

THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Essays in Methodology

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some of the major religions of the East as well as the Judeo-Christian religious traditions of the West. While many institutions are consciously attempting to present alternative interpretations of significant religious and philosophical questions in the Western tradition, a surprising number of leading schools in America have as yet done nothing to acquaint their students with the questions which have been raised in the non-Western religious and cultural traditions. We are not advocating that all students must become experts in *Religionswissenschaft*. But certainly in this bewildered world of our time, students ought to be exposed to some of the deepest issues of life, as they have been experienced and understood by the noblest men and women through the ages, in the East as well as in the West.

The history of religions, if it is taught competently in the undergraduate colleges, universities, and seminaries, can widen the intellectual and spiritual horizons of students by bringing to them these deeper dimensions of life and culture in the dreams and faith by which men live.

WILFRED CANTWELL SMITH

Comparative Religion: Whither—and Why?

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The thirteen-volume *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, (1908–21, and recently reissued) is an impressive work.¹ Not only does it serve as a great warehouse of information, indispensable to all careful students of the world's religious history. More than that, it may be taken also as a symbol. I see it as typifying a culmination of the first great stage of scholarship in this field: the accumulation, organization, and analysis of facts.² This stage began, one may say, with the Age of Discovery, when Western Christendom reached out to the rest of the world, probing, exploring, gradually becoming aware of peoples and places far beyond its erstwhile horizon. There were brought back accounts, weird or wonderful, of other men's religions—at first haphazardly, as travelers' tales, later in more ordered fashion and more

¹ *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, with the assistance of John A. Selbie . . . and Louis H. Gray (Edinburgh, 1908–21; New York, 1955).

² I hope that I may be forgiven for using the first person singular in this article, when expressing my own views, in place of the more conventional and less stark editorial "we." I have been pushed into doing so by the fact that a good part of the argument in this essay turns on the use of pronouns; and I am particularly concerned to note how the word "we" is used religiously and by scholars of religion. I have therefore avoided using it here myself so far as possible (I resort to it only when I mean myself and my readers—presumably fellow students of comparative religion in one way or another—or when I mean mankind, including my readers and myself).

abundantly. The nineteenth century saw the rise of a great attempt to give this matter serious and disciplined consideration: searching out material, recording it carefully, scrutinizing it systematically, interpreting it. This was the task of the universities, which gradually enshrined oriental studies and anthropological studies and here and there established chairs of *Religionswissenschaft*.

In our day a new development in these studies is to be discerned, inaugurating a second major stage, of rather different type. In suggesting this, I do not mean that the first phase is finished. It continues, and will continue. Information of increasing breadth and increasing precision, analyses of increasing complexity, presentations of increasing erudition and subtlety, must and will go on. I would hold, however, that these things, while not superseded, are being now transcended. The exciting new frontiers of inquiry and of challenge lie at a new and higher level.

In the first phase there was amassed an imposing knowledge about other peoples' religions. In the second phase it is those other peoples themselves that are present. The large-scale compilation of data of the nineteenth century and up to World War I has in the twentieth century and particularly since World War II been supplemented by a living encounter—a large-scale face-to-face meeting between persons of diverse faith.

In a sense, the modern counterpart to the *Encyclopaedia* are such facts as that in 1936 Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was appointed Spalding Professor of Eastern Thought at Oxford; in 1952 the Institute of Islamic Studies was opened at McGill with half its teaching staff and half its students Muslims; at the present time visiting Buddhist scholars have been invited to the Chicago Divinity School; and so on. Westerners professionally concerned with the Orient, including its religious life, are now expected to visit the communities about which they write, and most do keep in frequent and close personal touch.³ And just as in medicine a graduate may not practice until he has added an internship to his academic training, so at McGill University it is a formal requirement for the doctorate in Islamic Studies

³ It is coming to be recognized that part of the cost of setting up a department of oriental studies in a Western university is the provision of travel funds and of arrangements for what is unfortunately still called "leave," for the staff, who must have access to the Orient just as much as a chemistry professor must have access to a chemistry laboratory.

that the candidate "at some stage in his adult life, before, during, or after his work at McGill shall have spent some time (preferably at least two years, and in any case not less than the equivalent of one academic session) in the Islamic world."⁴

Moreover, it is not only professional students that are affected; the general reading or thinking public has also moved into the new phase. When the *Encyclopaedia* was published, intellectuals of Europe and America had available in it and in a series of books information about the "non-Christian"⁵ world; today intellectuals and also others find that they personally have Buddhist or Muslim neighbors or colleagues or rivals.

Future historians, it has been said, will look back upon the twentieth century not primarily for its scientific achievements but as the century of the coming-together of peoples, when all mankind for the first time became one community.

That this situation is of political, social, and cultural significance is evident enough. But is it also of academic import? Is the comparative study of religion thereby changed or even affected? It becomes more urgent and more central, certainly. In addition, I am suggesting, there is inherently involved a major modification in the nature and the manner of our work. And I believe that this second great development is a change for the good: that the personalization of comparative religion studies is transforming them into something more realistic, truer. In this case one cannot suggest any striking achievement as symbol; this stage has not yet culminated in any great work, and indeed it is both so complex and so incipient that neither its importance nor its implications have yet been clearly recognized. Yet it constitutes the basic advance in this field of our day. Our chief challenge is to understand this development and to carry it to a successful conclusion.

The new world situation is compelling us to explore what I might call the essentially human quality of our subject matter.

⁴ From the "Memorandum on the Ph.D. in Islamic Studies," Institute of Islamic Studies, July, 1957.

⁵ This term is used advisably here, to designate the nineteenth-century attitude. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that there is hardly a more fruitful way towards misunderstanding a Muslim, a Hindu, or a Buddhist than that of thinking of him as a "non-Christian." By the use of such negative concepts it is possible to miss altogether the positive quality of another's faith.

If we can effectively come to grips with this, we shall have taken a very considerable step forward towards doing justice to the study that we have ventured to take on. But it is not easy. The implications are many and subtle. Religion being what it is, and man being what he is, the task of adequately conceptualizing the personalization that is today involved will demand our best efforts, of careful scholarship and creative thinking.

The present essay is an exploratory attempt to delineate and to analyse trends and to urge desiderata.

The argument may be summarized briefly, in pronominal terms. The traditional form of Western scholarship in the study of other men's religion was that of an impersonal presentation of an "it." The first great innovation in recent times has been the personalization of the faiths observed, so that one finds a discussion of a "they." Presently the observer becomes personally involved, so that the situation is one of a "we" talking about a "they." The next step is a dialogue, where "we" talk to "you." If there is listening and mutuality, this may become that "we" talk *with* "you." The culmination of this progress is when "we all" are talking *with* each other about "us."

Let me elaborate this.

