Religious Truth and the Multiplicity of Religion

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I'm all wired up, I don't know whether I can speak about the truth with all this wire around me, but I'll try my best. Vice-President Barr, dear friends, when I was first invited to deliver this very prestigious lecture the part of the lecture that attracted me most was of course the name of Sterling McMurrin who I had known for many years when I lived in Iran. I would come often to Utah for, I guess, cultural and academic reasons and eighteen springs ago when I spent the first spring outside of my country here in the city teaching at the University of Utah when my exile in the west began. In addition, I had the greatest respect for one of their most brilliant and profound minds in the philosophical domain that this country has produced during the century. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to participate in a lecture named after him. The theme of the lecture, which I chose, was to some extent in relation to the discussions, which I have had with him. Mr. McMullin, during his life time and also to advise other kinds of discourse either directly or indirectly about the question of truth, and the question of religious of truth in a world in which the framework for truth are now multiple. Therefore, I chose for the subject of my discourse religious truth and the multiplicity of religion. I hardly need to emphasize that there is no religion which we have any certain knowledge in which truth is not the central reality. The most important value is the pillar around which the religion revolves. We all know that starting in Asia the word satiär in Sanskrit meaning truth fills all the pages of the (something) repeatedly. We know that the treasures of Buddhism are called the noble truths not the noble something else. (There are plenty of seats here, please do not sit on the floor come forward and sit here.) We know that Christ said I am the light and the truth and asked his followers to seek the truth which would set them free. Those who know Islam are well acquainted with the famous verse of the Koran that when the truth comes falsehood perishes or wilts away. And I want to quote a figure from the continent of Asia who is well know to all Westerners, who's life was an experiment with truth that is Mahatma Gandhi. Who when developing that old traditional Hindu idea of the significance of truth in religion wrote: "The word sattia (which in Sanskrit means truth) is the derived from sat (same as the German word ist, or is of English, the same root) which means `the'. Nothing is or exists in reality except truth. That is why sat, or truth, is perhaps the most important name of God. It is actually more correct to say that truth is God than to say that God is truth. Sat or Sattia is the only correct and fully significant name for God." This statement of Gandhi would, translated into Arabic and Persian, would correspond exactly to the Islamic idea in which the word truth is one of the names of God and is an exalted name of God to the extent that in very few people are allowed to invoke it. It is, in fact, at the very heart of divine reality Allah, that god is, is adhoc, is the truth. Of course, I told you already the saying of Christ in the Christian tradition, deified and divinized as calling himself the truth. Then we have a rather remarkable unanimity of view in the various religions of the world concerning the significance of truth.
In a discourse such as this we must define our term, because we live in a world, especially the Anglo-Saxon world, where over half a century such terms as truth have been turned upside down, on their head, and considered to be either irrelevant or only temporarily defined according to circumstances, situations in which such terms have been used, and their reduced to what Lichdstien called, ‘language games’. As far as this lecture is concerned, I will not be playing language games with truth. I will go back, rather, and state the definition of an Islamic source, or something like that, that would go back to a very famous definition which is that is central to both Christian theology and western philosophy the definition of St. Thomas Aquinas according to which the truth where is (something in Latin) that is the allocation of reality and intelligence. That is when that nuetic faculty, that faculty in us which knows is adequate to the task to understanding that which is out there, which is real, which is reality, that is a correspondent to the knower and the known, that is the truth. The truth in the sense is our consciousness of the real; and for the sake of the lecture tonight, I shall stick to this very famous definition of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Again, this is so universal, what St. Thomas says. You would find word for word practically, in classical definitions of Arabic and Persian the tradition about which I know a little bit, but also in the Sanskrit and other sources; equating in fact what we call truth with our knowledge of reality. So, truth is ultimately reality and can not be separated from reality. And therefore, it can not be determined only subjectively it always corresponds to that which is real. And religions are grouped upon the truth from that point of view, and this is precisely the difficulty in the problem in a world in which all discipline except modern western science have abdicated the claim to truth. Only modern science it speaks about the truth. If you are a professor of the humanities or social sciences and in college begin to speak about the truth we get into trouble. Professors are not supposed to speak about the truth; truth does not exist. It's (something), it's out of fashion. Only the chemist or the physicist could speak about the truth in a very limited sense of the modern sciences. And that's the deepest reason the deepest urges, religious urges, of humanity in today's world are turned into UFO's and pseudo-science. That is one of the lessons you should learn from about what happened a few weeks ago in San Diego, in fact. That is that abdication of everything other than science to claim to the truth, but this was not always the way. Like this, the situation was not such. Traditionally always, all religions, like I said, place truth at the center of their concern.

Just look at the vocabulary for a moment. One has to do comparative religion and comparative philosophy to travel across borders to get the resonance of all these terms. Let us say the Greek word allasao, how central it is to the whole of the Greek philosophical concern, which means to pull aside what deals with the reality of things, therefore the unveiling of truth. That in term, which was always combined in the Christian, mind in the middle ages when Latin was used, but also litre, because truth always triumphs. It was a model of many of the knightly orders of the middle ages to say (something in Latin), that is truth shall always triumph. I largely believe that truth will always triumph. Look at the word in English, look at its resonance. No matter what the philosophers say in the philosophy department we cannot live without it. And it resonates through all of our lives; throughout religious concerns, throughout philosophical concerns, throughout concerns with our families, to what we expect our relationships that they be based on the truth. Our soul hates falsehood, no matter what modern philosophy has may say So, truth remains in all of these contexts. The very term resonates in a very deep fashion within
us, no matter what the modern philosophy of religion or philosophy itself has said, the problems that it faces in defining what truth is, in the like now; in the multiplicity in religions.

