

Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or Dialogue

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In *Muslims in Dialogue: The Evolution of a Dialogue*, L. Swidler, ed, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, pp. 1-22, 1992.

Available at <http://global-dialogue.com/swidlerbooks/muslim.htm>

This is not the place to review the history of Christian-Muslim relations. This history may now be read in the erudite works of Norman Daniel.¹ The reading is sad and agonizing. The conclusion which may be safely drawn from this history is that Christianity's involvement with the Muslim World was so full of misunderstanding, prejudice, and hostility that it has warped the Western Christian's will and consciousness. "Would to God Christianity had never met Islam!" will reverberate in the mind of any student patient enough to peruse that history.² On the other side, Muslim-Christian relations have been determined by the Qur'an.³ Doctrinally, therefore, these relations have seen no change. Throughout their history, and despite the political hostilities, the Muslims revered Jesus as a great prophet and his faith as divine religion. As for the Christians, the Muslims argued with them in the manner of the Qur'an. But when it came to political action, they gave them the benefit of the doubt as to whether they followed the Christianity of Jesus or of the Church. Muhammad and 'Umar's wager for a Christian victory over the Zoroastrians, the Meccan Muslim's choice of, welcome and protection by Christian Abyssinia and Muhammad's personal waiting upon the Christian Abyssinian delegates to Madinah, the Prophet's covenant with the Christians of Najran, 'Umar's covenant with the Archbishop of Jerusalem and his refusal to hold prayer on the premises of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre lest later Muslims might claim the place, the total cooperation of the Umawis and 'Abbasis with their Christian subjects, and of the Umawis of Cordova with Christians who were not their subjects-all these are landmarks in a record of cooperation and mutual esteem hardly paralleled in any other history. Some persecution, some conversion under influences of all sorts, some aggression, some doctrinal attacks going beyond the limits defined by the Qur'an, there were, without a doubt. The Muslims in all places and times were not all angels! But such were scattered cases whose value falls to the ground when compared with the overwhelming spread of history which has remained true to this Qur'anic position.

I. The Present Problem

Perhaps nothing is more anachronistic-indeed absurd-than the spectacle of the Western Christian missionary preaching to Muslims the Western figurization of the religion of Jesus. The absurdity is twofold: First, the West, whence the missionary comes and which sustains him in his effort, has for decades stopped finding meaning in that figurization which is the content of mission. Indeed, in the missionary himself, that figurization determines but one little portion of his consciousness, the remainder falling under the same corroding secularism, materialism and skeptical empiricism so common in Western thought and culture. Second, the missionary preaches this figurization to Muslims who, in North Africa and the Near East, were thrice Christians. They were Christians in the sense of preparing, through the spiritualization and interiorization of the Semitic religion, for the advent of Jesus. It was their consciousness and spirit which served God as human substrate and historical circumstance for that advent. Naturally, they were the first to "acknowledge" Jesus and to believe in him as crystallization of a reality which is themselves. They were Christians in the second sense of the Western figurization of Christianity when, having fallen under the dominion of Byzantium, they flirted with that figurization and in fact adopted all its doctrinal elements regardless of whether or not they officially joined the churches of Western Christianity. After living with this figurization a while, they welcomed and embraced Islam. But they remained, even as Muslims, Christians in the sense of holding the realization of the ethic of Jesus as the

conditio sine qua non of Islamicity and of realizing a fair part of the Jesus-ethic in their personal lives. The comedy in evidence today is that the missionary is utterly unaware of this long experience of the Muslim with Jesus Christ.

This Western missionary, whether *monastes* or other, has associated himself with, and often played the role of colonial governor, trader, settler, military, physician and educator. In the last two decades, after the Muslim countries achieved independence, he found for himself the role of development expert. Expertise in poultry breeding, neurological surgery or industrial management, and the crying need of the Muslim as yet underdeveloped countries were callously taken as God-sent occasions to evangelize, thus stirring within the Muslim a sense of being exploited and producing still more bitterness. Besides, such an expert-missionary is often sponsored by, if not the direct employee of, the aiding agency of the Western government; and a fair harmonization of his tactics and purposes with those of that government were safely presupposed. The Western World knows of no Christian who, moved by the Sermon on the Mount, came to live among Muslims as a native, who made their burden his burden, their hopes and yearnings his hopes and yearnings. Albert Schweitzer, the idol of the modern West in Christian self-giving to the natives of Africa, was as unchristian as to condemn all the Africans' search for liberty;⁴ indeed, publicly to request President Eisenhower to prevent a United Nations debate on Algeria. The Africans ought to be helped and their suffering relieved, this saint of the twentieth century commanded his fellow Christian whites-but as our colonial subjects! Moreover, where it dissociated itself from imperialism and was purely religious, Western Christian mission to the Muslim World was never a mission of Jesus, but a mission of the Western figurization of Christianity arrogantly asserted in words, hardly ever exemplified in deeds. Modern Christendom has produced a Mrs. Vester who really gave and, fortunately, is still giving of her life to the orphans of Jerusalem.⁵ There probably were and still are other isolated individuals of this caliber. Nonetheless, the persistent effort needed to establish an ethically respectable relation with Muslim society has been neglected. Since it has brought hardly any significant conversions and aggravated the alienation of the two world communities, and since the Muslims, as well as Muslim World Christians, regard it as pouring ideological salt into political wounds inflicted by the Crusades and a century of colonization, the mission chapter of Christian history, as we have so far known it, had better be closed, the hunt called off, the missionaries withdrawn and the mission-arm of the Catholic Church and of the World Council of Churches liquidated.

To say all this is not to advocate isolation. In fact, isolation is impossible. The world is simply too small, and our lives are utterly interdependent. Not only our survival, but even our well-being and happiness depend on our cooperation. Mere diplomatic courtesy or casual coalescence of political interests will not suffice. No genuine and effective cooperation can proceed without mutual esteem and respect, without agreement on purposes, final objectives and standards. If it is to last through the generations and withstand the excruciating travails that it must and will face in the construction of a viable world-ecumene, cooperation must be firmly based on a communion of faith in ultimate principles, on communion in religion.

There is yet a more important and logically prior consideration why isolation is neither possible nor desirable. In Islam as well as in Christianity, and probably in all other religions, the man of religion does not, in his religious claim, assert a tentative hypothesis, nor a truth among other truths, or a version of the truth among other possible versions, but *the* truth. This is so much part of religious experience and of the claim resting on such experience that to deny it is to caricature the religion as a whole. Neither Islam nor Christianity can or will ever give it up. Certainly this is exclusivism; but *the* truth is exclusive. It cannot run counter to the laws of identity, of contradiction, of the excluded middle. Unlike science which works with probabilities, religion works with certainties. Religious diversity is not merely a religious problem. If the religion in question lays claim to *the* truth, contrary or diverse claims are intellectual problems which cannot be ignored. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the exclusivist claim is as much *de jure* as it is *de facto*.