I

The first and altogether fundamental step has been the gradual recognition of what was always true in principle, but was not always grasped: that the study of a religion is the study of persons. Of all branches of human inquiry, hardly any deals with an area so personal as this. Faith is a quality of men's lives. "All religions are new religions, every morning. For religions do not exist up in the sky somewhere, elaborated, finished, and static; they exist in men's hearts."⁶

We are studying, then, something not directly observable. Let us be quite clear about this, and bold. Personally, I believe this

⁶ As will become clear as the argument proceeds, I am not subscribing to that type of humanism that asserts that religious faith amounts to no more than a projection of human hopes, aspirations, and the like. What I am contending is that the study of religious faith, and especially of the faith of persons belonging to a tradition other than one's own, must be a study not only of tangible externals but of human hopes and aspirations and interpretations of those externals. The quotation is from my earlier essay, "The Comparative Study of Religion: Reflections on the Possibility and Purpose of a Religious Science," *McGill University, Faculty of Divinity, Inaugural Lectures* (Montreal, 1950), p. 51.

to be true finally of all work in the humanities, and believe that we should not be plaintive about it or try somehow to circumvent it. It is our glory that we study not things but qualities of personal living. This may make our work more difficult than that of the scientists but it makes it also more important, and in a significant sense more true. Ideas, ideals, loyalties, passions, aspirations cannot be directly observed, but their role in human history is not the less consequential, nor their study less significant or valid.⁷ Nor do the transcendent matters to which these may, no doubt inadequately, refer, have a status in the universe the less solid. A galaxy may be larger, but a value I hold to be not only more important but at least equally real and in some ways more real.⁸

A fundamental error of the social sciences, and a fundamental lapse even of some humanists, has been to take the observable manifestations of some human concern as if they were the concern itself. The proper study of mankind is by inference.

The externals of religion—symbols, institutions, doctrines, practices—can be examined separately; and this is largely what in fact was happening until quite recently, perhaps particularly in European scholarship. But these things are not in themselves religion, which lies rather in the area of what these mean to those that are involved. The student is making effective progress when he recognizes that he has to do not with religious systems basically but with religious persons; or at least, with something interior to persons.

Certainly there has been and remains a great deal of preliminary work to be done in the realm of tangible data, of what I have called the externals of religion. It is only as these are accurately established, that the study of the religions themselves can proceed; and this latter must continually be revised as the former become more exactly known. It is not a crucial question whether the same scholars do both tasks or whether there is division of labor. Nor is it worth quarreling about the relative value of the two; both are needed. What one would advocate is

⁷ On the study of unobservables in human behavior, cf. my *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 7, n. 4, 8, n. 5.

⁸ One wonders if a case should not be made for reviving the once lucid and important notion that there may be gradations of reality. For long it has been assumed that something is either real or unreal, with no room for a possibility of intermediate degrees.

clarity. The time has come when those in this field must recognize to what extent an article or a book or a conference or a committee is concerned with the externals of the history of the religion and to what extent with the history of the religions themselves. I am also suggesting that over the past century there has been, and am guessing that in the near future there will increasingly be, a development in the direction of more awareness that religions are human involvements.

The point may be illustrated widely. When in 1934 Archer published a general textbook, *Faiths Men Live By*,⁹ the title was arresting. The nineteenth-century scholar did not think in such terms, though today the attitude is almost standard. The striking works of Pratt, *India and Its Faiths* (1915) and *A Pilgrimage of Buddhism* (1928) did much to make these religions come alive for the first time for many Western readers; for Pratt had a gift not only of brilliance but of extraordinary human sympathy.¹⁰ These are clear instances of the increasing mobility of modern man: each book was written as the result of travel in the East. Personalization can be achieved also, however, in the case of the religion of an historical community that has ceased to exist: Frankfort's recent *Ancient Egyptian Religion*¹¹ differs from the first Western monograph, by Erman,¹² some forty years earlier, in considerable part as a study of people over against a study of data.¹³

⁹ John Clark Archer, *Faiths Men Live By* (New York, 1934). There have been several subsequent editions. The earlier, popular work, Lewis Browne, *This Believing World* (New York, 1928), made the same point; and there were others.

¹⁰ James Bissett Pratt, *India and Its Faiths: A Traveler's Record* (Boston and New York, 1915); *A Pilgrimage of Buddhism and a Buddhist Pilgrimage* (New York, 1928). That Pratt was conscious that he was doing something new in this realm is clear from his Preface, though I feel that he was not quite clear as to what it was. It was his interest in psychology, and his lack of training in oriental classics, that gave him his personalist approach.

¹¹ H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* (New York, 1948).

¹² Adolf Erman, *Die Religion der alten Aegypter* (Berlin, 1905).

¹³ Frankfort also is conscious that he is innovating, and he states the point almost in the terms of my present argument: "Erman . . . gave . . . a masterly but patronizing account of weird myth, doctrines, and usages, while the peculiarly religious values which these contained remained hidden from his lucid rationalism. . . . Since then . . . the most prolific writers . . . assumed towards our subject a scientist's rather than a scholar's attitude: while ostensibly concerned with religion, they were really absorbed in the

Perhaps one should say, with more precision, the study of a people's religious life over against a study of their gods, their doctrines, their institutions, and the like. The difference is in attitude and treatment. We must repeat, perhaps, that there continues to be a need for scholarly work on the externals. Erman's study fails not because it deals with these (he was an important Egyptologist) but because it makes the mistake of presenting these as the religion itself. Our plea would be that from now on any study of externalia recognize itself as such; that only those deserve to be accepted as studies of religion that do justice to the fact that they deal with the life of men.

Part of the personalization of our studies is evinced in the shift over past decades to a primary interest in the major living religions of the world. (The phrase "living religions," which has become current, is itself significant.)¹⁴ Whereas at the turn of the century a typical introductory course in this field would emphasize "primitive religions," and a typical book would address itself to "the nature and origin of religion" (the phrase implicitly postulates that the reality or truth of religion is to be found most purely or most surely in its earliest and simplest forms), today it is normal to give chief or even sole attention to Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, along with Christians and Jews—groups that between them constitute the vast majority of today's population,¹⁵ and between them claim most forcefully

task of bringing order to a confused mass of material. Men of this school have dominated this subject for the last twenty or thirty years; they possess a splendid knowledge of the texts and have enriched our information greatly. But in reading their books you would never think that the gods they discuss once moved men to acts of worship" (Preface, pp. v-vi).

¹⁴ It is the title, for instance, of a recent work: Frederic Spiegelberg, *Living Religions of the World* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1956); and of various others. It is to be found also nowadays as the title of course offerings in college curricula. I doubt that one would find it academically as title of either book or course at the turn of the century.

¹⁵ Many examples could be given. One illustrative title is that of Edward J. Jurji (ed.), *The Great Religions of the Modern World* (Princeton, 1946, and several times reprinted). As the wording suggests, this is one of those volumes that omit any treatment of "primitives." One example among many of the same point from college curricula is the fact that at the Divinity School, University of Chicago, apart from an introductory course on analytic principles, there is one basic ("Common-Core") course in this field, "Contemporary World Religions" (HR 302; in the 1957-58 and 1958-59 An-

to represent religion's highest and truest development. And whereas once such attention as was given to the great religions was primarily to their scriptures and historically to their early, classical phases, today these religions are seen primarily as the faith of present-day groups.¹⁶

In the case of the living religions this matter affects not only the conception of what is being studied, but also the method employed. First, there is an important epistemological point. In the study of a religion other than one's own, a knowledge of its institutions, formulations, and overt history may be derived from things. But if they are seen as clues to a personal quality of men's lives, then a sympathetic appreciation of this quality may at least in part be derived from having adherents of that faith as

nouncements). Until recently a specializing student could elect a course on primitive religions, in advanced work, though even there this took a minor place alongside studies of the more advanced great faiths—especially Buddhism, on which Chicago has been concentrating. And even this has now been dropped, apparently in favor of a new course, on Christian and Western positions vis-à-vis the other world religions (cf. HR 341 in the 1957-58 *Announcements* with HR 342 in that for 1958-59)—a shift towards a "we/they" orientation that we consider in our next section. The same omission of primitives and concern for the great religions is true of the recent brilliant text of Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York, 1958)—this last is a luminous example of the treatment of religion as the faith of *persons*: note the opening paragraphs, which present people worshiping, the book moving on from this to portray their religion as the substance of their worshiping. Note also the opening pages of other chapters. This book, indeed, virtually recognizes, or at least confirms, the point that I am making in this present essay, for the author explicitly states in his Preface that the reader should turn to other (earlier) books for the data of the religions, while he is moving on from these to proffer an interpretation of those data (cf. his note 1 to chap. i, p. 315). This work is perhaps the first adequate textbook in world religions, precisely because it treats religions as human.

