysteries of the human condition.” The Council summarizes the beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, and recognizes that they contain what is “true and holy” and reflect “the Truth that enlightens every human being.” Further, the Council “exhorts” Christians “prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and

demographic trends, by the year 2000 A.D. only about 16% of the world's population will be Christian. Most Christian converts have come from polytheistic or animistic religions, or from religions that had already lost their personal hold on the hearts of their people. Often such conversions as these have not been purely matters of the heart, in that they took place in the context of the military, political and economic pressures of colonialism and cultural imperialism. In any case, when confronted by living religions, especially if they were undergirded by some kind of intellectual system, Christian missionaries have had practically no success at conversions. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism have been relatively untouched by Christianity except, in the case of the latter, when evangelism was accompanied by terror. Moreover, as the globe shrinks, it is no longer possible to deny that countless numbers of people have found salvation, to use a traditional term, through faiths other than Christianity. It is no longer possible to deny the vitality of other non-Christian religions, and their success in helping people to find meaning and to live lives of heroism and holiness. Canon Max Warren, former Secretary General of the Church Missionary Society in London, has observed that "the impact of agnostic science will turn out to be child's play compared to the challenge to Christian theology of the faiths of other people."¹⁰

There is much honest grappling with this situation going on within the Christian Church, and part of our task as Quaker Universalists is to support honest reassessments by Christian thinkers of the significance of all this. Indeed, there have already been remarkable changes in Christian attitudes. For example, it was scarcely a hundred and fifty years ago that Pope Gregory XVI wrote: "We come now to a source which is, alas! all too productive of the deplorable evils afflicting the Church today. We have in mind indifferentism, that is, the fatal opinion everywhere spread

unless he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." (The Muslim *Hadtih, Muslim, imam, 71-2*).²

Carl Gustav Jung has made a well-known comment on the value of religious faith: "Among all my patients in the second half of life ... there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age had given to their followers, and none of them has really been healed who did not regain his religious outlook."³

I recently saw a television program entitled "Thy Kingdom Come ... Thy Will Be Done." It was made by British producers, but surveyed the burgeoning evangelical movement in the United States. It was developed from a liberal point of view and so did not gloss over much that is sinister, and in fact which is blatantly counter to the teachings of Jesus, in the growth of this religious Right. Yet I could not help concluding from the many interviews the producers conducted with evangelical church members that people, probably very many people, were finding in the movement a way and a guide for life which was bringing them meaning and joy.

Now, one of the things that politically active evangelicals understand very well is that for human beings to change significantly, social structures must change. Except for a few very exceptional sages, people do not and cannot alter their lives profoundly all by themselves. The world cannot be saved simply by trying to save individual persons. The social structures within which individuals live must also be saved. People who grow up in different societies and different historical periods are formed in different ways. They become quite different persons than they would have if they had grown up elsewhere.

Thus, all significant religious teachers have started communities of believers intended to be the beginnings of a new culture, including, for example, the Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, George Fox, and Francis of Assisi. This insight is what fuels the American Friends Service Committee's preoccupation with "social change," and the Marxist determination to build a new society. It is what fuels as well the evangelicals' disquieting thrust into the political arena.

Most universalists shrink from "evangelizing" anyone, from aggressively promoting any particular religious perspective. Is there a universalist way of life which can fill diverse human needs? Do we have more thinking to do about this, lest the arena simply be captured by others whose inadequate way of addressing questions of meaning and of ways of being nevertheless become seductive because there is nothing else in view for seekers to find?

In this nuclear age human beings are living out their lives confronting every day the very worst that evil can do. How, in all our diversity, can human beings live together in an atmosphere of peace, of active sympathy, instead of regularly falling prey to the kinds of struggles which now may erupt in a holocaust, in a nuclear omnicide, a killing off of everything?

William Cantwell Smith, professor of the comparative history of religion at Harvard, has written: "My own view is that the task of constructing even that minimum degree of world fellowship that will be necessary for humankind to survive at all is far too great to be accomplished on any other than a religious basis. From no other source than his faith, I believe, can a person muster the energy, devotion, vision, resolution, and capacity to survive disappointment, that will be necessary - that are necessary - for this challenge."⁴

We must bring together all the wisdom, devotion and insight that humanity has accumulated in its long history,

remote or standoffish.