I could also talk about other terms. Like the term ( ) in Arabic. ( ) There is nothing more profound in the whole of Arabic vocabulary than this term. In addition, how from many different words that are created, which are related to each other, especially the words reality and truth. Which in the classical form of vocabulary not only in Arabic, but also in Persian, and other languages, are inseparable. Truth is that which is real and reality is that which truth is. You will find that in modern Arabic that is a Persian word different from truth for reality is the question of the influence of modern philosophy on this country. Not classical languages those two are the same as in Sanskrit.

All this being said we are face with a very profound dilemma and that is that if truth is so central to our religion or a religion, even if you do not have a religion and you are a scholar of religion, you are studying religion; has been so central to the studying of religion. We have seen that historically and theologically truth has always been a particular universe, the universe of that religion. What do we do when there are particular claims to the truth? Here I do not talk about; I do not speak of scientific or philosophical claims, but religious claims to the truth, what if you have other human beings who also claim that what they say is true? There is no other greater dilemma of our century than this. It is the lack of the solution of this problem, which makes all peace across civilization boundaries mere expediency and diplomacy. Not based on real mutual comprehension and understanding and therefore it is a very serious problem, many have of the greatest minds of the century will be attracted to the field of religion, from William James to Huston Smith and American philosophy spanning a whole century. I have devoted most of them of the most profound thoughts to this issue. Therefore, I want to come back to it as someone who is a little bit acquainted with western thought, but also looking upon it from this other tradition from which I come, the Islamic tradition.

Try to analyze what would be the possible positions that 0 take, and the fact that now, for the first time in human history we have an interpenetration of religious worlds in which a particular region no longer has homogeneity over its sole class. We have had interpenetration of religions historically. Islam and Hinduism met in India. Islam and Christianity met in southern France and Spain and in the near East. Judaism and Islam met in Persia. Buddhism and Hinduism met in Japan. I could give a thousand examples, but to add to that last phrase, to modify it; in all of those cases the space, the mental, spiritual, psychological space of each religion was filled with the teachings of that religion, whereas today, for the first time, this is not the case in the Western world, and now more and more so the rest of the world. That is, for example, the mental ambiance of the west is no longer homogeneously Christian, as it was five hundred years ago. Not only are there other religions, but there is also a vacuum of religion, that is people who don't believe in anything, in any religion, and all though they are the minority, in fact, they run the engine of American intellectual life, you might say. They are the people who run the media, the books, the pace setter, in setting up the passions. It is not a question of democracy or of taking votes, there might not be more than fifty percent of the population, but never the less the people of the universities are dominated by this point of view and therefore we have to consider this.

It is the first time in the history of the world in which now you have an encounter with this empty space in the mind and the heart and the soul of many people. Therefore, it brings up
very, very major questions, which it does not have to be probed in the same way in those other major instances of the encounter between various truth claims throughout history. It is very significant for every intelligent westerner to ask why is it, why is it, that Armenians lets say, living in Esperan for four hundred years, since the time of Escprhad, showed no interest whatsoever in Islamic theology and philosophy. Whereas it is impossible for a person getting a PhD in religion now from major American universities, not be interested in the tradition like Islam or Hinduism, and they were not even living in of them, where these people were living in the middle of all the major Islamic cities in the world, the heartland, the virgin culture in Islam. This is a very important question to ask. The reason is, Armenian Christianity at that time, the space in which its followers lived was full of the Armenian Christianity that is the Armenian Christian filled the total space. There was not a nostalgic need in the soul of that particular type of Christian to find out what the Muslims or Jews or Hindus are saying. This, of course, is now no longer a choice. There are seminaries today in which, or course you will only study Christianity, or Toshiba's, or the people who are studying Judaism, there are not many Islamics on this continent, so a modern tool might be blocked out, but those are exceptions. The mainstream which enters into universities, have this contact with other worlds has to face the challenge of the multiplicity of religious claims of worlds different from our own for making the whole question of "how does one determine the truth". Using what matrix, what framework, what to do with the multiplicity of truth claims when they oppose each other, when they contradict each other, becomes very central. In light of this on might say that there are four different logical possibilities to consider, and I want to consider all of them with you.

There are four different positions that one can take. The first is to say that only one religious claim is true and everything else is false, and that one is usually mine, of course. Even if, I will be more general, it could be not mine, but one religious claim is correct. Of course, many people believe this, and I must add that although that this is very difficult to defend this is the normal and natural human situation. Human beings were no more made to live on two planetary systems then to have to consider other religious worlds than their own. It is the same was today. You have a small number of astronomers who look at the heavens who feel and imagine that the sun is not the only sun, but there are other suns in other planetary systems. The rest of us go "yes, yes", but go on living our lives with only one sun; which rises and sets. If we all thought like astronomers, most of us would have gone mad, most of astronomers are mad because they live on another world. The don't have their feet on earth, you know what astronomers are like, they claim that themselves, because they live in a world where the coherence of the imaginable faculty is broken by the fact that you have to always place yourself in non-earthly situations to observe. Many astronomer friends will, I believe, agree with what I say. However, will be our way in the normal sense.