¹⁶ Note the Chicago course offering and the Smith book mentioned in the preceding note. At a more popular level one may instance the series in various issues of *Life* magazine (New York, 1955), later republished independently as a book, *The World's Great Religions* (New York, 1957). (A Dutch version has also appeared: *De grote Gotsdiensten der Wereld* [1958].) Significantly, the Introduction is entitled "How Mankind Worships" (by Paul Hutchinson), pp. 1-8.

Furthermore, Harvard University, inaugurating in 1958 a new program in this field, chose to name it neither History of Religion(s) nor Comparative Religion, which for some decades have shared the field between them, but "Program in World Religions."

informants¹⁷ and perhaps even as friends.¹⁸ Of the various ways of finding out what something means to the person concerned, one way is to ask him.

¹⁷ An illustrative development has been the publication for Western students of the Morgan series on comparative religion, in which Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims present their own faiths: Kenneth W. Morgan (ed.), *The Religion of the Hindus* (New York, 1953); *The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists* (New York, 1956); *Islam—the Straight Path: Islam Interpreted by Muslims* (New York, 1958). There are many other examples of the growing recognition in the West that to understand an alien religion one should allow its adherents to speak for themselves. One is the 1952 paperback publication of the Qur'an explicitly in a Muslim's translation (*The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall* [New York: Mentor Books, 1953]—note the opening sentence of the Foreword: "The aim of this work is to present to English readers what Muslims of the world over hold to be the meaning of the words of the Koran. . . . It may be reasonably claimed that no Holy Scripture can be fairly presented by one who disbelieves its inspiration and its message"). Another is the series of London editions of Indian classics with expository commentaries by Radhakrishnan (*The Bhagavadgītā, with an Introductory Essay, Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes by S. Radhakrishnan* (London, 1948 and subsequent reprints); *The Principal Upaniṣads, Edited with Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes by S. Radhakrishnan* (London, 1953; etc.); and many more.

¹⁸ The differences are significant in many ways, some of which will be considered below under the heading of "encounter." It is a step forward to recognize that adherents of a religion should speak for that religion. Yet this is not in itself enough. For one thing, it has long been recognized that a faith cannot adequately be expressed in words, not even by a man who holds it devoutly. To understand what is in his heart, therefore, the student must not merely listen to or read what a believer affirms, but must come to know those qualities of the believer's life that can become known only in that personal two-way relationship known as friendship. This is peculiarly true of religious faith, but applies in some measure to all human discourse. It is to misunderstand man not to recognize that the knowledge of a person available to another person depends quite basically on the personal relationship between them. I cannot know my neighbor more than superficially unless I love him. So seriously is it believed at McGill University that a Western student is not being offered adequate facilities for the study of Islam and for a degree in Islamics unless he has Muslims available from whom to learn, that it is formal policy at its Institute of Islamic Studies that half of the teachers and half of the students be Muslims. In the case of a dead religion, such a regulation cannot be administratively established, but the principle is not entirely invalidated: all interpretations of bygone faiths must in principle be tentative, since there is in fact no final way of checking whether an ascribed meaning was in fact operative. The Frankfort reconstruction of ancient Egyptian religion mentioned above has in fact been criticized by other Egyptologists as insufficiently supported by the data. Not being a scholar in this field, I cannot assess the cogency of such charges. I simply insist that what Frankfort was trying to do in his lectures is not merely legit-

There is a further point, concerning the audience of any study. An important question about any book is, for whom—whether consciously or unconsciously—was it written. What gets written is determined in part by the experience of the writer, in part by that of the persons addressed. Here too our novel world situation, where both people and books now move freely across cultural frontiers, has been pushing comparative religion writers towards a greatly increased personalization in what they write. As we have already remarked, the Western reader of a Western book about what used to be exotic religion will increasingly himself have Asian friends, or African experience, or international responsibilities. The consumer pressure for the production of studies about the faiths of others is no longer only academic interest or idle curiosity, but is a demand for an interpretation of people with whom one has to deal.

Moreover, books by Western scholars about, say, Buddhism are increasingly being read by Buddhists. Few Western authors have been conscious of the wide extent to which this has become true. Even fewer have grasped its important implications. I would put forward two propositions, both rather bold and perhaps more in process of becoming cogent than actually valid as yet but, I am persuaded, increasingly important. The first is that it is no longer legitimate to write in this field for any but a world audience. Many think that they are addressing books and articles to one particular community (normally their own), but these are in fact read by others, and especially by that other community that they are about. Muslim writing about the West or about Christianity or Christendom, though in Arabic or Urdu or whatever and produced for Muslim consumption, is being

imate but imperative. If he has not done it well, then others must do it better; but we cannot accept the view that it should not be attempted. As historical criticism in literature, art, and other humane studies has long known, there are ways of attempting to reconstruct what was going on in the minds and hearts of people now dead. Such ways can also be resorted to in the case of people now living; but here they can be checked or supplemented by contact with the persons themselves. And even for persons not accessible, I would hold that sympathy plays a part in any human capacity to understand.

I do not suggest that a personalist epistemology is infallible. It is possible to be inadequately informed, and even misinformed. Personal explanations must be checked against or co-ordinated with texts and other overt data. The personalist approach does not replace other methods, but in our present world surely cannot fail to supplement.

studied and analysed by Western scholars, and the results published. This has two sets of consequences: a somewhat sensitive awareness of the fact is beginning to be not without its effect on the course of Muslim writing itself, in addition to the effect on Western orientation to Islam.

It is much more widely true that books by Western scholars¹⁹ expounding, let us say, Islam to Westerners, or analysing the rise of Mahayana Buddhism in terms of an academic tradition of secular rationalism, are increasingly studied by those concerned.²⁰ So far this fact has led to only limited awareness and had very limited effect on the course of such Western writing, but these have begun to be discernible²¹ and must increase. The effect on the East has been great, and is growing. Western writing on Eastern religion has had, in the course of the last hundred years, because of its substance, an influence on the development of those religions themselves that certainly deserves careful historical investigation; on the whole, because of the form in which it has mostly been cast, it has in addition been causing resentment and is beginning to elicit protest.²² Certainly anyone

¹⁹ Also non-scholars, though this concerns us here less directly: a graphic example was the article "The Moslem World" (actually on its religion) in *Time*, August 31, 1951, pp. 32-37, which gave great offense in the Muslim world and resulted in *Time's* being banned for a while in more than one Muslim country.

²⁰ It has even happened that two industrious researchers in Beirut have combed writings by Christian missionaries discussing the Christian missionary movement to Muslims, and published their ensuing indictment: Muṣṭafá Khālidī wa 'Umar Farrukh, *al-Tabshīr wa al-Isti'mār fī al-bilād al-'Arabīyah* (Beirut, 1372/1953).