Finally, those of us interested in a Quaker Universalist spirituality should avoid falling into the assumption that a kind of formless and blanket hostility to Christianity is a service. Rather, it is our job to celebrate and raise up all the beautiful things that Christianity and its saints have brought to the human enterprise, and to help project these good things into the future. We Quaker Universalists must occasionally be prepared to play the role of Christian evangelists, as I on some occasions have felt it right to do. For as we encounter people of many backgrounds in the new global spiritual community, we will occasionally meet people hungering to know about Christianity and about how the activity of God in human affairs finds manifestation in this particular faith experience. I am overstating the case, just to make a point, in using the term "evangelism", for certainly any such interpretations of Christianity I have offered have never had the goal of asserting the superiority of Christian spirituality over other faiths. But I have often found myself engaged in efforts to help people understand what is true and beautiful in the Christian message.

It behooves us also to recognize that institutional Christianity is presently facing one of the gravest crises of its existence - a crisis comparable in import to that faced at the very first council held at Jerusalem and described by the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Galatians and in the Book of Acts; a crisis greater even than those posed by the Protestant Reformation and by the scientific age. For regrettably, a great deal of Christian theology, and the faith of a great many people, has been hung on the untenable proposition that Christianity is superior to all the other world's faiths, and that all of humanity is destined to become Christianized. Now, however, after extensive efforts by Christian missionaries, efforts which have often had great achievements to their credit, it seems that, given world

- the practices of love, faith, and hope;
- nonviolence:
- the practice of inner silence, of chanting, and of other devotional exercises to still the self-willed impulses of the mind and heart so that Truth can be heard.

Is there any hope for the human future unless more and more people become imbued with these values which are common to many or all of the great faith traditions?

In October of 1970, 221 representatives of all the world's major faiths gathered at Kyoto, Japan under the sponsorship of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. They found in common that they possessed:

- a conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family, of the equality and dignity of all human beings;
- a feeling for the inviolability of the individual and his conscience; a feeling for the value for the human community;
- a recognition that might does not make right, that human power is not sufficient unto itself and is not absolute;
- the belief that love, compassion, selflessness and the power of the spirit and of inner sincerity ultimately have greater strength than hate, enmity and self-interest;
- a feeling of obligation to stand on the side of the poor against the rich and the oppressor;
- deep hope that ultimately good will be victorious.

Admittedly those who gathered for this conference may not have been typical of the main streams of their various spiritual communities, but rather came from their more venturesome and charitable wings. Nevertheless, a declaration such as this shows the true direction in which all the world's faiths should move. It is our job as Quaker Universalists to cultivate and nourish these trends, which we can only do by understanding deeply the spiritual resources offered by different ways of devotion, and by being active participants in interfaith dialogues, not by being

not as elements of rivalry, but in honest seeking for that new way of life which will encourage survival. Surely universalist spirituality, with its readiness to acknowledge truth from whatever religious camp it might be spoken, and with its vision of a charitable rapport among religious traditions, has a vital contribution to make in bringing a new world to birth. But to make such a contribution, to do what is required of us in today's world, will certainly involve an activist and involved approach, will require conceiving of ourselves and our Fellowship as something more than a place where people gather for shelter as refugees from various forms of Christian malpractice.

Correctly to assess the role and function of religions in human life it is necessary to acknowledge that religious institutions and religious cultures have been plagued with what I have termed "malpractice".

- Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all approved of slavery until barely a hundred and fifty years ago and all, except for minorities within them, routinely violate the human rights of women even today.
- Hinduism has supported a caste system and other outrageous practices, such as allowing or encouraging widows to cremate themselves on their husband's funeral pyre.
- Christianity is guilty of the burning of witches, of the torturing to death of people regarded as heretics, and of the persecution of Jews.
- Islam has promoted Holy Wars, and often still enforces the cruelest of punishments on members of its society it regards as having transgressed its laws. In fact, many aspects of Islamic law stand in stark contradiction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (1948).
- The poor of Latin America have for generations been

consoled by the symbol of a heaven and the rewards awaiting far them after they have passed through this vale of tears, all the while their religious feelings have been manipulated to allow landowners to take great advantage of them.