In our day and age, exclusivism casts a bad smell. Having worked with probabilities for three hundred years, as scientists or the audience of scientists, and-as philosophers or the audience of philosophers-with skeptical notions of the truth for over half a century, we contract our noses whenever an exclusive claim to the truth is made. As men of religion, I hope we all have the strength of our convictions, and feel neither offended nor shamed by what our faiths claim. On the other hand, there is something shameful about exclusivism, just as there is about mission. That is to lay one's claim with authority, to refuse to listen to or silence criticism, and to hold tenaciously to one's claim in face of evidence to the contrary. We regard the exclusivist in science stupid, and even insane, for running in the face of evidence. Such opprobrium equally belongs to the man of religion guilty of the same offence against the truth. Resistance to evidence, however, is not a necessary quality of religion, nor of the man of religion. It falls within the realm of ethics of knowledge. True, religious theses are not as easily demonstrable as those of science; and the man of religion appears often to rout the evidence when it would be more just to say that he is not yet convinced thereby. But where the evidence is significant or conclusive, to flout it is a deficiency of the man. Though its object is religious or moral, exclusivism is epistemological and hence not subject to moral considerations. On the other hand, although its object is epistemological, fanaticism is moral.

Islam and Christianity cannot therefore be impervious to each other's claims, for just as it is irrefutably true that each lays claim to *the* truth and does so candidly, it is irrefutably true that the truth is one, that unless the standpoint is one of skepticism, of two diverse claims to *the* truth, one or both must be false! In the awareness that the standpoint of religion is that of a claim to *the* truth, none but the most egotistic tribalism or cynicism would sit content with its grasp of *the* truth while diverse claims to *the* one and the same truth are being made just as candidly by others. The man of religion, however, is moral; and in Christianity and Islam, he is so *par excellence*. He must therefore go out into the world, teach *the* truth which his religious experience has taught him and in the process refute the contrary claims. In Islam as well as in Christianity, the man of religion is not a tribalist nor a cynic; and his personal relation to other men, if not the fate itself of other men, weighs heavily in the outcome of his own fate. Hence, both the Muslim and the Christian are intellectually and morally bound to concern themselves with the religious views of each other, indeed of all other men. To concern oneself with the convictions of another man is to understand and to learn these convictions, to analyze and criticize them and to share with their adherents one's own knowledge of the truth. If this is mission, then Islam and Christianity must missionize to the ends of the earth. I realize the equivocation of the term, and I suggest that the word "mission" itself be dropped from our vocabulary and the term "dialogue" be used to express the man of religions concern for men's convictions.

"Dialogue" then is a dimension of human consciousness (as long as that consciousness is not skeptical), a category of the ethical sense (as long as that sense is not cynical). It is the altruistic arm of Islam and of Christianity, their reach beyond themselves. Dialogue is education at its widest and noblest. It is the fulfillment of the command of reality to become known, to be compared and contrasted with other claims, to be acquiesced in if true, amended if inadequate, and rejected if false. Dialogue is the removal of all barriers between men for a free intercourse of ideas where the categorical imperative is to let the sounder claim to the truth win. Dialogue disciplines our consciousness to recognize the truth inherent in realities and figurizations of realities beyond our usual ken and reach. If we are not fanatics, the consequence can-not be anything but enrichment to all concerned. Dialogue, in short, is the only kind of inter-human relationship worthy of man! Vouching for Islam and, unless my reading of Christianity has completely deceived me, for Christianity as well, dialogue is of the essence of the two faiths, the theater of their eventual unity as the religion of God, the religion of truth.⁶

We must say it boldly that the end of dialogue is conversion; not conversion to my, your or his religion, culture, mores or political regime, but to *the* truth. The conversion that is hateful to Islam or to Christianity is a conversion forced, bought or cheated out of its unconscious subject. Conversion as conviction of the truth is not only legitimate but obligatory -indeed, the only alternative consistent with sanity, seriousness and dignity. Moreover, the mutual understanding

between Islam and Christianity which we yearn for is not merely the conceptual, descriptive knowledge of Islam texts and manuscripts achieved by the *Orientalistik* discipline, nor of the Christian tradition achieved by the Muslim and older discipline of "*Al Milal wa al Nihal*" where the elements constitutive of Christianity are simply listed as in a series. It is primarily an understanding of the religion in the sense of faith and ethos, of apprehending the moving appeal of its categories and values, of their determining power. Religious facts may be studied scientifically like any specimens of geology. But to understand them religiously is to apprehend them as life-facts whose content is this power to move, to stir and to disturb, to command and to determine. But to apprehend this power is to be determined by it, and to do so is precisely to attain religious conviction-in short, conversion, however limited or temporary. To win all mankind to *the* truth is the highest and noblest ideal man has ever entertained. That history has known many travesties of this ideal, that man has inflicted tremendous sufferings upon his fellowmen in the pursuit of it are arguments against man, not against the ideal. They are the reasons why dialogue must have rules. Dialogue according to rule is the only alternative becoming of man in an age where isolation-were it ever possible-implies being bypassed by history, and non-cooperation spells general disaster. Granted, the rules must be critical and their presuppositions the fewest and simplest.

II. Methodology of Dialogue

Granted then that dialogue is necessary and desirable, that its final effect should be the establishment of truth and its serious, free, candid and conscious acceptance by all men, we may now move on to the specific principles of methodology which guarantee its meaningfulness and guard against its degeneration into propaganda, brainwashing or soul-purchasing. These are the following:

1. No communication of any sort may be made *ex cathedra*, beyond critique. No man may speak with silencing authority. As for God, He may have spoken with silencing authority when man was an infant, and infant man may have accepted and submitted. To mature man, however, His command is not whimsical and peremptory. He argues for, explains and justifies His command, and is not offended if man asks for such justification. Divine revelation is authoritative, but not authoritarian; for God knows that the fulfillment of His command which issues from rational conviction of its intrinsic worth is superior to that which is blind. Fully aware of his moral freedom, modern man cannot be subjected; nor can he subject himself to any being without cause; nor can such cause be incomprehensible, irrational, esoteric or secret.⁷
2. No communication may violate the laws of internal coherence mentioned earlier. Paradox is legitimate only when it is not final, and the principle overarching thesis and antithesis is given. Otherwise, discourse will issue in unintelligible riddles.
3. No communication may violate the laws of external coherence; that is to say, man's religious history. The past may not be regarded as unknowable, and historiography assumed to stand on a par with either poetry or fiction. Historical reality is discoverable by empirical evidence, and it is man's duty and greatness to press ever forward towards the genuine understanding and reconstruction of his actual past. The limits of evidence are the only limits of historical knowledge.
4. No communication may violate the law of correspondence with reality, but should be open to corroboration or refutation by reality. If the laws of nature are not today what they were before Einstein or Copernicus, it is not because there are no laws to nature, nor because reality is unknowable, but because there is a knowable reality which corroborates the new insights. The psychic, ethical and religious sensitivities of the people, of the age, are part of this reality; and man's knowledge of them is most relevant for the Muslim-Christian dialogue we are about to begin.
5. Dialogue presupposes an attitude of freedom vis-à-vis the canonical figurization. Jesus is a point at which the Christian has contact with God. Through him, God has sent down a revelation.