²¹ An instance, that of Montgomery Watt, is pointed out in n. 42.

²² As one example among many, see Khurshid Ahmed, *Islam and the West* (Lahore, n.d.) (sc. 1958), a Jamā'at-i Islāmi pamphlet. (Though ostensibly addressed to the West, this work—which deserves a very careful study—was in fact aimed also at those Westernizing young Muslims who seemed to the author to be in danger of being too much influenced in their own religious ideas by Western writing on Islam.) The increasingly expressed dissatisfaction among Muslims at the otherwise impressive work of European scholarship, *The Encyclopaedia of Islām* (Leiden and London, 1908-38, and currently being reissued in revised form, Leiden and London, 1954-), is in part to be included also under this present heading. In addition, however, it is in part rather an indication of the resentment of a people inchoately feeling themselves excluded from a conversation about their own affairs. The protests led the editors to recognize self-consciously for the first time that the encyclopedia was in fact produced not for men in general but specifically for (as well as by) the scholarly tradition of Western Europe. This sort of situation is discussed in my next section, below.

for whom comparative religion studies are something that might or should serve to promote mutual understanding and good relations between religious communities cannot but be concerned at this contrary effect. Even by those to whom this is a moral point not essentially germane to the intellectual principles involved, it may yet be recognized that a situation has arisen wherein anyone who writes about a religion other than his own today does so, in effect, in the presence of those about whom he is speaking.

If nothing more, an author not alert to the point that we have been urging, namely, that a religion is a personal thing in the lives of men, is today being alerted to it by the increasingly live reaction to his writing of those men themselves.

As it becomes more widely recognized that the comparative religionist speaks in the hearing of those he describes, this will inescapably have its effect at least on how things are put and perhaps also on the kind of thing said. The point is that an author must write not only more courteously but more responsibly.

I would contend that not only is such a development taking place but that it ought to take place, deliberately and rapidly. For I would proffer this as my second proposition: that no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers. I know that this is revolutionary, and I know that it will not be readily conceded; but I believe it to be profoundly true and important. It would take a good deal more space than is here available to defend it at length; for I am conscious of many ways in which it can be misunderstood and of many objections that can be brought against it which can be answered only at some length. I will only recall that by "religion" here I mean as previously indicated the faith in men's hearts. On the external data about religion, of course, an outsider can by diligent scholarship discover things that an insider does not know and may not be willing to accept. But about the meaning that the system has for those of faith, an outsider cannot in the nature of the case go beyond the believer; for their piety *is* the faith, and if they cannot recognize his portrayal, then it is not their faith that he is portraying. There are complications regarding historical change; I recognize that a religion develops, whereas few believers do recognize this,²⁴ so that

²⁴ I have studied some of the intricacies of the notion of a religion's developing, in my Inaugural Lecture mentioned in note 6, above.

what once was true about it may no longer be so, and the insider can speak authoritatively only for the present.²⁴ There are other complications too. All of these must be taken into account in any final exposition; some of them have been explored, others need further clarification. But on the fundamental point I have no qualms: I would hold emphatically that fruitful study must recognize this principle. Indeed, it is not really a limitation but a creative principle; for it provides experimental control that can lead a student dynamically towards the truth.²⁵

Non-Christians might write an authoritative history of the church but however clever, erudite, or wise they can never refute Christians on what the Christian faith is. The only way that outsiders can ever ascertain what Christianity is, is by inference from Christian work or art or deed; and they can never be better qualified than those Christians to judge whether their inferences are valid. Indeed, some Christians have maintained that in principle no one can understand Christianity who does not accept it. We do not go so far, but we recognize substance in this contention. We recognize also that a similar point applies to all religions. Anything that I say about Islam as a living faith is valid only in so far as Muslims can say "amen" to it.

The reverse is certainly not true. Not every statement about Islam that is acceptable to Muslims is *ipso facto* true: one can flatter or beguile. Nor need outsiders simply follow Muslims: It is possible both in theory and in practice for an outside scholar to break new ground in stating the meaning of a faith in, say, modern terms more successfully than a believer. At the present time, for instance, Muslims themselves have not been able to give an intellectual statement of their faith that succeeds well

²⁴ And with final authority only for himself. The subtle question of the relation of one man's faith to his community's faith I am examining in a series of forthcoming lectures on the history of the concept "Religion."

²⁵ For instance, Huston Smith, in the book to which reference has been made (above, n. 15), states in his Preface that he has had scholarly members of the faiths concerned read some of his chapters. This, which has ceased to be surprising, implicitly supports the principle for validity that I have formulated, as well as showing how the procedure can be productive. Again, the publishers proclaim on the dust-jacket of another recent work (Edmund Perry, *The Gospel in Dispute* [see n. 34, below], the publishers are Doubleday): "Dr. Perry has used the skills of the cultural anthropologist in presenting a clear picture of the four leading non-Christian religions—a picture accepted enthusiastically by their exponents." Even making allowances for commercial overstatement, one may find the claim interesting, suggesting what the publishers expect readers nowadays to approve.

in communicating meaning to a Western audience.²⁶ The task of a non-Muslim scholar writing about Islam is that of constructing an exposition that will do justice to the Western academic tradition, by growing directly out of the objective evidence and by being rationally coherent both within itself and with all other knowledge, and at the same time will do justice to the faith in men's hearts by commanding their assent once it is formulated. It is a creative task and a challenging one.²⁷

Whether or not this particular argument carries full conviction, we pass on. The general point that has been made is that in the new conditions of the modern world the comparative study of religion has moved into a new phase—first, in that the object of inquiry has on a quite new scale been seen to be communities of persons. Enough has been said to emphasize the point that the implications of this development are far from negligible.

II

Our second point is that the subject of inquiry also has been taking on a personalized quality: the investigator. Formerly the scholar was seen, ideally, as the detached academic intellect, surveying its material impersonally, almost majestically, and reporting on it objectively. Such a concept is characteristic of the academic tradition of Western Europe; one might be bold enough to add, characteristic particularly of nineteenth-century Western Europe. One cannot belittle that tradition or its accomplishments, in our field or in others. Yet in three ways the situation has become more complex since.

First, the detachment was felt in this particular case to mean,

²⁶ It has been recognized, even by some Muslims (in private conversation), that Part I of Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York and London, 1956), is a more effective exposition of Islam to Christians than any modern Muslim has been able to accomplish. Compare also my review of Morgan (ed.), *Islam—the Straight Path: Islam Interpreted by Muslims*, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1959.