- There are many other ways in which the world's religions have contributed devastatingly to the divisions of humankind.⁵

In considering this panorama, one is tempted to inquire if it can be demonstrated that any particular religious tradition has succeeded in producing more saints in proportion to its population, or a higher quality of saintliness, than any of the other great streams of religious life. Can we demonstrate that any of the great religions has promoted the welfare of humanity better than others?

Again, John Hick reaches what is for me a most sensible conclusion: "It seems impossible to make the global judgement that any one religious tradition has contributed more good or less evil, or a more favorable balance of good over evil, than the others. As vast, complex totalities, the world traditions seem to be more or less on a par with each other. None can be singled out as manifestly superior."⁶

The complexity of this panorama of the role of religion in human life can engender various problems for those who are interested in universalist spirituality, a spirituality which can be regarded, at least in part, as growing out of a desire to conserve what is good in faith traditions and dispense with what is bad.

One mistake is to regard faith issues in a rather cold and detached fashion, as if religion is a kind of superstition better dispensed with or kept around only in very diluted forms. This is an attempt to intellectualize religious experience or to subsume it under a system of rationalist philosophy. But such a bloodless approach to religious faith is certainly a far cry from the concrete examples of prophesy and sanctity we have actually seen in the religious experience

concern to extinguish craving for things of this world (e.g., fame, honor, and power), or to the Muslim's distress that one is tempted to ignore the will of God?⁸

We obviously cannot now know what the future holds. It could be that some new form of religion or of faith will be revealed containing useful elements from major existing faiths. But certainly another possibility is simply that the existing world religions might retain their current spheres of influence, but would come gradually, through dialogue and searching, to evolve so as to incorporate good elements one from the other, and release from their practices and attitudes whatever a new global consciousness shows to be seriously retrograde.

It follows from all this that the first characteristic of a Quaker Universalist spirituality will be an enthusiastic and positive affirmation of the significant role of religious traditions in defining the meaning of human existence and in giving significant formation to individual human life and to the social order. Moreover, we must see that now that we live in a single interconnected and interdependent world, it is humankind's religious traditions which offer us the best hope for shaping a viable future.

There are themes common to many of the world's major religious faiths:

- the idea that a human being is placed on this earth by a power greater than him/herself and for purposes not strictly one's own;
- the idea that this larger creative principle is at once mysterious and yet also intimately knowable, that it resides somehow in all people;
- the idea that right living involves an abandonment of egotistical willfulness and an obedience to larger purposes;
- the idea that to do this brings great joy, in spite of all expectations to the contrary;

knowledge of their own and other spiritual traditions and practices. We cannot expect truly to grasp the meaning and significance of any faith tradition by standing outside of it and looking in.

Ellen Zubrick Charry, Associate Program Director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, asks an interesting set of questions about possible points of contact among the world's religious faiths:

...(I)s the Marxist notion of suffering totally unrecognizable to the Buddhist? Or is it possible that in identifying suffering and oppression, respectively, as a central problem, each has excluded an aspect of suffering upon which the other has fastened? How far is the existentialist naming of the problem of meaninglessness from the Hindu expression of the problem as entanglement in finitude? Is there any common ground between the Hindu naming of the solution as liberation from redeath and the existentialist naming of the solution as living an authentic existence? Is the Christian diagnosis of sin unrecognizable to the Muslim who speaks of forgetfulness of the divine nature ... or to the Marxist who sees human greed as destroying the lives of those in grinding poverty? Is the Jew able to hear the Islamic claim about the universality of God despite Judaism's claim to an exclusive covenant between God and the Jewish people? Are feminists and black theologians unsympathetic to the Buddhist notion that all suffer because all crave? Can the Marxist readily ignore the existentialist claim that economic arrangements, important though they be, do not begin to diminish Sisyphus's misery? Is the Christian concern over alienation from God unrelated to the Buddhist

of humankind. It is certainly a far cry from the mood and the attitude of George Fox and the valiant sixty, who were quite passionate about their religious insights. It certainly bears little kinship to the flavor of the testimony of many of the great Christian mystics about whom Rufus Jones wrote and whom he regarded as persons who prefigured Quakerism.