Just as this revelation had to have its carrier in Jesus, it had to have a space-time circumstance in the historical development of Israel. Equally, Muhammad, the Prophet, is a point at which the Muslim has contact with God Who sent a revelation through him. Muhammad was the carrier of that revelation, and Arab consciousness and history provided the space-time circumstance for its advent. Once the advent of these revelations was complete, and men began to put their faith there in numbers and confronted new problems calling for new solutions, there arose the need to put the revelation in concepts for the ready use of the understanding, in precepts for that of the intuitive faculties, and in legal notions and provisions for the guidance of behavior. The revelations were "figurized." Simultaneously, as is natural in such cases, different minds created different figurizations because they had different perceptions of the same reality. This latter pluralism is not a variety of the object of faith, the content revealed *an sich*, but of that object or content in *percipi*, i.e., as it became the object of a perception that is intellectual, discursive, intuitive and emotional all at once. Within each religion, the object of faith which is also the content of the revelation was, in itself, all one and the same. Although the figurizations of the revelation were many, that of which they were the figurization was one. Jesus is one; the God who sent him, and the divine revelation with which he was sent, each and every one of these was one, not many. When, as objects of human knowledge, they were conceptualized and perceptualized, they became many. The same is of course true in the case of the figurization of Islam.

The pluralistic variety of men, of their endowments and talents, their needs and aspirations, and the peculiarities of their varying environments and historical circumstances produced a great array of figurizations in both religions. Undoubtedly, some of them were, some others were not, and still others were more or less inspired. There were differences in the accuracy of figurization, in the adequacy of conceptualization and perceptualization, and outrightly in the truthfulness and veracity of the representation. That is all too natural. Disputation and contention arose and lasted for many centuries; they continue to our present day. In the case of Christianity, it became evident that one of the figurizations surpassed in the mind of the majority all other figurizations. It must then be, the community concluded, an identical copy of the content revealed. Since this content is holy and is the truth, the thinkers of the community reasoned, all other figurizations are "heresies" inasmuch as any departure from the Holy is anathema, and any variance from the Truth is falsehood. Slowly but surely, the "other" figurizations were suppressed, and the chosen figurization stood as "the dogma," "the catholic Truth." In the case of Islam, the general religious and ethical principles revealed in the Qur'an were subjected to varying interpretations, and a large array of schools produced differing figurizations of law and ethics. As in the case of Jesus, the life of the Prophet was the subject of numerous figurizations. In order to bolster its authority and add to its faith in its own genuineness, each school projected its own thought onto his own person. Consensus finally eliminated the radical figurizations and preserved those which, in the judgment of the community, contained all the essentials. Later Muslims sanctified this figurization of the fathers, solemnly closed the gates of any creative interpretation however orthodox, and practically, though not theoretically, hereticated every departure from what they had made canonical.

Being human conceptualizations and perceptualizations of reality, the figurizations of Islam and Christianity are necessarily tinged with the particularism of space-time. It is quite possible, therefore, that some later generation might find some aspect of the holy content in the old figurization dimmed by time or distance; that the said content might need to be rediscovered therein; that some other generation might find new figurizational items which express to them that content or some part thereof more vividly. Certainly this is what happened in the Reformation, which brought in its wake revivification of many an aspect of the divine revelation of Jesus and released new as well as dormant energies in the service of the holy. This is also what happened in the Taymiyan (fourteenth century) and Wahhabi (eighteenth century) reforms in Islam.

Would such a re-presentation or rediscovery necessitate the Christian's and the Muslim's going out, as it were, of their own figurizations? out of their "catholic" truths? Not *simpliciter*. For there is no *a priori* or wholesale condemnation of any figurization. But we should never forget that, as a

piece of human work, very figurization is capable of growing dim in its conveyance of the holy, not because the holy has changed, but because man changes perspectives. Truth, goodness and value, God and the divine will for man as such, are always the same. But His will in the change and flux of individual situations, of the vicissitudes of history-and that is precisely what the figurization had been relational to-must be changing in order that the divine will for man be always the same. To question the figurization is identically to ask the popular question: What is God's will in the context of our generation? of our historical situation? indeed, in the context of our personal individuation? The dimness of the figurization must be removed at all costs; its meanings must be rediscovered and its relevance recaptured.

There are those who argue that the figurization can and should never be transcended. Some of these do not recognize the humanity of the figurization. Others insist that piety and morality are rediscoverable only in the figurization itself. To seek the ever-new relevance of the divine imperative is for them to relate the figurization of the fathers to the new situations of human life and existence. That that is not a barren alternative is proved for them by numerous movements within the Christian tradition, and by a number of juristic interpretations of the shari'ah, in the Islamic tradition. Whether or not the present needs can be met by such means cannot be decided beforehand, and must be answered only after the needs themselves have been elaborated and the relating attempted. We can say at this stage, however, that a considerable degree of freedom *vis-à-vis* the figurization is necessary to insure the greatest possible tolerance for the issues of the present to voice their claim.

6. In the circumstances in which the Muslims and Christians find themselves today, primacy belongs to the ethical questions, not the theological. When one compares the canonical figurization of Christianity with that of Islam, one is struck by the wide disparateness of the two traditions. While Christianity regards the Bible as endowed with supreme authority, especially as it is interpreted with "right reason"-that is to say, in loyalty to the central tenets of the figurization according to the Protestant school, or in loyalty to the tradition of the Church as understood by its present authorities, according to the Catholic-Islam regards the Bible as a record of the divine word but a record with which the human hand had tampered, with holy as well as unholy designs. Secondly, while Christianity regards God as man's fellow, a person so moved by man's failure that He goes to the length of sacrifice for his redemption, Islam regards God primarily as the Just Being whose absolute justice-with all the reward and doom for man that it enjoins-is not only sufficient mercy, but the only mercy coherent with divine nature. Whereas the God of Christianity acts in man's salvation, the God of Islam *commands* him to do that which brings that salvation about. Thirdly, while Christianity regards Jesus as the second person of a triune God, Islam regards him as God's human prophet and messenger. Fourthly, while Christianity regards space-time and history as hopelessly incapable of embodying God's kingdom, Islam regards God's kingdom as truly realizable-indeed as meaningful at all-only within the contexts of space-time and history. Fifthly, while Christianity regards the Church as the body of Christ endowed with ontic significance for ever and ever, Islam regards the community of faith as an instrument mobilized for the realization of the divine pattern in the world, an instrument whose total value is dependent upon its fulfillment or otherwise of that task.