²⁷ My recent *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, 1957) was a deliberate and explicit attempt to meet this challenge; see the Preface, pp. v-x. Particularly relevant here is the attempted exposition of the meaning of Islam as a religion, pp. 9-26. The book was deliberately written in an endeavor to be simultaneously (1) true (and intelligible, cogent, to academic scholars), (2) intelligible to Muslims, (3) intelligible to Christians. That I have only been partially successful means that one must keep trying, not that one must not try. For a similar point on a smaller scale, compare the reference to Montgomery Watt, below, n. 42.

inter alia, that the scholar studied religion but did not (at least, qua scholar) participate in it. Most of the significant academic advances in the study of religion before World War I or thereabouts were made by the secular rationalist. In mid-twentieth century, on the other hand, he is joined, if not superseded, by the explicit Christian as a student of non-Christian religions, or at least by the serious searcher as a student of all religions, in the West. Seventy-five years ago it was widely held in universities that a necessary qualification for an "impartial" or scientific study of religion, including the religions of other communities, was that the student be without a faith of his own, be not *engagé*; at the present time, the contrary view is not unfamiliar.²⁸

Secondly, the Western scholar in this as in other fields is being joined by investigators from other civilizations—where the secular-religious dichotomy of the West does not, or does not so fully, obtain. In the Muslim world, India, the Buddhist countries, writers in this field will largely write, one may expect, as Muslims, as Hindus, or as Buddhists.²⁹ This much at least may be conceded, that along with the academic tradition of detached secular study of religion, there is growing in both Christendom and elsewhere a religiously related scholarship of religious diversity.³⁰ To some extent in the future these studies, it would seem,

²⁸ When it became known that a certain chair of comparative religion was held by a professor who was a Unitarian Christian, two opposite reactions could be observed by the present writer among colleagues: one, that by being a Unitarian "at least he would be less prejudiced [than a more orthodox Christian] in his work"; the other, that a man who had not seen the point of his own religion could hardly be expected to see the point of other people's.

²⁹ Communist scholars, e.g., from China, may write in a non-religious fashion, but not as non-*engagés*. Since I am of those that hold Confucians to be in fact, as such, religious men, non-Communist Chinese writers would seldom prove exceptions to the general principle.

³⁰ One recent example among many: Franz König (ed.), *Christus und die Religionen der Erde: Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (3 vols.; Freiburg, 1956*). A Muslim example: 'Abd Allāh Dirāz, *al-Dīn: Buḥūth Mumahhidah li-darāsāt ta'rikh al-adyān* (Cairo, 1952). More recently: Ahmad 'Abdullāh al-Masūdī, *Maḥāhib-i 'Ālam* (Karachi, 1958). More generally, one may compare such earlier names as Max Müller, Tylor, Fraser, Durkheim, and may one not add Freud, with such recent ones as Otto, Kraemer, Wach, Van der Leeuw, Eliade, etc.? Further, one may note how little of any significance at the present time is being put forward on religion by secularists, over against the very considerable activity in nascent departments of religion and by divinity schools and the churches, especially in America. Not many decades ago it was virtually standard that the academic writer take

are to be carried out by religious people for religious people.

The third aspect of this development is that even the secular rationalist is coming to be seen as a person like another: not a god, not a superior impersonal intellect, monarch of all it surveys, but a man with a particular point of view. Secular rationalism may be the right road, may be the Truth as it claims to be; but it has come to be felt that there is no a priori intellectual or universal reason for supposing so from the start, so that it may sit in unchallenged judgment on equally massive and venerated traditions, Christian, Hindu, or whatever, that make the same claim. The decline of Western Europe's world position, the rise of existentialist philosophies and moods, the Western "return to religion," the rise of communism, and the resurgence of Eastern civilizations on a religious base, have all conspired to bring about this new situation, wherein the secular intellectual, like the religious believer, takes his place as a member of one group of men, one of the world's communities, looking out upon the others.

Each writer in this field is beginning to be recognized and to recognize himself as the exponent or champion of one tradition in a world of other persons expounding or championing others.³¹

For granted that religion is a fallacy, the problem being to explain it away in terms of something else; recent books on the matter take it as at least a mystery, if not as an accepted commitment. Studies of individual religions by clerics, such as Cragg (Islam) and De Lubac (Buddhism) cannot be matched today by secularists' works.

³¹ In the case of Islamic studies, this general point may be illustrated with reference to two of the West's ablest scholars, Gibb and Von Grunebaum. That the former speaks in a situation of a "we" reporting about "they" is made explicit, with the use of these actual pronouns, in the Preface to his *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago, 1947), pp. x-xii. Part of Gibb's greatness as a scholar lies in his clear awareness of Islam as the faith of living persons, and his incorporating this into the Western academic tradition; he was one of the first to visit the Muslim world regularly (until World War I, he spent a sizable period every winter in Cairo, and was a member of the Egyptian Academy; this was true also of Massignon, another of the pioneers in introducing the personalist sense into Western Islamics). Gibb's "we," cited above, refers to the Christian community in the West. Von Grunebaum studies Islamic civilization as a conscious representative of the Western academic tradition ("we") confronting the Islamic tradition ("they"). He knows that the former tradition is on the defensive in the modern world; it has his loyalty and esteem, while he recognizes clearly that other traditions have other men's loyalty and esteem in a comparable, if for him less justified, fashion. His concern is essentially comparative civilization rather than comparative religion, the Western academic tradition being the crowning aspect of Western civilization and Islam the foun-

III

The next step follows rather closely. When both the writer and that about which he writes become personal, so does the relationship between them. As we have said, the present position is an encounter.³² When persons or human communities meet, there arises a need to communicate. What had been a description is therefore in process of becoming a dialogue.

To talk about people is not the same as to talk to them; nor is this quite the same as to talk with them. The need for these last two steps in comparative religion is beginning to be felt, only gradually perhaps in universities but urgently by the churches. The word "dialogue" has actually been coming much to the fore in recent years, with both the Roman Catholic church³³ and the Protestant.³⁴ Major movements are afoot. It

dation aspect of Islamic civilization; our argument is not seriously affected by this point. The "we-they" theme runs through much of his writing on Islam, coming perhaps into clearest focus in a paper read to the Conference on Near East History held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, 1958, not yet published.

³² Note C. A. O. van Nieuwenhuijze, "Frictions between Presuppositions in Cross-cultural Encounters: The Case of Islamology" (*Institute of Social Studies Publications on Social Change*, No. 12 [The Hague, 1958]), pp. 66-67: "We must persistently remain aware of our own presuppositions in our Islamic studies. We must consider our studies an encounter first and foremost, even rather than as an attempt at understanding, let alone interpretation." This quotation is taken from a paper commenting *inter alia* on the International Islamic Colloquium, Lahore, 1958—which I also attended. The almost fantastic developments of that conference would lend themselves rather readily to analysis in the terms being put forward in the present essay, I suggest. The conference in its discussion on Islam by Muslims and others ("non-Muslims") displayed every variety of an impersonal/it, impersonal/they, we/they, we/you, we-all relationship pattern, and collapsed because of a failure both to clarify these and to clarify which was to obtain.

³³ There are many instances throughout the world. As a friend of mine who is a priest puts it, "The notions of dialogue and encounter are 'in the air' these days." A practical example, in relation primarily to Islam: the summer sessions (International Seminars) at Tioumliline, Morocco, since 1956. An example at the level of intellectual statement, of theory: Louis Gardet and M.-M. Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane: Essai de théologie comparée* (Paris, 1948)—Note in their announcement of purpose: "C'est un fait que le dialogue ne s'est que peu engagé encore entre la culture occidentale (chrétienne ou déchristianisée) et la culture arabo-musulmane. Tout cependant semble le requérir" (p. 6), and again in their conclusion, the word "dialogue" being taken up again in the final and perhaps culminating sentence of the book.