An argument can be made, although it cannot be done within the scope of the present consideration, that rational philosophy cannot answer the profound question raised by Giovanni Pica della Mirandola's creation allegory, nor can it answer questions of meaning or of ways of life. These can only be provided to those who participate in the life of a community of faith, a group whose thought and action are informed by some distinctive profession of settled conviction, and who pass from generation to generation the wisdom of the community.

There is a second inclination which is apt to overtake those interested in a universalist spirituality. In the face of the bewildering panorama of humankind's religious experience, and in the face of what has been noted earlier as the impossible task of rendering judgement overall regarding which religious cultures or religious traditions most helped or most hindered humankind, it is tempting to sink into a sort of indiscriminate relativism, an unwillingness to judge some things bad or good, or better or worse, than other things.

This disinclination to make judgements probably stems from an unwillingness to appear "dogmatic," or culturally chauvinistic, or to mimic the triumphalist and extravagant claims traditional to Christianity regarding other religious faiths.

Yet we have to exercise discernment. While there is a real need to be broad-minded and to free ourselves from fanaticism, we certainly cannot tolerate religious cannibals,

religious sacrifices of human victims, religious wars of aggression, religious murders, and religious castes simply as part of the “infinite variety” of human faith. We are apt to be more sharply aware of the failures and the evils of Christianity than we are of the other world faiths because we have been exposed to them more relentlessly. But there are some aspects of all the great religious traditions for which resistance is imperative. While we want to be cautious and not rush to judgements merely on the basis of our own inherited religious or cultural biases, we must, after humble and careful searching, be prepared to resist with vigor the shadow side, or destructive side, of a particular religious tradition.

A third misconception would be that it is possible to contribute toward the projection of a global spirituality adequate to humankind’s future on the basis of a superficial dabbling – or Way-hopping – among religious traditions. One cannot plumb the depths of humankind’s spiritual needs at this juncture of history nor develop the capacity to address these needs profoundly on the basis of oblique or glancing encounters with the substance of many different spiritual traditions. It is only by having connected with the deepest elements of one spiritual tradition that one will be sensitized enough to respond to the deepest elements in another. I think it is no accident that those who have done most to bring about a rapprochement among two or more spiritual traditions have been deeply immersed in their own tradition. I am thinking particularly of people like Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, who accomplished much in building bridges of communication and feeling between Christianity and the Taoist, Buddhist, and Hindu faiths. His ability to resonate to the truths in these faiths, and to look sympathetically at the dissonances between each of them and Christianity itself, was enhanced, not impeded, by his many years of Christian monastic discipline and study. A post-exclusivist or post-

dogmatic religious identity cannot rule out belonging to one’s own religion. We need religious roots. “A kind of ‘religious space trip’ by which we try to cruise mystically above all religious traditions without belonging to any one of them does not permit serious religious commitment and living. To be religious and to be serious about it one must, generally, belong to a religion.”⁷

Still another misconception is the idea that a future global spirituality will be some sort of wholly novel theological concept. But a glance at humankind’s religious past gives very little reason to suppose this would be the case. Although humankind certainly needs to adopt a new global spirituality, it is hardly likely that this will be unrelated to the spiritualities which already exist. Just consider the past. Christianity expropriated vast amounts of Jewish spirituality and Hellenistic philosophy in its essential self-definition. The prophet Mohammed built the Islamic faith on Jewish and Christian religious roots. He acknowledges both Moses and Jesus Christ, and the Koran even concedes to Jesus the miracle of a virgin birth! Buddhism, although in some senses a reaction against the Vedic spiritualities which Prince Gautama encountered in his searchings, nevertheless incorporated many modes of thought and practice from Hinduism.

While we universalists are sometimes derided by others for our syncretism, the fact is that all the great spiritual traditions of the past have been syncretic and have tended to absorb unto themselves anything useful that was in view. The only difference in the current situation is that the modern technologies of communication and transportation have made many more traditions grist for a spiritual seeker’s mill than ever before was the case. One can expect that as a global spirituality begins to emerge it will contain elements from many of the existing world faiths and will tend to be fashioned by people who have deep experience with and