Religiously this is the same way, this symbol that I have presented for you, or the example, metaphor, of considering each religious universe as a planetary system with its own sun is a very (something) one for our day. In which now we are discovering new stars every day, and we a becoming conscious of space with all its remarkable discovers and illusions, which go along with it, really, on earth, we have a sun, but it is the sun of our solar system. There are other suns, which do not appear to us to be suns, they are stars in the firmament. And the fact that from a non-terrestrial point of view, there are also suns, does not effect our situation of a sun, which rises and sets, which defines the rhythm of our life in this world. That is something
we all agree, because they are so obvious. The normal thing is precisely as we do astronomically, as we do religiously; to live without being concerned with those solar systems, with those other suns. In fact, nothing is more painful than having to face this situation. Why do we have to face this situation? Even today, an Italian peasant, a Spanish peasant somewhere, or an Iowa farmer, might not have to face the situation. They are still isolated enough from other worlds that they remain a kind of phantom for him, or her, it does not have to be concretely a concern. This becomes less and less of a possibility for those who not only rub shoulders on a human level of those members of other religious communities. Whom they can no longer ignore, but also read some of the great works of sacred scriptures and inspired writings of other religions and they can hardly ignore it and say "Well, I don't want to think about this", because then they have the great danger of losing their own faith. Therefore, this position, which we now denigrate, was in fact, from a purely theological point of view, divine grace. The grace that God had given us without having to think of other worlds; it is we who pierced the wall that is modern civilization, pierced the wall and it spread to other places, forcing us now, to have to think of these other worlds. There is also great compensation, of course in it, to which I shall turn later on. However, the first position, as I said, only one truth claim, and I added usually my own, is true and all others are false.

The second possibility would be to say that all religious truth claims are the same, all religions are saying the same thing, and therefore are all-true. This is the second logical possibility. The third would be to say that because some truth claims contradict other truth claims they are relative, and ultimately false, except as temporally and historically conditioned responses to particular cultural and sociological situations, societal situations. That would be another possibility. Moreover, the fourth possibility would be to say that all traditional religious truths, or truth claims, are true, but that religions do not say the same thing. Now let me go over these four possibilities. Examine them a bit philosophically, and I will try to expand on the fourth one, which is the most fruitful, and the most inclusive of all possibilities, without destroying the notion of truth itself.

The first claim until recently was the official claim of all, almost all, Christian theologians; both Catholic and Protestant. The famous Catholic doctrine (something in Latin), which is `there is no salvation outside the church', which Catholicism tried to apply when many people were trying to leave Catholicism for Protestantism, they tried to develop that being a doctrine for everybody, all non-Catholics. All those expressed in Latin, of course, have been held, and upheld by most of the Protestant theologians until the last fifty years. During the last half century this position has began to change, in both main stream Protestantism and in the Catholic Church. However, there is a very great deal of debate going on, it has not totally changed, but anyway, and it is being debated. The Orthodox church, and the evangelical movement in Protestantism are very adamant in holding on to this position, that is that there is no salvation outside the church of Christ (Of course, they also consider the Catholics to be outside the church of Christ, but that is besides the point, but that's another inter-religious debate.). Anyway, that outside of Christianity there is no salvation. People of many other religions, also hold a view Christians should not be embarrassed by; it is not unique to Christianity. In Hinduism, you have to be born into the cast system in order to have the door of deliverance, of Maksha, opened to you. The same is for Buddhism, although Buddhism does not expect, embrace, the cast system, but you cannot reach nirvana without following the sun value,
that Buddha hood is not available except through Buddhism. Other examples, Islam had both views expressed before modern times. That is that non-Muslims, people not of the book are saved, is expressly stated in the Koran. However, some theologians say `No that meant before the coming of Islam', and that has been debated both pro and con, and is a very acute debate that is now going on in the Islamic world. Anyway, it is a major problem. The reason I am mentioning this Christian part is because I am addressing a predominantly Christian audience, at least I believe, a predominantly Christian audience.

Now, the problems with this position, of course, are immense. For many people the problems are human that is, they destroy the possibility of peace among religions, lead to Bosnia's, ethnic cleansing, and all kinds of things like that. That is not the point; the point is much more profound than that. It is not only the question of expediency, or did the United Nations work, but ultimately, the question is, `what about divine mercy'. How far does God's mercy go? It is predominantly a theological question. When you cut off people from God's mercy when they are not doing what we are doing, or what our community is doing, that poses a major theological question. Which now is coming back with a vengeance, and cannot just be brushed aside by calling people heathens and infidels and pagans, and terms used between Christians and Muslims for fourteen hundred years, and other terms used between Hindus and Muslims in India and all kinds of other situations. That is the difficulty with it and it is untenable, it is very difficult to defend. That is why intellectually this tradition is not fashionable, although, it is still prevalent, because it is a normal human situation, and probably for your grandmother, and my grandmother that is how she lived and died as a pious woman, which is how life was. Intellectually today, it is very difficult to defend this position in the West, because then enemies of religion as a whole find a very good excuse for debunking and destroying the whole of the religious perspective, whatever the religion may be.