³⁴ Again there are many instances, throughout the world. The word "dialogue" (also "encounter") has become popular with the World Council of

is perhaps too early yet to say whether this is the form into which the earlier unilateral preaching of the evangelistic missionary movement is being transformed; there seem to be forces working in that direction, not the least being the vitality of the faiths addressed. Might it not be that the next step in missions would necessarily be one where one religious group says to another, "This is what we have seen of the truth, this is what God has done for us; tell us what you have seen, what God has done for you; and let us discuss it together"?³⁵ Provided that this is sincere, it seems entirely legitimate; though if a participant privately hoped or believed that out of a genuine discussion the other side would come to a preference for his side, then it may still be evangelical. In addition to this type of mutuality, perhaps with some ecclesiastical commitment, more and more there are independent dialogues, or encounters where the spirit is not persuasive but inquiring, where members of two faiths or groups of members meet simply to learn. The same question as before may be put, but in this case the objective is one's own enrichment, rather than the other group's, or the enrichment of all but without any transfer of allegiance. Indeed, even on an institutionalized scale, there are incipient encounters where the specified purpose is the needed but difficult matter of the groups' simply learning how they may live together in mutual respect and collaboration.³⁶

Churches and International Missionary Council, Geneva, as well as in less formal or authoritative circles. In fact, so common has the terminology become in some Christian thinking that in a recent academic book it is even used as a verb: "It is good for us Christians [note the pronoun] to have these other missionary religions dispute the Gospel. . . . The present dispute brings the issues and differences among religions out in the open so that the genuine Christian has to dialogue with the genuine Jew, the true Muslim, the best Hindu and the real Buddhist. . ." (concluding paragraph of Edmund Perry, *The Gospel in Dispute: The Relation of Christian Faith to Other Missionary Religions* [New York, 1958]). The author is chairman of the Department of History and Literature of Religions, Northwestern University.

³⁵ Some modification in the phraseology would be needed in certain cases, e.g., that of Theravadin Buddhists; but the substance of the approach is not altered.

³⁶ Instances of friendly coming together are the World Congress of Faiths, established in 1936 in London by Sir Francis Younghusband and now with a considerable membership, program, and institutionalized life; at an academic level the Union for the Study of Great Religions, founded in 1950 in Oxford by Spalding, Radhakrishnan, and Raven; etc. Instances where

To situations of these kinds the comparative religionist may respond in various ways, though to me it hardly seems reasonable that he not respond at all. First, he may participate in the dialogue, as a member of one or other group. In a meeting between, let us say, Christians and Buddhists, it is clear that the conversation would proceed the better if the latter contingent included a well-qualified Buddhist student of comparative religion. One would hardly organize a dialogue with Hindus without inviting Radhakrishnan. Indeed, in a sense all members of the encounter are in effect expected *ipso facto* to end up as in some sort comparative religionists; presumably some of them might well start so. In the Christian case specifically (and to some extent the same would apply in theory to the Muslims, though in practice today it would clearly not) it would be felt by some that the comparative religionist would be out of place as a protagonist in any encounter. Such a feeling has been due to two things: the Western tradition of academic non-involvement, on which we have already commented, and the Christian tradition of exclusivism and proselytism. I would argue that these last two are not (or will become not) obligatory elements of the Christian faith, and indeed my personal view would be that the very value and even the purpose of Christian dialogue with other faiths may well be a Christian learning at last to apprehend one's own faith fully and loyally (and perhaps more truly?) and simultaneously to appreciate the quality and even the ultimate validity (in the eyes of God) of others'. Many today say that this is in principle not possible. I venture to believe that it is³⁷ and that dialogue may be an avenue of the church's reaching it.

Whatever one's own view, however, I do not see how either I or anyone else, on either academic or moral grounds, can possibly legislate that, let us say, Hendrik Kraemer be not allowed

specifically two religions are involved are the Council on Christians and Jews, founded in 1923, and the Continuing Committee on Muslim-Christian Cooperation, set up in 1954 as a result of a meeting at Bhandun, Lebanon, sponsored by the American Friends of the Middle East.

³⁷ First, I reject the view that a rule may be set up a priori that in qualifying as an adequate scholar of comparative religion there is involved withdrawing from one's own community; second, I hold that one has not fully understood the faith of a community other than one's own until one has seen how that faith can serve (does serve, has served) as the channel between God and those persons.

to participate in a Christian encounter with other faiths, or can possibly deny him the right to hold his chair.³⁸ I do not at all like his views, but I feel that I must refute them, not suppress them.³⁹

In the other sort of dialogue, where the purpose is mutual understanding, amity, and collaboration, the comparative religionist may clearly participate. One would hardly argue that either a Christian or a Muslim scholar in this field would be out of place in the recently established Continuing Committee on Muslim-Christian Co-operation, or a Christian or Jewish scholar on the Council of Christians and Jews. He would do so in his private capacity, no doubt; but presumably he would both learn something, and contribute something, qua scholar.

The second role that the representative of our studies may play in the encounter between faiths is that of chairman. For this Kraemer would be disqualified by his views, but also he would not choose the post. Others of us, however, may aspire to

³⁸ When he wrote *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London, 1938), he was Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Leiden—a post for which one could hardly argue that he was not qualified.

³⁹ Perhaps, however, it is legitimate not merely to argue against his conclusions but to urge against his position from the start the general principle that an outsider cannot understand a civilization or a great religion unless he approaches it with humility and love. Such a principle does not apply, I must admit, to a phenomenon such as fascism. I personally find so axiomatic a differentiation between at least the great religions, with their long historical record behind them of human achievement, and such things as fascism that I see no practical problem here. But perhaps there is still an intellectual problem, so that the sentence in the text stands. Until that intellectual problem is resolved, my statement in note 37, above, needs some refinement on the intellectual level. I feel that adequate writing about a religion by an outsider requires an imaginative recognition that if, say, I had been born a Hindu I would presumably remain a Hindu, if born a Muslim I would presumably remain a Muslim, but if born a German I like to think that I would not have been a Nazi. Can this judgment be intellectualized and objectively justified? That it is an objective statement can be shown statistically: a large number of Germans did reject nazism. Even more important, those Germans who rejected it are all those whom one admires, whom one could take as friends; whereas those Hindus and Muslims whom I admire, who are my friends (and indeed whom Christians generally must admire, and do take as friends), remain Hindus and Muslims. (And probably it is good that they so remain.)

My statement above must not be taken to exclude the point that if I were a Hindu or a Muslim, presumably I would be a reforming one (just as in fact I am a reforming Christian). Since every religion has to do with transcendent reality, it is part of the truth of that religion to be dissatisfied with its extant forms.

qualify—and indeed to regard this qualification as almost the essence of our work. One objective of training might be formulated as equipping the student with such an understanding of at least two religions, and of the problems of relationship, that he can serve as a mediator or interpreter between them, or at least as a kind of broker helping them to interpret themselves to each other. There is need today for men so equipped, and where else are they to derive the training? Moreover, how better could one's competence in this discipline be tested?