This list is far from complete. But it does show that the pursuit of dialogue on the level of theological doctrine is marred by such radical differences that no progress may be here expected without preliminary work in other areas. Since it is at any rate impossible for this generation of Muslims and Christians to confront one another regarding all facets of their ideologies at once, a choice of area for a meager start such as this is imperative. Priority certainly belongs to those aspects which are directly concerned with our lives as we live them in a world that has grown very small and is growing smaller still. The Muslim-Christian dialogue should seek at first to establish a mutual understanding, if not a community of conviction, of the Muslim and Christian answers to the fundamental ethical question, What ought I to do? If Muslims and Christians may not reach ready appreciation of each other's ideas or figurizations of divine nature, they may yet attempt to do the will of that nature, which they both hold to be one. To seek "God's way," i.e., to understand, to know, to grasp its relevance for every occasion, to anticipate its judgment of every

moral deed-that is the prerequisite whose satisfaction may put the parties to the dialogue closer to mutual self-understanding. Even if theories of God's nature, of His revelation, of His kingdom, and of His plans for man's destiny were to be regarded as objects of faith beyond critique, certainly the ethical duties of man are subject to a rational approach. Neither Christianity nor Islam precludes a critical investigation of the ethical issues confronting modern man in the world. The proximity of these issues to his life, his direct awareness of them as affecting his own life as well as that of mankind give immediacy to the investigation, and they assign the prerogatives of competence and jurisdiction to his personal and communal judgment in the matter. The relevance of the issues involved to world problems pressing him for an answer furnishes the investigation with a ready testing ground.

Moreover, ethical perceptions are different from the perceptions of theoretical consciousness where to miss is to perceive unreality. Difference in ethical perception is that of the brother who does not see as much, as far or as deep as the other. This is a situation which calls for the involved midwifery of ethical perception. Here, there is no question of error and falsehood, as every perception is one of value and difference consists in perceiving more or less of the same. Neither is the question one of an acquiescent profession of a propositional fact. It is rather one of determination of the perceiving subject by the value that is beheld; and for such perception to be itself, it must be the perception of the man, just as for his realization of the will of God to be itself, i.e., moral, that realization has to be his own free and deliberate act. On the purely theological level, when the impulse to make others heretical is at work, tolerance can mean either contemptuous condescension, conversion, or compromise with the truth. In ethical perception, on the other hand, disagreement is never banished or excommunicated; and heretication defeats its own purpose. Tolerance and midwifery-which are precisely what our small world needs-are the only answer. Their efforts are in the long run always successful; and, at any rate, they are in the Muslim's opinion the better as well as the "Christian" view.

III. Themes for Dialogue

Looking upon the contemporary ethical reality of Muslims and Christians, three dominant facts are discernible:

First, the modern Muslim and Christian regard themselves as standing in state of innocence. Whatever their past ideas and attitudes may have been, both of them agree that man's individuation is good, that his life of person and in society is good, that nature and cosmos are good. Fortunately, modern Christian theologians too have been rejoicing in their rediscovery of God's judgment of creation "that it was good."⁸ The ideological import of this re-discovery is tremendous. Man has rehabilitated himself in creation. He has found his place in it and represented his destiny to himself as one of engagement in its web of history. He is in God's image, the only creature with consciousness and spirit, unto whom the command of God has come, and upon whom the will of God on earth depends for realization as that will is, in itself, a will to a morally perfected world. Certainly, God could have created the world already perfect, or necessarily perfectible by the workings of natural law. But He created this world, "where rust and moth consume and where thieves break through and steal,"⁹ i.e., a world where His will, or value, is not yet realized, that in the free realization of it by man, the moral values may be realized which could not be realized otherwise. Hence, this world is good, despite its imperfection; and man occupies therein the especially significant-indeed cosmic-station of the bridge through which the ethical elements of divine will enter the realm of creation. It is not surprising that a rediscovery of such momentum causes a great deal of joy, a feeling of self-confidence in the great task ahead. Gone are the sordid obsessions with the innate depravity, the intrinsic futility, the necessary fallenness and cynical vacuity of man and of the world. Modern man affirms his life and his world. Recognizing the imperativeness as well as the moving appeal of God's command, he accepts his destiny joyfully and presses forth upright into the thick of space-time where he is to make that will real and actual.

Secondly, the modern Muslim and Christian are acutely aware of the necessity and importance of recognizing God's will, of recognizing His command. This acknowledgment is the substance, the content or "meat" of their acknowledgment of God. "Recognition of God's command," "ethical perception!" and "the act of faith" are mutually convertible and equivalent terms. Such acknowledgment is indubitably the first condition; for it is absurd to seek to realize the divine will in the world without a prior acknowledgment of its content, just as it is absurd to seek to realize what ought to be done without the prior recognition of what is valuable. How is one to recognize that which ought to be done in any given situation-which must be one among a number of possible alternatives-without the standard or norm with which the realizability in the alternatives of that which ought to be can be measured and ascertained? Indeed, if any axiology-free program of action could ever be envisaged, the agent thereof would not be a moral subject, but an automaton of duties. To be moral at all, the act must imply a free choice; and this is a choice in which consciousness of the value, or of its material as the spatio-temporal concretization thereof, plays the crucial part. All this notwithstanding, and however absolutely indispensable and necessary the acknowledgment of God's command and will may be, it is only a condition, a *conditio sine qua non* to be sure, but still a condition. Philosophically stated, this principle is that of the priority of the study of values to duties, of axiology to deontology. The act of faith, of acknowledgment, recognition and acquiescence, is the first condition of piety, of virtue and felicity. But woe to man if he mistakes the condition of a thing for the thing itself! The act of faith neither justifies nor makes just. It is only an entrance ticket into the realm of ethical striving and doing. It does no more than let us into the realm of the moral life. There, to realize the divine is imperative in the value-short world, to transfigure and to fill it with value, man's prerogative as well as duty.

Thirdly, the modern Muslim or Christian recognizes that the moral vocation or mission of man in this world has yet to be fulfilled, and by him; that the measure of his fulfillment thereof is the sole measure of his ethical worth; that in respect to this mission or vocation all men start out in this world with a carte blanche on which nothing is entered except what each individual earns with his own doing or not-doing. In the discharge of his mission in space-time, no man is privileged and every man is an equal conscript. For the command of the one God is also one, for all men without discrimination or election; and His justice is absolute.¹⁰

IV. Dialectic of the Themes with the Figurizations

A. Modern Man and the State of Innocence

The notion of original sin, of the fallenness of man, appears from the perspective of contemporary ethical reality to have outlived its meaningfulness.