The second grew, really out of nineteenth century sentimentalism, what I would call nineteenth century sentimentalism. When the oriental religions opened up to the West for the first time, of course, the West had known Islam for a long time as its great enemy, but also learned from it greatly in the Middle Ages. But at that time another face of Islam was Sufism, writings coming up, Persian writings coming up from India and latter on Arabic writing, and then later on Hinduism, Buddhism, these religions came to the fore. And then, of course, a great deal of debate was carried out, many leading intellectuals like Ralph Waldo Emerson in American, or the greatest writer of the German language Goethe, became interested in these other worlds. It set the intellectual world on fire, to some extent, and such philosophers as Schopenhauer, and the most famous of German philosophers, became influenced actually according to his own words, by a non-Christian and non-Jewish source that is Buddhism, and Goethe greatly influenced by Islam, and people laughing that Goethe secretly converted to Islam. There is a new book that has come out in German claiming this. But whatever it be, it presented a new situation in which a certain number of people began to purpose a kind of sentimental, now emphasize this word, a sentimental one sub religions, but opposing all religious doctrines. Saying "these are dogmas; let's put these dogmas aside, we all love each other and we are all sons and daughters of God", and out of this came a number of nineteenth century religious movements all the way from the movement of the Koran in Hinduism, to the rise of ( ) in Iran, and many, many other movements of this kind. They had always this one element, which they shared in common. Moreover, the whole war parliament of religion in
1893, in Chicago, which celebrated its first centenary just three years ago. The world council of faith, congress of faith; many organizations were created based on trying to bring about a chord between religions by saying that religions are saying the same thing. The trouble then was that they would have to put aside when they do not say the same thing, which of course, was essential to many religions. Therefore, the vast majority of the followers of those religions do not accept these movements. A vast majority of the Christians remain Christian, Muslims remain Muslims, Hindu's remain Hindu, there were conversions among each other, but they did not convert they did not convert to these movements. These movements always remain small in number, but never the less, the idea was very important.

Now, this movement faced very severe opposition from academic circles with the study of religion in the twentieth century. Almost all European scholars of religion, whatever their background; whether they are historicists, or phenomenologist, or whatever they were, they were dead set against this approach as were most of the great American scholars of Western Religion. The reason for that, which is obvious, was that an attitude like that despite its noble intentions leaves aside both the theological and historical reality. The scholar must pay attention to the history on the one hand and the theology on the other. You cannot put both aside, and therefore any attempt to create an understanding among religions intellectually, was faced from the very beginning with the same kind of rejection in academic circles, of which Scandinavian schools especially, (), and others in the forties, fifties, and sixties, and then the English school of comparative religion were in the forefront. The Americans who are not violently opposed to this, especially great American scholars of religion, like William Conifer Smith was Canadian, but did most of his activities at Harvard, and many other scholars. Never the less, they found this to be inadequate.

Now we come to the third view that is the view that began to rise within the Middle East, which is the philosophical movement in France in the eighteenth century. The age of so called enlightenment, which means the age of Rationalism. It is one of the greatest misnomers in history because does not have to do with enlightenment, it has to do with dimming of intellect, but the lighting of the land out there, of reason that it is called the enlightenment. But anyway, it began with the eighteenth century philosophers 0 these people were mostly agnostics, then they would say they were atheists, of course they didn't say they were agnostics, but the word agnostic was not invented. Thomas Huxley invented the word agnostic in the nineteenth century, and it caught fire very rapidly, which is quite interesting. Where the Gnostic has never caught on for the last eighteen hundred years because there are no Gnostics around, there are agnostics around and that's the reason. But anyway, these people are afraid to say "we are agnostics, or atheists", but that's, the already hated religion. They hated Catholicism, they hated Christianity, and so as gradually scholarship began to come out about other religions of the world, besides Judaism and Islam which were know to the West, the Jesuits showed letters from China, gradually we began to learn about Confucianism, people went to India. By the eighteenth century there was cinema material coming from the Orient. The seed of this is to be found there that is appealing to the following reasoning: Since the teachings of various religions are not the same they must all be false. It is this which was taken of later on by Forba and Carl Marx, and became the fountain head of the most aggressive form of atheism which the West saw, spawned, and gradually it spread in the nineteenth century, as first in the Soviet Union, which was then the Soviet Union, and then in China, and other places. It did not catch on to the rest of the West, but
the Marxist idea remained quite strong and is still quite strong in many American universities. The name has changed, the tag has changed since 1989, but what happened to all of our colleges that were Marxist, they did not all become Catholic priests. They have the same view, but they put other titles to themselves and other labels. Therefore, the idea is still around, that is to appeal to the relativity of truth claim by destroying its absoluteness complete. And it seems to be philosophically strong, that is if I claim that this tree is six feet tall, and some other person claims it to be five feet tall, and another seven feet tall, and we all claim to be botanists throw the signs of botany out there is something wrong. The funny thing, of course, they never do that in science. The funny thing is, it is not done in science, because you have unbelievable truth claims. Look at something as fundamental as the structure of matter, I mean the views of Eisenstein and Boore are as different as Hinduism and Christianity, and reincarnation. But nobody says `oh they're wrong' throw out quantum mechanics. But when we come to the field of religion this is a very very important argument that grew from the eighteenth century and had many, many different versions. It lead to the, as I said, atheism before Bach, and then Marxism in the nineteenth century. It lead to positivism and it's a very powerful force today in the study of religion in many places in Northern Europe and the United States and Canada, it doesn't have too much influence in Southern Europe. I'm not talking here about now the former Soviet Union where religion was taught scientifically from a Marxist point of view. And this theory was taught on page one in every book on religion. Everything that produced in seventy years in Russia. Whether is was in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity itself, Judaism, you name it, began with this argument, I am putting that world aside in our world, where were talking now, in the Western world, this argument has remained a very powerful argument, and many different variances of it. Many, many different variances of it of which the last is especially strange and touches a bit too close to home to me because I always stood all my life against this position. There are a number of American scholars of religion who claim that American Academy of Religion are taking this set of religions still too seriously, and you should be able study a religion as an atheist, in the same way that you study paleontology, or something like that. And so far so good, the point that is terrible is that they have named themselves the North American Association for the Study of Religions, whose acronym is Naasr, like my name. That is the worst thing that could happen at the end of my life. Fortunately it is with two A's, I hope that you can distinguish one from the other. But this brings this home this position, that despite the unbelievable revival of religion during this last half century throughout the world, certainly in Islamic world, in the Hindu world, the Buddhist world, the Christian world, the Jewish world, you name it, the Shindu world, Despite this incredible revival of religion in all societies, this position very far from having weakened, in fact, is going from strength to strength, because it is no longer being seriously challenged by the theologians themselves. That is the whole problem, it is much less challenged than it was in the nineteenth century, and at least the Christian theologians challenged these positions much more strongly. Now much of Christian theology has rather retracted from giving a frontal answer, attack against this.