In fact, in one or other of these roles not only might the scholar of comparative religion seem professionally involved; perhaps the department of comparative religion may become institutionally so. It is perhaps not unlikely that over the next, say, twenty-five years, departments of comparative religion in various parts of the world will formally become places where such dialogues deliberately and explicitly take place, formalizing and systematizing the intellectual encounter between representatives of diverse traditions. In North America such a process has already begun at McGill, Chicago, and Harvard. The move will be effectively launched only when there are counterparts in Asia.⁴⁰

The third role is that of observer. If the comparative religionist chooses not to participate in or to moderate the dialogues that are in fact increasingly taking place, at least he can hardly fail to take a (professional) interest in what is going on. It is part of the contemporary history of the religions (and conceivably one of the most profound matters in the whole history of religion) that they are encountering each other, both on systematized occasion and informally in the coffee houses of the world. And even on the sidelines he may find himself being asked at least to provide the theory for those that are practically involved. People wishing to talk together across religious frontiers have been finding that their conceptions of one another's faiths, their capacity to explicate their own faiths in terms that can be understood by outsiders, and the concepts of mutual dis-

⁴⁰ On the whole, Asian religions and communities have been considerably more ready for collaboration and mutual study than has the West. It is the formal, academic pattern of these at the level of scholarship that is here in question. The Union for the Study of the Great Religions (cf. n. 36, above) has begun to be active in this matter, particularly in Pakistan and India.

course available to them jointly, are inadequate. They turn to comparative religion to supply this.

At an even more withdrawn level, the scholar is presented with the task of conceptualizing the dynamic processes at work, and of discerning and again conceptualizing whatever new may emerge.

In this human situation is elucidated my earlier contention that a statement about a religion, in order to be valid, must be intelligible and acceptable to those within. In order to be sincere, and of any use, it must also of course be intelligible and acceptable to the outsider who makes it. When Muslims and Buddhists meet, what is needed are a statement of Islam that Muslims can recognize as valid and Buddhists can recognize as meaningful, and similarly a statement about Buddhism that Buddhists can acknowledge and Muslims understand. In any dialogue the participants, the chairman, and the writer of books that all of these will read must move towards this if intercommunication is to proceed.

This can be generalized so that herein is posed one of the fundamental tasks of our studies today. I would formulate it thus: *it is the business of comparative religion to construct statements about religion that are intelligible within at least two traditions simultaneously.*⁴¹ This is not easy, it has not been done systematically in the past and almost not done at all; but it is intellectually important and historically urgent.

⁴¹ The following extracts from the regulations for the degree of Ph.D. in Islamic Studies at McGill University illustrate one attempt to formalize this kind of consideration. In this case only one religion is in question, and attention is given to the relationship between the Islamic tradition and the Western academic tradition. Speaking of what the Institute of Islamic Studies here regards as the inadequacy of a doctorate's only applying the form of the latter to the substance of the former, the memorandum goes on to say: "Its ambition would be to encompass something of the substance of both Western and Islamic traditions, and also something of the form of both. . . . In the matter of form he [the candidate] should not only satisfy the principle of a Western doctorate, but also produce work that would maintain continuity with the Islamic tradition. It is the task . . . of the Institute to strive for the construction of new forms that will subsume but transcend the present pattern on both sides: new forms, that is, that will neither betray the Western academic tradition nor distort the Islamic. The product of research must be relevant to both, significant to both, and cogent in both. . . . [The] thesis should be recognizable in both traditions as a constructive advance." For the doctorate in comparative religion, formal regulations have not yet been adopted for this point, but the same principles

Since the scholar presumably works from a university, that is, within the academic tradition, the statement that he produces must first of all be meaningful and cogent within that tradition. That is, it must satisfy his own trained and inquiring mind, and must satisfy all the most rigorous standards of scholarship. In the particular case where the encounter is between the academic tradition of the West and a particular religion, the statement that is evolved must satisfy each of two traditions independently and transcend them both by satisfying both simultaneously. In the case of an encounter between two religious groups, let us say for example Christianity and Islam, the scholar's creativity must rise to the point where his work is cogent within three traditions simultaneously: the academic, the Christian, and the Muslim. This is not easy, but I am persuaded that both in principle and in practice it can be done.⁴²

would obtain, with the added complication that the candidate must satisfy three traditions: that of Western scholarship and also those of at least two religions. In the case of living religions, an acceptable doctoral thesis would, among other requirements, have to satisfy examiners representing each of the traditions concerned.

⁴² There is an example of a successful attempt, on a small scale—in fact, on simply one particular point, though an important one: W. Montgomery Watt, in the Introduction to his *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford, 1953), p. x, writes, "I have refrained from using the expressions 'God says' and 'Muhammad says' when referring to the Qur'ān, and have simply said 'the Qur'ān says.'" The device may seem minor and almost too simple, but I would urge its significance. To anyone familiar with the history of Western biographies of the Prophet, with its long tale of vituperation and certainly of totally reckless distance from the attitudes of Muslims as a community of persons, it is particularly striking to have a scholar write explicitly in the awareness that he is writing also for a Muslim audience, and take pains to write in a way that they can accept. "This book will be considered by at least three classes of readers: those who are concerned with the subject as historians, and those who approach it primarily as Muslims or Christians" (*ibid.*; this is the opening sentence of the book). The paragraph from which these two sentences are taken indicates, however, that the author is picturing his situation to himself as one of avoiding the issue between Christians and Muslims rather than (so far as wording goes) solving it. He does not seem to realize that the form of his presentation has transcended the separate viewpoints, not merely evaded two of them ("In order to avoid deciding whether the Qur'ān is or is not the Word of God, I have refrained . . ."). Is this perhaps the first time that a Western or Christian scholar was consciously and deliberately writing in such a way as to be read by these three groups?

For the same attempt on a larger scale, compare my work mentioned in note 27, above, in which every sentence in the book was thought out so as to be, if possible, cogent in all three traditions.

This kind of constructive thinking is necessary in order to provide the intellectual basis for the meetings between communities that are today taking place. Like other intellectual advance instigated by actual problems of evolving human conditions, however, it has worth in itself, and implications far out-reaching the immediate issues. In principle, the drive is toward the construction of an intellectual statement (or history) of the diverse religions of mankind that ideally does justice to all of them as well as standing independently, a statement that will be cogent to a reasonable man who is a member of any faith or of none. This leads us on to our fourth major consideration, where the personalization of our studies with which we began eventuates in their attaining fully human status, overcoming the local or particularist. In this lies the culmination of this development of our work, and to it we now turn.

IV

The emergence of dialogue is important not only in itself but for its further implications. Once it is achieved, its significance transcends the achievement, opening the way to a still newer stage. For a dialogue may lead (in some individual cases has led already) to reconciliation, to an enlarged sense of community. In any case, and at the least, it implies articulateness on two sides. This is incipient, and major. No longer is the prosecution of these studies exclusively a western prerogative. Japanese are studying Eskimo animism and Christianity, Muslims are diagnosing Western secularism, the theorizing of Hindus about comparative religion is becoming widely known. Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists are learning to talk to Christian and Western scholars, as well as being talked to; and in the process are studying religious diversity itself. Thus the Western scholar is slowly coming to have not only an Asian (or African) informant as his source, an Asian critic as his audience, an Asian scholar as his teacher, but, perhaps most significantly of all, an Asian colleague as his collaborator.

Certainly we are only at its beginning, but the long-term trend promises to be towards a transformed situation, where an international body of scholars writes for a world audience. This essentially new and potentially highly significant emergence brings to light what I see as the culmination of the contemporary

transformation. As with the other stages, it makes vivid what was always in principle true but hardly grasped.

I have argued that one cannot study religion from above, only from alongside or from within—only as a member of some group. Today the group of which the student recognizes himself as a member is capable of becoming, even is in process of becoming, world-wide—and interfaith. This is the significant matter.