1. Sin is, above all, a moral category; it is not ontological. For modern man, there is no such a thing as sin of creation, of nature, of man as such, no sin as entry into existence or space-time. Physical death is perhaps the deepest mystery of the process of space-time; it is certainly a disvalue, but it is not moral, and therefore not sin, nor the consequence of sin.

2. Moral sin is not hereditary; neither is it vicarious, or communal, but always personal, always implying a free choice and a deliberate deed on the part of a moral agent in full possession and mastery of his powers. The actual involvement, or the "attraction," to which the free moral agent may be subject by merely being a member of his family, of his community, of his religio-cultural group, is not denied. Modern man is also aware that sin is an evil act the ontic consequences of which-whether material or psychological-diverge in space-time *ad infinitum*, affecting in some measure the being and lives of other people. He is equally aware that such consequences are not moral precisely because they are ontic, i.e., necessary, involving no choice on the part of the person whom they affect. Moreover, modernity has removed the hitherto necessary connection between existence and membership in the family, community or religio-cultural group. It was this strict necessity of the connection, characteristic of ancient societies, which, though partially, had induced the fathers to represent sin as a necessary and universal category. The modern Muslim

and Christian no more hold a man as member of a group and as subject to the fixations operative in that group except as the result of a decision that man makes for himself. This is particularly true of those societies which have achieved a high degree of internal mobility, especially true of Western society. But the fact is that the whole world is moving in that direction and the day is not far when, from the perspective of the now-forming world community, the universalization of education and the termination of the age of societal isolation, it will be relatively easy to move from one culture to another.

3. Sin is not only a doing, whether introverted, as when the doing is strictly within the person's soul directly affecting neither his body nor anything else outside his soul, or extroverted, as when the doing is spatial involving his body, the souls and bodies of others, or nature. Such doing is only the spatio-temporal consequence of sin. Sin is primarily a perceiving. Here lies its locus and genesis, i.e., in perception. Its effect is in intent and doing. Accordingly, it can be counteracted only in the faculties of perception and its solution must therefore be in education. It is obvious that retaliation and retribution are by themselves inadequate to meet sin wherever it may take place. That forgiveness is equally inadequate becomes clear when we consider that by releasing the ethical energies of the sinner from frustration at his own misdeed, the spiritual power of forgiveness can cure only the sinner with strong ethical sensitivities. For it takes a sinner genuinely frustrated by his own moral failure to respond to its moving appeal. The rest-and the rest is surely the great majority-remain untouched by its power, if not encouraged and confirmed in their sinfulness. Education, on the other hand, ministers to everybody's need. It is universal in its application as all men stand to benefit from its fruits. Admittedly, forgiveness does have an intrinsic power which acts on all perceiving subjects moving them to emulate the forgiver. Like love, courtesy and respect, it is "contagious." But it is forever personal, its activity and effect are always erratic; whereas education is always subject to deliberation, to critique and to planning.

4. It is within the realm of perception that the modern Muslim and Christian can make sense out of the Christian figurization's notion of sin. From this perspective, sin is man's propensity to ethical misperception. It is an empirical datum whose ubiquitousness is very grave and disturbing. Nonetheless, it is not necessary. The general propensity to ethical misperception is counterbalanced by the propensity to sound ethical perception which is at least as universal as its opposite. Indeed, there is far more value in the world than there is disvalue, far more virtue than sin. If by nature man falls in error in his cognition of the ethical, of value, it is equally by nature, if not by a stronger nature, that he is driven to keep on looking and trying despite the faltering. "Man by nature desires to know" the true, the good and the beautiful (said Aristotle); and "man is doomed to love the good" and pursue the true and the beautiful (said Plato). While his soul yearns for, seeks and pursues value, man's natural "will to live" keeps him on his feet, and his "will to do" propels him forward despite the setbacks of sin. True, man is by nature inclined to moral complacency, but he is equally inclined to the life of danger. And while modern man is certainly resolved in favor of the latter, our reason tells us that we should encourage him all the more because the life of danger holds the greater promise. Man may and certainly will err in ethical perception. But he is not hopeless; nor are his misperceptions-his sins-incorrigible. His fate, blest or unblest, devolves in the first place upon him alone.

If this is convincing to both, the dialogue must move on towards revivifying the figurization-recapturing whatever truth there is in it. We may hence expect it to bring out the following point. Ethical misperception, in all its varieties, is that which we ought to guard against, to avoid and to combat in ourselves, in the others and in all men. Indubitably, we must become fully aware of the enemy, of his tactics and defences, of his nature and constitution, if we are to fight him successfully. In the mind of the general, a very prominent place is occupied by "the enemy." It was such genuine awareness on the part of the fathers that induced them to put sin in man's flesh, in the passions for the lower values of pleasure and comfort, of life and power, in the overhasty realization of value, the surmounting of man's cosmic station, in the arrogant pride that the ethical job of man on earth has already been done and finished. In this sense everyone is susceptible to sin as every man has his temptations, his weak moments when his ethical perception is dimmed and his moral vigor is dull and slow to act. To be always conscious of this

disposition, i.e., to keep it constantly in mind as the negative object of the moral struggle, is the peculiar merit of the fathers' emphasis on sin.

Unlike the fathers, therefore, the modern Christian and Muslim cannot think of sin as the predicament out of which there can be no hope of deliverance save by a non-human, divine act. Even if, in the interest of final victory in man's moral struggle, we overestimate the enemy, victory must certainly be possible if it is to be an objective and the struggle is to be sustained despite the eventual setbacks. Were we to grant that sin is necessary but keep in mind its meaning as ethical misperception, we would be contradicted by the fact that man has in fact perceived rightly when he perceived God's past revelations as genuine. This inconsequence may not be removed except by adding another fantastic assumption nihilating man's responsibility for genuine perception, *viz.*, predestination to right perception. But that is a pure fabrication; that perception which is not the person's perception is not perception.

Finally, the dialogue must move towards a clear answer to the ethical question. If we keep our balance, we will recognize that the right mental and emotional attitude to sin is to keep it in consciousness in order to avoid and to surmount it. The Toad hitherto is and can be only education, the axiological *anamnesis* which causes the man to see for himself, to perceive value and expose his own ethos to determination by it. The teacher in general, whether mother, father or elder, teacher by concepts, or by example, is precisely the helper who helps man perceive tightly and thereby surmount the sinful misperceptions. Education is the unique process of salvation. No ritual of water, therefore, or ablutions or baptism, of initiation or confirmation, no acknowledgment of symbols or authority, no confession of contrition, can by themselves do this job for man. Every person must do it for himself, though he may be assisted by the more experienced; and everybody can.