Now, the fourth point of view claims that religions have different truth claims. They are not all saying the same thing, and yet they are all true. Moreover, they meet at a point that is beyond all forms, all symbols, and all language. Frido Shoarn has called the transcendent unity of religions. This requires a rather and very elaborate, and a delicate metaphysical exposition into which I wish I could go fully, that must remain for another time. I am suppose to give
another of these Tanner Lectures in this very city, your small sister up the road, a fairly soon and perhaps that is what I will choose to do at that time, and so it will compliment this. That is how does one go about doing this, how does one make such a claim. That is based on the idea that you first have the truth that is absolute, only the absolute is absolute, and what is the metaphysical absolute. The reality, which is beyond all definition, all that can be said of it, all limitations that the mind or human language can place upon it. What in Christian theology would be ‘Usia’, the divine essence, and many Islamic terms for it, ‘Uttman’ in Sanskrit, and so forth, only the divine reality in its ultimate absoluteness is absolute. To claim complete absoluteness for anything else is to make a mistake between the absolute and the manifestation of the absolute in a particular world in which those manifestations are the absolute for that world, but not the absolute as such.

Going back to the image that I gave, no one can claim that the sun is not the sun of our solar system. For us the sun is the sun, and to say that it is a sun by astronomers does not negate the fact that it is the sun. Moreover, it is the same in religions within each religion there is a manifestation of that religious universe, which, for that religion, is absolute, what we call the relative absolute. Of course, we make all linguistic philosophers pull their hair and run out of the room, but that is all right, we will have a better discussion afterwards, so it does not matter, because this is a very cogent key term. That it is possible to conceive, logically, of an idea of something that is relatively absolute, that is absolute within a relative order, but it is not the absolute. Moreover, in the face of that to understand perfectly well why in an ordinary human society, the human collectivist Christianity, for the Christians Christ is the Son of God. The only manifestation of divine reality and nothing else can be a manifestation of reality. The truth cannot manifest itself again. While it is possible to accept that, and yet express the truth that God has said "I" other times, God has not said "I" only once, there are other revelations, God has spoken more than once. This is a possibility, and it is a vast metaphysics that connects with it. As we have developed very amply during the last few decades, it usually relates to the perennial philosophy, what is called the perennial philosophy, and it is the perennial philosophy approach to the study of religions, which accepts the truth claims of religion, and centrality of truth itself, which must be there, without which religion is meaningless.

Now, the types of problems that such a point of view faces are two fold. One is metaphysical and theological. For example, the Christian view of trinity, the Trinitarian doctrine on the nature of God, and the Islamic view of unity, which strongly opposes the Trinitarian perspective. These are theological issues. Or, for example to come out of the Abrahamic world the religious significance of the cast system, into which you have to be born to be a Hindu, and therefore have access to delivery from the boundary of the cosmos, the prison of the cosmos. 'And, that of Buddhism which negates the cast system completely and substitutes with it the sanga which is open to all people. Now these are theological differences. Now, which is right, I mean if you are going to have truth claims, which is right, the Christian view of divinity or the Islamic view of divinity? The Hindu view of the cast system, or the Buddhist view, and so on and so on, there are many, many other examples. Very famous example of course is that between Judaism and Christianity. That is on the function and identity of the Messiah. Who is the Messiah? That is an obvious question, These are theological and metaphysical questions.