For once the community becomes large enough, and if consciousness keeps pace, that process is fulfilled whereby the study is no longer an objective inquiry carried on from the outside, but a human study carried on from within. Even a face-to-face dialogue gives way to a side-by-side conversation, where scholars of different faiths no longer confront each other but collaborate in jointly confronting the universe, and consider together the problems in which all of them are involved.

For finally it will be recognized that in comparative religion man is studying himself. The fact of religious diversity is a human problem, common to us all. It is becoming an incorporated, internal part of the fact of being a Christian that other intelligent, devout, and righteous men are Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. Even the non-religious man is engaged in living in a world where his fellows are of unreconciled faiths. Every man is personally involved in all man's diversity. Man here is studying one of the most profound, one of the most perplexing, one of the potentially most explosive aspects of his own modern situation. We all are studying the fact that our human community is divided within itself religiously.

The practitioner of comparative religion, then, I am suggesting, may become no longer an observer vis-à-vis the history of the diverse religions of distant or even close communities, but rather a participant—in the multiform religious history of the only community there is, humanity. *Comparative religion may become the disciplined self-consciousness of man's variegated and developing religious life.*

We may look now for a history not so much of the disparate religions but of man's religiousness. Such a history should be persuasive to students of that total history, themselves from diverse faiths. It should be such and they should be such that they can recognize and acknowledge their own separate communities within it, and at the same time recognize and acknowledge

the totality, of which also they are learning to be part. Such a history should in particular trace and clarify—even explain—the rise, at a certain period of human history, of the great religions as separate entities. Perhaps also sheerly by being written it would give some intellectualization to the fact that again, in the present period of human history, those great religions seem in some degree to be in process of ceasing to be quite so separate, even perhaps of ceasing to be quite so surely entities.⁴³

The student of comparative religion begins with the postulate that it is possible to understand a religion other than one's own.⁴⁴ In our day, this postulate is being tested—urgently, severely, by our concrete human situation. We are called upon to make good our claim, in practice, and quickly. To meet this challenge demands that we rethink our purposes, recast our basic concepts. But there is also the promise that if we do meet it, the results may contribute to that largest of contemporary problems, the turning of our nascent world society into a world community.

A religious history of man has yet to be written, concerning itself with the development of us all rather than primarily with the development of each. It is interesting to note, however, that titles are beginning to be phrased as "the religions of *man*" and the like.⁴⁵ And in other ways the work of individual scholars has begun to move in this direction.⁴⁶

⁴³ That each of the religions of the world is in some sense a distinct entity is a commonly accepted notion. On examination it proves that this idea has come into historical acceptance gradually, and there is perhaps some reason to speculate as to whether it will persist in its current form. I have examined the question at some length in the lectures referred to above (n. 24).

⁴⁴ If this postulate be false, then the whole study must of course be called off. Admittedly, one would be left with what we began this essay with, the factual data of the *Encyclopaedia*, but with the added proclamation now that one does not and cannot understand what the data signify. This would constitute a formidable and no doubt growing discipline of the history of the externalia of religion, and there could be a comparative religious externalia. The work of the current school of phenomenologists in Europe would continue to have significance.

⁴⁵ Two examples: John B. Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York, 1949, and subsequent editions); Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York, 1958), cf. n. 15, above. Compare also Paul Hutchinson's essay "How Mankind Worships" referred to in n. 16, above.

⁴⁶ Younger scholars, perhaps particularly in North America, seem to be taking up a relationship to their work of some such kind. For example, Philip H. Ashby, *The Conflict of Religions* (New York, 1955), the first work of the first scholar in this field at Princeton, is a discussion "concerning the

Presently may there be a symposium in which scholars from different faiths will write chapters not each on his own faith but perhaps each on other aspects of the total development, in a way agreeable to all?⁴⁷

It would, of course, be an oversimplification to hold that an over-all development such as has been here outlined has gone forward quite straightforwardly and steadily. I do suggest, however, that it is in fact possible to characterize any study of a religion other than one's own, or of interrelationships, as falling under one or other of these headings. I suggest also that there has been on the whole a gradual movement in the direction indicated. I contend further that clarity here will prove of major benefit. We must become conscious, and self-conscious, on this matter. Students would do well to ask themselves, concerning any account or any project that they meet, in which category it falls: impersonal/it, impersonal/they, we/they, we/you, we-both, or we-all. A writer should clarify in his own mind which kind of book or article he is proposing to write; and an organizer, which kind of university department, of conference, of journal, he is proposing to run.

Though the various principles that we have adumbrated are beginning to be recognized, the performance, one must confess, is as yet sadly inadequate. It will be a good while yet before anything is achieved on the level of interreligious communication and dialogue, let alone on that of multireligious consciousness,

possible contributions of the religions of the world to the amelioration of the problems of mankind" (p. 192; opening sentence of the concluding chapter); the author is concerned to show that man (*sic*) can meet the terrible problems that confront him today if he can replace the "conflict" among his various religions with a "combined witness" (p. viii). The book is implicitly written for believing members of the four largest communities (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist) equally—this is something new.

⁴⁷ The first step towards this might be a collaborative work on two faiths; let us say Christianity and Islam, written jointly by a Christian and a Muslim. If it is possible, as I have argued, for a Christian student to write something on Islam that Muslims can acknowledge, and therefore possible also in principle (although it has not yet been done) for a Muslim to do the same on Christianity, then presumably a joint study of the two faiths and of the relationships between them could be produced by a Christian and a Muslim working in collaboration. This should be quite striking. Presumably this is the kind of work that would lay the intellectual foundation for bringing into being the human partnership at which a movement such as the Continuing Committee on Muslim-Christian Co-operation is aiming.

that can be compared for quality to the impressive monologue of the *Encyclopaedia*. When a work does appear worthy of typifying achievement in this realm, we predict that it will be written by a person who has seen and felt, and is morally, spiritually, and intellectually capable of giving expression to, the fact that we—all of us—live together in a world in which not they, not you, but *some of us* are Muslims, some are Hindus, some are Jews, some are Christians. If he is really great, he will perhaps be able to add, some of us are Communists, some inquirers.

If the great religions are true, or even if any one of them is, then such a work is possible; and if it is written, it will be essentially true. For have we not been told that men are brothers, that in the eyes of God⁴⁸ the human community is the only real community there is? And that the two matters of supreme importance are the relations among persons within that total community, and the relations between men and God?

⁴⁸ One might equally say, in the eye of reason. In line with this, one might then add to the preceding sentence, "or if the rationalist tradition is true."

The Supreme Being: Phenomenological Structure and Historical Development

When one speaks in a historical-religious way of the Supreme Being of the so-called primitive peoples, one usually means by this the Celestial Supreme Being.

The sky, in its unbounded immensity, in its perennial presence, in its wondrous luminosity, is particularly well suited to suggest to the mind of man the idea of sublimity, of incomparable majesty, of a sovereign and mysterious power. The sky elicits in man the feeling of a theophany. This is the feeling of a manifestation of the divine, which finds adequate expression in the notion of a Supreme Being.

On the other hand, the notion of a Supreme Being is not exhausted in the image of the Celestial Being. In the following pages I propose to show that there exist various distinct forms of the Supreme Being and that the Celestial Being is just one of them.

Forty years ago, when I began to study the notion of a Supreme Being, I insisted especially on its uranic aspects.¹ The Supreme Being was for me essentially a mythical personification of the sky. The evolution of my thought in this matter has

¹ I refer especially to my book entitled *L'Essere celeste nelle credenze dei popoli primitivi* (Rome, 1922).