B. Justification as Declaring or Making Good

Looking at the figurization created by the fathers, the contemporary Muslim and Christian observe that its notion of justification as a declaring or making good the person who has acknowledged the figurization does not accord with contemporary reality. Here three considerations are in order. First, where ethical misperception has been the fact or the rule, no confession of any item in the figurization will transform misperception into perception. Even the confession of God as conceived of in the figurization does not constitute the "entrance ticket" we mentioned earlier, the *sine qua non* of salvation. What will do so is the confession of the content of divine will, of value itself. For it is the *materiale* values themselves, not the concepts and theories of "God" or "divine will" as enunciated or elaborated by the figurization, that move the human soul, that can be realized once they are known, and that must be known in order to be realized.

Second, education, as we have defined it, is a long and continuous growth which has no divisions admitting of the representation of its processes as a before and an after. Neither is the realm of values (the will of God) divided into two parts such that only the attainment of one, rather than the other, may be said to constitute, or begin, ethical living. Genuine perception, therefore, as well as genuine value-realization, is with the child as well as with the mature elder, though the objects (values and their relations) discerned may belong to different orders of rank. Salvation or, rather, an amount of it may be the work of the "faithful" of any religion as that of the "faithless"-the *goyim* or *barbaroi* of any faith without regard to the figurization to which they subscribe. The child must then be "justified" as much as the adult, the "sinner" as much as the "saved," provided he perceives that which his yet-undeveloped, or little-developed faculties enable him to perceive. Value-perception is a continuous growth process. It does not admit of a moment of justification before which there was no growth at all and then, by divine fiat, it has come to be. Third, perception of genuine value is only the beginning of the process of felicitous achievement. Beyond it yet lies the longest and hardest part of the road, the realization in space-time of that which had been correctly perceived.

Another meaning of confession is conversion. It consists of a new openness of mind and heart to the determining power of the divine, of value. It is the state of fulfillment of the admirably stated first command of Jesus, namely, to love God with all one's mind, all one's heart and all one's power.¹¹ This is certainly a radical transformation, for it entails a deliberate willingness to seek the good and to submit to its determination rather than to evil's. As the first step of faith, however, it must stand below the act of confession as perception of value at all. All it recognizes is the value of submission to value which is also a prerequisite but more fundamental, more elemental, than the first. It can also refer to an attitude that comes after perception of the whole, or a large part of the realm of value. In this case, it is of momentous significance if we regard the ethical phenomenon as necessarily broken into perception and action, as separate successive stages between which the devil and his temptations may intervene. This view rests upon the groundless assumption that ethical perception is formalistic and, hence, discursive and intellectual (Kant's "practical reason" trying to subdue and to discipline an erratic "*Willkür*"). The establishment of ethical perception as emotional *a priori* intuition (Scheler, Hartmann) has recaptured the unity of the ethical phenomenon as perception and action at the same time, and proved the Socratic formula "knowledge = virtue" once again true.

There is yet another sense, recognized and well-emphasized by the figurization of Christianity, in which faith and its confession can constitute a real achievement. This is the sense in which the confession of faith, i.e., the subject's conviction that he is now reconciled to God and accepted by the community, means the liberation of his ethical energies for self-exertion in God's cause. Since the state of sin is by definition the undesirable state of being, and faith is the consciousness of this undesirability at all levels, the solemn confession of faith becomes the resolution not to relapse into that which has so far been rightly perceived as undesirable. Psychologically speaking, assurance of the acceptance by God and the community of this resolution as something serious and significant, has the good effect of removing whatever fixity misperception may have developed in the moral subject and releasing his energies towards value-realization, as if a new page had been turned in his book-of-life. Though this must remain a mere "as-if," it is a powerful moment psychologically. In a person of ethically sensitive nature, the consciousness of sin may possess that person to the point of frustrating his determination by the good, his will to right perception and right action. In such a person, the phenomena of repentance, confession, reconciliation and acceptance can not only release pent up energies but create new ones and orient them towards the good to which they can then rush with a great surge. But, as we have said earlier in connection with the psychological effect of salvation upon the subject, we must remember that such responses and effects are the prerogative of the few, just as great sin equally belongs to the few. The majority, however, remains as little determined by the one as by the other. In the mediocre measure that the majority can have either the cause (sin) or the effect (justification), the advantage of the confession of faith must perforce be equally mediocre.

There is a sense, therefore, though a unique one indeed, in which the act of faith carries an ontic relation to man and cosmos, which is its capacity to infuse into the psychic threads of the subject new determinants and thus bring about a new momentum as it deflects the causal threads from the courses they would have taken had these new determinants not entered the scene. This "plus" of determination is as ontically real as any natural determination since both of them equally produce the same result, namely, the deflection of causal threads to ends other than those to which they would lead otherwise. But we should guard against ever confusing the nature of this "plus." It is certainly not a *justificti*, a making just, for, ontologically speaking, the deflection of causal threads which constitutes the moral deeds have not yet taken place though it has become a real possibility. Nor is it a declaring just in the forensic sense that, whereas the same person remains the same, the scales of justice that pronounced him sinful have just been tipped in his favor by the fact of solemn confession. Such would be literally a case of "cheating." Nor, finally, is justification a considering of the sinful as innocent, ethically speaking. For it is neither a category of God's thought, nor one of the mares deeds which belong to history and can never be undone. It is only a psychic release in the justified sinner, whose real value is not intrinsic but derivative of that of the values which the newly released energies may, or may not, realize.

C. Redemption as *Ontic Fait Accompli*

Thirdly, looking at the figurizations of the fathers, the modern Muslim and Christian recognize that redemption is not a *fait accompli* inasmuch as the filling of space-time with realized value is not yet, but has still to be done by man; that it is man's works, his actualization of divine will on earth as it is in heaven, that constitutes redemption. Were redemption a *fait accompli* in this sense, i.e., were the ethical job or duty of man towards God done and finished, his cosmic status, and hence his dignity, would be impaired. In that case, morality itself falls to the ground. Salvation must flow out of morality, not vice versa. The only morality that can flow out of accomplished salvation necessarily robs man's life and struggle in space-time of its gravity, its seriousness and significance. True, the already-saved man is not free to lead any life and must live like a person unto whom God had accomplished salvation. Such a man will therefore be under the obligation of gratitude for the salvation done. Far from underrating the order of rank of the ethical value of gratitude, the modern Muslim and Christian find any ethic in which gratitude is the determining cornerstone inadequate to confront space-time, to govern the plunging of oneself into the thick of tragedy-laden existence, to guide man's efforts for transformation of the universe into one fully realizing the will of God. Historically speaking, and in the figurizations of Christianity and Islam, the ethic of gratitude that emerged out of the notion of redemption as a *fait accompli* devaluated space-time as an unfortunate, insignificant interlude, the end of which was eagerly awaited. In the perspective of such an ethic, the fulcrum of life and existence is clearly shifted outside of space-time, which becomes no longer the "body" and theater in which the will of God is constantly prayed to be and should be done. That is all in addition to the superciliousness and complacency which the carrying around of one's title to paradise generates. If, on the other hand, redemption is remembered-and affirmed-to be the doing of man's cosmic vocation, the realization of value in space-time, then the assumption of redemption as accomplished salvation must be the greatest sin.