Second, are questions, which are, which we would call historical questions that have to do with temporality, with events in time. In which there are religious truth claims, which also
contradict each other. Example, the question of the finality of revelation, who is the seal of prophesies. Who is the last prophet? That is an extremely significant question, for which several religious communities have several different answers. Or between Islam and Christianity, and this is something explicate and the most difficult of all points of dialogue between Christian and Islam. What happened to Christ between Good Friday and Easter Sunday? The Christians just celebrated that a few days ago. As Islam, that is the Koran, specifically negates the crucifixion, believe that Christ was taken to heaven alive. Of course, Christianity, say yes he was taken to heaven alive, but something happened to him before that. Therefore, you have this whole question of an event, this is historical, an historical event. There are many, many other questions of this kind. Some of them are easier, for example, in the binding of the son of Abraham, who was it that was going to be sacrificed? Issac or Ishmael? That is between Islam and Judaism, a very crucial and important point. And so you have all of these different issues, some of which are historical, some of which are metaphysical and theological. And to really face this very important question of the significance of religious claims of various religions, without any dishonesty, both of these questions must be faced. And they are not the same among different truth systems. If you are comparing Christian and Islam there are certain points of contention, if you are comparing Islam and Hinduism there are other points, if you are comparing the Dao and the Christian and Buddhism you have another set of different truth claims that come to the fore. In any case, the future of any religion in the modern world will depend on a large extent to the degree, which we are able to dedicate ourselves to the solution of this problem and the success in being able to solve it.

What happens if you do not solve it? I am going to establish to conclude my discourse. Gradually the religion will have to forgo the discussion of truth. This is already happening in the Western religions, in both Christianity and Judaism, in America and Europe the term heresy is now out of fashion. Because where there is no truth, there is no error. Nobody wants to talk about now error, and it is already happening. In addition, it causes, of course, a major religious crisis. That fact that it is not politically correct to talk about error can land us in very great difficulty. The theology we do not see, the ethics we feel, we know what is going to happen. We will end up with that wonderful episode with this person who is really kind of a Jewish theologian. This famous New York actor Woody Allen, in one of his films he was living in one of these kind of apartment house, and somebody who lived down the hall, the neighbor, a man, his wife had died and everybody said he killed his wife. Woody Allen's wife came out and said, 'this is terrible, the neighbor has killed his wife', and she became excited; and he said 'don't become excited dear, it is simply an alternative life style'. We are going to of course, end up with that. There is no reason whatsoever under the sun why we should end up with that. That is once religion ceases to have any claims to the truth, the truth claims ceases, then the whole of religion gradually weakens. And this appears immediately. What has happened in Western religion is the following. That first of all Christianity disclaimed any truth claims concerning the cosmos after the Galileo trial. Protestantism, seeing what had happened to Catholicism, and Catholicism had burned its hand, was to Protestant theologians was cosmic. No one wanted to talk about the world of nature and the cosmos for a long, long time. Now the environmental crisis knocking at our door has brought many people back, as Christian theologians, to talk about nature, after three or four hundred years. Therefore, any truth claim about the cosmos was given up.
Gradually truth claims had to be given up about things, which were philosophical, things, which were close to the sciences. Religion kept the human state; truth claims about animals and so forth were also given up. People in medicine now will talk about an eagle that was out of fashion that was a medieval book of animals, in nineteenth century, to talk about that. Then the human body was preserved and human actions, and ethics, and conscience. The next step, of course, is the giving up of the human body. Now we are already at the door of cloning. The desecration of the human body and this reduction to just a few molecules banging around. And you talk about the sanctity of life, which mean absolutely nothing in this perspective, absolutely nothing because we're not brave enough to reclaim the religious truth claim about the world of nature, we have already given that up. So now we are left with conscientiousness, a little bundle (we do not know where it is), and we are clinging to that. Since this conscientiousness has to act, has to live; now religion faces a major challenge in the world of ethics. There are people who claim there is non-religion, secular ethics. You do not need Christian ethics, you do not need Jewish ethics, and you do not need Mormon ethics. These things are all historical, what you have is scientific ethics, which of course does not work, and so the whole of society falls apart.

So the consequence of not wanting to face the problem of the multiplicity of religious truth claims, at the same time the necessity of preserving the truth, is not a minor problem. It is a very, very essential problem, and it's not only theoretical. For some time we thought is was theoretical; we left is to philosophers and theologians to do whatever they wanted to do with it. But gradually it begins to manifest itself in human society. In ethics, in the way we look upon our bodies, in our relations with other human beings, and of course as effective for four hundred years, how we look upon God and upon his laws, whether the laws of the world of nature are God's laws or the blind matter. Which is a stupid statement, blind matter, because there is no such thing as matter in modern physics, but we keep saying blind matter. In the philosophical attitude there is no such thing as matter, especially in modern physics, but we talk about it in this way. And now it's creeping, as I said, into the last citadel, in which a receding army of religion with its truth claims had set up for itself, and is now gradually we see this phenomenon in other religions. Although this phenomenon first began in the West and Christianity suffered all these woes and consequences it is now beginning in other religions of the world; because religions of a kind of, almost invisible relationship of connections, which happens in one general sense, can visibly effect the other in one way or another. And therefore while the problem of the multiplicity of religious forms and truth claims of religions are for all the globe, they're not for Western humanity. The solution also will concern the whole of the globe. And precisely because of that the solution has to be approached from angles of different religions. No wonder this you can impose a solution. This is not something that you can just get from the internet from some city in California and it would fill the whole globe and everyone would say "yes, yes". It has come around from within the various religious traditions, and various religious traditions of the world are very rich in the philosophical and theological insights, which they have in this.