This consideration need not blind us to the fact, hinted at in the foregoing section, that redemption does achieve an ontically real accomplishment: namely, the release of energies and the infusion of determinants which would not have become real otherwise, and the actualization of ends other than those to which the un-increased determinants and energies would have led. But the "plus" of determination, the pent-up energies released by the redemptive act of faith are not bound to produce any given ends. As a rule, they will go to reinforce those applications of energies, or those causal nexus at which the moral subject has already been working; and the act of faith presupposes that what has been discerned is the genuine truth, goodness and beauty. But the application of the new energy to the pursuit of what has been rightly discerned is not necessary. That is why sin is possible even after redemption—a fact which the figurization which understands redemption as a being-done of man's ethical vocation cannot recognize or affirm except through the inconsequence of paradox. Thus, it takes something more than redemption in the sense of forgiveness and release of ethical energies to achieve salvation in the sense of ethical felicity, of realizing value in space-time, of deflecting its threads towards value-realization, the bringing about of the *matériaux* of value and of filling the world therewith.

In giving us the notions of justification and redemption, therefore, the canonical figurizations gave us merely a prolegomenon to ethical salvation. These notions provide a cure for those who need it and these are of two kinds: the hypersensitive person, whose consciousness of his past ethical shortcomings and misperceptions has prevented him from trying again; the hypochondriac, who dwells on his sad state of affairs so strongly and so long that he forgets that there is a task yet to be performed, however bad his past may have been, and that his complaining will not perform that task. Just like the man who has been so sick that he has lost the sense of life and can think only of death, and who will lead a superficial life if he were to come to a sudden cure, so the moral hypochondriac, upon redemption, would hardly exert himself morally, or know what to exert himself for, as his ethical vision has been warped by the long illness. Such a man will never recover from the event of his cure, of his redemption. He will never pass to the sanity, sobriety and gravity of facing space-time with its crying need for God, for value.

Both these types are rare; mankind is neither made of ethical geniuses and heroes, nor of hypochondriacs. For the majority of men, redemption remains an event of especial significance only inasmuch as it is the perception of that which ought to be and, in this capacity, it is an actual embarkation on the ethical road, a prolegomenon to real felicity. Valuable and necessary as it may be, it constitutes no salutary merit and those who have achieved it have achieved only the beginning. They are not the elect in any sense, and neither is their salvation guaranteed. What they achieve is not only possible, but actual for every man; all men must come to it sooner or later by nature as they begin consciously to live under the human predicaments of desiring knowledge and of loving the good. Far from furnishing ground for a new "election," a new particularism, and a new exclusivism, redemption in the only sense in which it makes sense, namely value-perception and value-realization, is truly universalist in that it expresses modalities of ethical living which are actual in all human beings. Ethical salvation, on the other hand, i.e., the actualization of divine will or moral value, is a progressive achievement open to all men by birth; and it is judged and measured on the scale of an absolute justice that knows no alternative to or attenuation of the principle "Better among you is the more righteous," for "whoso doeth good an atom's weight will see it then, and whoso doeth ill an atom's weight will see it then."¹²

V. Prospects

This has been a sample dialogue between Islam and Christianity. It has anchored itself in a common reality and paid the tribute due to the canonical figurizations. Beyond the latter, however, it has moved towards reconstructing religious thought consonantly with its own experience of reality and without violating any of the necessary conditions of dialogue. However hard the results may have been on the Islamic and Christian figurizations, they can be claimed and asserted by the modern Christian as a continuation of that same loyalty to Jesus which produced the Christian figurization, and *mutatis mutandis* in the case of the modern Muslim. The novelty is that in asserting them the Christian is joined by the Muslim, and their communion will undoubtedly open limitless vistas of common religious and moral ideas for further exploration. As to whether the Christian is likely to enter into dialogue and follow this course in our generation, I am pessimistic.

A. The Catholic Church

On the Catholic side, we can safely take the record of Vatican II not only as representative, but as determining the future for at least this generation. As regards the issues taken up by the foregoing dialogue, Catholic Christianity is still to be heard from. As far as I know, Vatican II has not even attempted to discuss such issues, let alone re-present them as objects of a critical Christian-Muslim dialogue. It has stopped the calling of non-Christians by bad names. But that is too modest a contribution. Modern man takes the prerequisites of politeness, courtesy and mutual respect for granted, and he is not moved to admiring trance by an assertion or defence of them. As far as the Muslim is concerned, such defence is fourteen centuries late.¹³

As a matter of fact, Vatican II left much to be desired that is of far greater importance. Besides joining the Muslims to the devotees of most archaic religions, the statement—"the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator... the Moslems... [and] those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God"—merely subsumes them under the call of God.¹⁴ The universality of the call is not an actual but an ought-universality, and hence it does not yield the desired universalism at all. If God called all men, it goes without saying that the Muslims are included. To exclude them is tantamount to counting them among the trees. If this is an advance over the former position where the Muslim was regarded as a subhuman, it is an advance which stinks by virtue of this relation. Moreover, the same document has stressed that of the pious among those who "do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church" only those may "attain to everlasting salvation" who do so "through no fault of their own."¹⁵ The Muslim who has been thrice Christian is therefore excluded. The judgment—"whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel"¹⁶—may be as old and classical as Eusebius to which the text proudly refers. Condescending? Indeed! Do I see progressivism at the apex of which stands Christianity as the archetype of religion and the other religions as

faltering approximations? Yes; but wait for the explanation of this religious diversity and imperfect approximations outside of Christianity! "Often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become caught up in futile reasoning and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator"!!!¹⁷ The non-Christians do not even know God; neither do they serve Him! This is utterly out of tune with the twentieth century. Name-calling will not do. It is amazing that despite this low esteem of those who are not Christians, Vatican II agrees with my plea to seek mutual understanding and cooperation on the ethical level, "to make common cause ... on behalf of all mankind ... of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom."¹⁸ As a Muslim who has been thrice Christian, I applaud and stretch forth my hand in the hope that my Sermon-on-the-Mount ethic may prove contagious.