I wanted just to conclude by going back to my own tradition, Islam, and saying that according to many, many sayings of the prophet of Islam, the highest claim of Islam that is what makes it authentic is that is claims to express the truth. And once the truth is negated all other virtues fall apart, and the whole of the religion falls apart. The explicit versus, I don't want to burden you, of the Koran, of the sayings of the prophet, and many, many poems in Persian and
Arabic, which come back to this issue. And therefore we are all, in a sense, in this same boat together, the question of rescuing our religious claim to the truth, whatever that 'our' means, from the demolition of the revitalizing squad not as against other claims, but also with the aid of other truth claims remains, I believe, both the greatest opportunity of our times. Thank you very much.

Every chapter of the Koran begins, except one, with "In the name of God the most merciful and the most compassionate", Christ was the mercy of the world, and God's mercy is mentioned in every other page of the New Testament. Now we come to Buddhism. There is no mention of mercy, in the beginning. Buddhism does not talk about mercy. It only talks about enlightenment, what to do to reach enlightenment. But, at the Buddhist religion tradition develops you have these very powerful Buddha's of mercy, this whole system of the dispensing of mercy in the Buddhist cosmos, you might say. I would say, there is no major element of the concept of divinity that does not manifest itself in one way or another in many of the great living religions in the world. However, religions also decay and die, and they fall off. Many religions in Africa have decayed; they have not preserved their original structures, and have really become superstition in the real Latin sense of the term, that is something that you pull the ground from underneath it and therefore it does not stand on anything. That is what superstition means, and therefore it does not stand on anything. But, by in large, a great many religions of the world, which have been around for a long time and have many, millions of followers, all of the elements which you and I would see in our conception of God in religions which are very close together like Christianity and Islam and Judaism, are nevertheless present. For example, in practical life, a Hindu or Buddhist asks oh God help in situations where you would ask "Oh God, help us", a Buddhist would pray to the Buddha of mercy or something like that. Nevertheless, the consequence in his or her life is very similar to our own. However, also that very important question has to bring out. That is one of the parts of the discussion that has to be carried more and more is: How the truth claims of religion, while they all claim a transcendent reality that is beyond all claims, and if you don't call it transcendent you may call it eminent, which is the same, that is either a pull beyond us that way or beyond this way, those two are the same; also embraces the of the major elements that are needed for man's religious life. I'm not saying that God has always shown the same face in every religion. However, every face that God has shown, his essence has shown through that face, of pulling this way.

Yes?

Do you think it's possible for cultural discovery of unity? What do you mean by that?

Well, just like how Islam is founded on confine of unity. Like right now, you could go down to the book store and find information on all kinds of religions, where thirty to forty-five years ago you never could have.

And what is your question?
I'm just asking if you think it's possible that our world culture is discover the unity, or are the certain things that lead in that direction.

Alright, first of all, since you ask my opinion, I am totally opposed to the idea of a global village. I'm totally opposed to the idea of a single world order. Which is really something demonic, really the reign of the anti-Christ in a certain sense. I believe that the major religions of the world and the cultures and the civilizations they have created are going to continue to survive. And that all this propaganda about how small the world is, you press a button here and somebody from Sumaht is listening to it. You go to Sumaht and see how different it is from Salt Lake City. And this is all propaganda, sheer propaganda. So, I believe that the various cultures of the world must be preserved like little flowers in a garden, there is nothing worse for the future of humanity to reduce everything to the least common denominator uniformity. And therefore we must fight to preserve the genus of Western civilization, Islamic civilization, Hindu civilization, Buddhist civilization, Japanese, whatever it is; the different civilizations of the world, there will be more ideas traveling there is no doubt about it. The Japanese know more about Islam now than the did a hundred years ago, and Americans know a lot more about Buddhism than did they a hundred years ago; ideas will come and go. But I do not believe that it is possible, or even desirable, to create a single world culture. Which would a culture of what? Michael Jackson, and selling cars, and things like that, and really . . . what can I say? But what can be done, and which in fact 0 people like that, in India tried to do when they came to America half a century ago, is to show in fact the inter-unity of all tradition and all culture. It is on that unity, I believe, that we can build relationships. That unity would include most of humanity, but of course would exclude all those who reject all of the spiritual principles. You can not have something which includes everything. To include everything, is to exclude everything, under the circumstances. Only the divine reality is all inclusive, in this world we can not have a reality that includes everything. It is against the principle of manifestation, metaphysically speaking.

I think I will take one more, oh, there are several questions.

Yes, Miss?

I'd like to ask you about the role of the laws in knowing truth. If I speak to a parent about their child, as a teacher, and say "This child can't concentrate, and won't settle down, and is a distraction to the rest of the kids", or if I say to that parent " You know, your child is like a butterfly and alights from thing to thing and my job is to get them to rest a little longer". I mean that's two very different ways of knowing a child, and yet one is spoken with a sense of love, and the other is more of a disconnected way of talking, that know that child in a different way and maybe knowing them through love, and so what would you say about knowing truth, getting at truth through love?