B. The Protestants

Unlike the case of Catholics, no pronouncement is vested with decisive authority for Protestants. Their position would have to be surmised from the writings of those who regard themselves as the spiritual thinkers of their community. I therefore propose to do no more than plumb one thinker on this matter who, many Protestants will probably agree, stands on the frontier of Christian theology. That is the late Paul Tillich.

In his *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, Tillich repudiated the neo-orthodox approach which refuses even to acknowledge the existence of such a problem as man's religions pose for Christianity.¹⁹ He criticized the progressivist explanation of the religions of the world and refuted the circular arguments of those theologians who, assuming Christianity to be the *typos* of religion, measure man's religions with its rod.²⁰ He spoke of an original universalism of the early church meaning thereby Christianity's adoption of elements from other religions and their subjection to the particularist idea of Jesus as the Christ.

Though commendable, this idea is hardly adequate to meet the issue of interreligious confrontation.²¹ The problem is not one of approving of or adopting that which agrees or can be made to agree with us but of what to do with that which contradicts us, that which stands on the other side of us. On this issue Tillich suggests the possibility of self-criticism in light of the difference with other religions. Appropriately, he entitled his concluding lecture "Christianity Judging Itself in the Light of Its Encounters with the World Religions." No more promising title can be found than this. But before he let his audience rise to cheer, Tillich dissolved the whole promise as he defined the basis of any future self-judgment of Christianity. "There is only one point," he said, "from which the criteria can be derived and only one way to approach this point. The point is the event on which Christianity is based, and the way is the participation in the continuing spiritual power Of this event, which is the appearance and reception of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, a symbol which stands for the decisive self-manifestation in human history of the source and aim of all being."²² Evidently, the basis is not God, nor the will of God, but the Christian figurization of God. But loyalty to figurization produces footnotes and commentaries, not knowledge; and Christianity, if based upon such a principle, will learn nothing at all.

Here Tillich has failed in our fifth methodological principle, *viz.*, freedom vis-à-vis the canonical figurization. It seems as if Tillich, despite the depth and breadth of his vision, is telling the Muslim: Assuming the Council of Nicaea consisted of God as chairman, His angels and prophets as members, and that it did unanimously and under express divine command decide for all eternity what it did decide, what use can we make of what you or any other religion has to offer? The Muslim retort is that it is precisely here in the Nicene Council that the dialogue will have to start, if at all, assuming that the council is still on and deliberating. Consisting of men with holy as well as unholy motives and presided over by a pagan emperor interested in the political unity of the Empire more than in the truth, the council is either closed and hence only of didactic value to modern man, or open and modern man may participate therein as constituent member.²³ It was precisely at Nicaea that the split of Christianity into Eastern and Western formally began, not in the meaning usually attached to these terms as denoting the Roman Catholic Church and the

Greek Orthodox Church, or the Churches of the West as distinguished from those of the East, but in the older sense of a Semitic Christianity of so-called "heretic" churches of the East and a Christianity figurized under terms supplied by Hellenistic consciousness. Only at "Nicaea" can the dialogue with Islam, the heir of that Eastern Christianity which was hereticated at Nicaea, be resumed.

In the last lecture of his career, "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian,"²⁴ Tillich did not progress beyond the foregoing position. He called "Religion of the Concrete Spirit" the "telos" or the "inner aim" which the history of religions "is to become." This is composed of three elements: "the sacramental basis" which is "the universal ... experience of the Holy within the finite"; the "critical movement against the demonization of the sacramental"; and the "ought-to-be... the ethical or prophetic element [which] becomes moralistic and finally secular" without the other two.²⁵ One can hardly miss the parochial representation of Western Christianity in this scheme where the first element is the Jesus-event, the second the Reformation, and the third, the secular moralistic humanism of modern times. And we must, in addition, overlook Tillich's lack of information, at least regarding Islam, evident in his generalization that "the universal religious basis is the experience of the Holy within the finite."²⁶

Having defined these elements, Tillich then tells us that they always struggle against one another; but that when integrated within the Religion of the Concrete Spirit, they struggle as one organic whole against the domination of each.²⁷ "Kairos" or "moments ... in which the Religion of the Concrete Spirit is actualized fragmentarily can happen here and there."²⁸ But "the whole history of religions" is "a fight for the Religion of the Concrete Spirit, a fight of God against religion within religion."²⁹ In this continuing world struggle of God against the demonic forces, "the decisive victory" was "the appearance of Jesus as the Christ."³⁰ "The criterion" of victory, or of the presence of the Religion of the Concrete Spirit is "the event of the cross. That which has happened there in a symbolic way, which gives us the criterion, also happens fragmentarily in other places, in other moments, has happened and will happen even though they are not historically or empirically connected with the cross."³¹ Tillich even suggests the re-use of the symbol "Christus Victor" in this view of the history of religions.³² How do we know that what happened in the *kairos* of Muhammad or of the Reformation was "a fragmentary event of the cross" unless it is assumed that all religious moments are *kairos* of the same? But if this is assumed beforehand, what novelty did the minor premise bring? Obviously, this is the same circular reasoning Tillich had criticized in Troeltsch and Otto, however disguised the terms.

Tillich's "last word" was his answer to the question of the meaning of the history of religions "to the religion of which one is the theologian." "Theology," he claimed, "remains rooted in its experiential basis. Without this, no theology at all is possible." Thus, in loyalty to the canonical figurization, Tillich persistently refused to recognize any sacrament-free consciousness as religious. Straightjacketed by his own self-imposed limitation to the experience of the Christian figurization, the Christian theologian is to spend the rest of time "formulat[ing] the basic experiences which are universally valid [sic! the experience of the Holy in the finite is anything but universal] in universally valid statements."³³

How can such an attempt see anything in the religions of man but fragmentary realizations of the Christian experience? Can it be said that such an attitude enables the Christian to understand the other faiths of other men, let alone produce a fruitful dialogue with the men of other faiths?

As for his systematic theology, its pages run counter to every one of the ethical insights we have attributed to modern man. One might conclude that if Tillich were still alive, he would not carry the dialogue a single step forward. Surprisingly, however, this conclusion is not true. For just before he died, he read the sections of this paper entitled "Methodology of Dialogue," "Themes for Dialogue" and "Dialectic of the Themes with the Figurizations" and wrote in a letter to the author: "I... read your manuscript and thought it was an excellent basis for any discussion between Christianity and Islam. You bring out the points of difference with great clarity and sharpness. Not in order to let them stay where they are, but in order to show that behind the different figurizations

there is, especially in the present moment, a common ground and a common emergency. I believe that with this presupposition in mind, a discussion could be very fruitful.”

This was a surprise. It recaptures my lost optimism.