When you get to religious claims about the truth it is always combined with love. Because in the highest level one can never love what one does not know, and one can never know what one does not love. So, on the highest level they are really complimentary to each other. But there are emphasis in various religions, especially in India where they are very separated, about what one
emphasizes more in the path of realization. But when I was talking about sentimentalism that was something else. That was a kind of anti-intellectual sentimentalism, which is a possible attitude. But in this context, I believe, it will not bear fruit.

Now, there was a hand there, somebody there? I and then I will come to you. Yes?

To what degree do you believe the environment of Christ has been effected by giving up the discussion of nature over the past hundred years, and what role do you believe that religion should take in a unified discourse in environmental ethics?

This is very interesting because I gave the capillary of lectures in 1994 called Religion and the Order of Nature, which in large is about exactly the question that you asked. Which is almost as if you asked me the question and I wrote the book. And I cannot summarize it, I spent several years writing this book, but let me just say two sentences about it. I do not believe that environmental Christ is simply the result of bad engineering, or bad economics. It is a spiritual crisis. I was one of the first people to predict the environmental crisis in 1965, 66, when I gave the, offered a lecture at the University of Chicago in a book that came out that was called Man and Nature: the Spiritual Christ of Modern Man. I believe that it is a direct effect of the abdication of the religious knowledge nature in Western Christianity. That is when religion abdicated its right to have a religious view of nature, and stuck only to the ethics. Now we all talk about environmental ethics, which is just pure sentimentality. Because if that ethics does not correspond to a reality what are we talking about? That's why it doesn't work. So what is needed is there has to be a regaining of the religious view of nature, without in any way destroying the scientific view of nature. Because science asks several types of questions of nature, but doesn't ask all the questions. It is totalitarianism that has come out of the scientific culture, that is really sub gated everything. But science itself is a way of knowing nature, we learn a lot of things through science and we do not learn a lot of things through science. But the claim that this is the only way to know; that the scientific way is the only way to know nature, I believe makes it impossible to have environmental ethics, and finally we are going to have a major catastrophe on our hands, and then we'll wake up. I believe that in this task you've got to have inter-religious relationships, because the environmental crisis is global. I begin my book by saying that sadly the only thing in which everywhere in the globe agrees on is the destruction of nature. This is the only thing which everyone in the world agrees upon. Whether you're a leftist, rightist, religionist, anti-religionist, we are all together destroying our home. And therefore it has to also be global, and in this book I taught extensively about the views of other religions that, in fact, did not abdicate, did not give up their claims, until today, until the 20th century. But in the 16th, 17th century when these things were taking place in the West, such as Hinduism or Islam, Islam had a very, very strong tradition about this, did not dispose nature of its spiritual significance.

I'll take one last question, somebody raised his hand, yes?

I understand that religions should have a purpose to try and regain truth, but I was wondering what you thought about the inherent contradiction between the business's world's idea of secularization, that business should be set aside from religion. And maybe they can not say this
and they still make an attempt at the so called business ethics, or whatnot, but do you see that's there's any fight that ought to be made by religion in general against this sort of secularization of ideas?

Definitely. It's true that everybody says now that this prevalent idea that Christianity separated the domain of God from the domain of the world from the very beginning, but there was a very elaborate Christian theory of economics, both in the Catholic and Protestant camps for centuries. And there was a Christian ethics which, in fact, was dominant until the last century, it gradually receded. And now you have something else that is taking its place, because you have a business ethics that essentially is based on greed. And you cannot repeat any of the sayings of Christ, blessed are the poor, or greed is a sin, is one of the capital sins, that is now no longer fashionable. I believe that this is an extremely unfortunate event and the fortunate collapse of the Soviet Union, which was such a catastrophe for the world, has had this one negative influence. But many people think now that socialism is gone, is not a hay day for a kind of open market capitalism in which the only factor is profit. And so we see more and more people becoming marginalized to the point of poverty, and there are some Christians who are conscious, of all different denominations, trying to do something in the middle. But they don't have the economic means to do so, and so the problem that has to be tackled, I believe, intellectually and has to be brought out into the open.

Now in my own tradition in Islam the secular domain is not even accepted, there's not even a word for secularism. And religious laws pertain also to economics. I'm not saying that they are promoted and implemented, because the Islamic world is not independent economically. You have a sort of global economic order that is pressed upon various countries, they have no freedom, but in principal you economic life is supposed to be regulated by religion. Now, in Christianity, although you do not have the Shaiiad that we do in Islam, there is a verse in the New Testament saying how you should trade in the market and so forth, there were these general principles, ethical principles, by which very devout Christian business men lived from the rise of the American of society in the fourteenth century, until the last century. This wedding between industrialization and capitalism, which took place, and the sudden explosion of wealth, without any limits being placed upon it, is, I think, a very dangerous, dangerous thing. Moreover, a great challenge to Christianity, because all of the things that we begin to hear in Christian teaching, that it is good to be wealthy. That is putting Christianity on the side of consumer society, I think it's a very great tragedy because, of course, consumer society cannot go on forever, it just cannot match up to earth, the earth isn't that big. We need to think of something serious, have to have a more equitable way of using the products of the earth, the materials, and minerals, and so forth and so on. This is a very, very important religious issue, also, that has to come to the fore. Of course, this is the topic of my discourse. That is all for this evening, I wish you all well.

Clapping.