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# What Makes a Bell Ring?: The Buddhist Golden Rule and Its Means of Implementation

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The following article is based on a presentation I gave at the Inter-university Center of Dubrovnik, Croatia as part of a course entitled "The Future of Religion" in 2007. The theme of this year course was "From the Jus Talionis to the Golden Rule."

Buddhism, like many religious traditions, has its equivalents of a Golden Rule; that is, a course of action that takes into consideration equally one's own interests and those of others. For example, in Shântideva's *Bodhicaryâvatâra*, a Buddhist text from the eight-century CE, one is told that, "All equally experience suffering and happiness, and I must protect them as I do myself."[1] Using this basic idea as a theme, the author further gives a long series of justification to enjoin us to act accordingly. For instance, he says that, "Just as the body, which has many parts owing to its division into arms and so forth, should be protected as a whole, so should this entire world,"[2] or, "I should eliminate the suffering of others because it is suffering, just like my own suffering. I should take care of others because they are sentient beings, just as I am a sentient being."[3]

The reason why one should act according to this Golden Rule is also very explicitly given in this text. It is a means to cultivate *bodhicitta*, a Sanskrit technical term that may be translated as "Thought of Awakening." In the *Bodhicaryâvatâra*, as well as in many other Buddhist texts, *bodhicitta* is defined as the desire to achieve awakening (or enlightenment) for the sake of all sentient beings. It is the cornerstone of a person's commitment to the Buddhist path. Such a person is called a bodhisattva, and his or her spiritual life as a bodhisattva actually starts with the explicit vow, often made in front of a community of other bodhisattva, to achieve awakening for the sake of all beings.

At first, the vow to save all beings takes the form of an act of will. It is a commitment that may have to be renewed constantly along the path, like a resolution one takes and of which one keeps reminding oneself. However, the Buddhist scriptures also present the vow as a form of spiritual experience, as a kind of spiritual breakthrough. The most important characteristic of this spiritual breakthrough, from a psychological and phenomenological point of view, is that the sense of I, which is usually at the base of one's motivation to act, disappears. A person who has reached such a state of mind—in Buddhist technical terms we would say that this person has experienced the arising of the Thought of Awakening—is still doing actions. His or her actions, however, naturally flow out from him- or herself. It is like someone who, being half-asleep, reaches out for a fallen pillow and brings it back automatically, without any thoughts. According to Buddhism, it is in this state of mind that one can truly act for the benefits of all sentient beings. Without oversimplifying one's understanding of Buddhism, one can say that the sole aim of their religious and philosophical discourses is to induce this spiritual breakthrough. I would like next to discuss how, from a phenomenological

[1] BCA, VIII: 90 (trans. Wallace).

[2] BCA, VIII: 91 (trans. Wallace).

[3] BCA, VIII: 94 (trans. Wallace).

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point of view, this breakthrough is achieved. This analysis should help us appreciate the extent of the task involved and the conditions by which it is likely to be accomplished.

The distinction between these two modes of implementing the Buddhist way of action is not foreign to Buddhism itself. Indeed, Paul Griffiths, a Buddhist scholar, identified two basic approaches, which at the beginning of Buddhism, seemed to have lived side by side. He called these two approaches: the analytic and the enstatic approach. As Griffiths says:

> [The analytic approach] is concerned with repeated meditations upon standard items of Buddhist doctrine--the four truths, the 12-fold chain of dependent origination and so forth--until these are completely internalized by practitioners and their cognitive and perceptual systems operate only in terms of them. Such analytical meditations are designed to remove standard cognitive and perceptual habit-patterns and to replace them with new ones. Furthermore, these techniques are designed to teach the practitioner something new about the way things are, to inculcate in his consciousness a whole series of knowledges that such-and-such is the case. In contrast, the enstatic meditations are designed to reduce the contents of consciousness, to focus awareness upon a single point and ultimately to bring all mental activity to a halt.[4]

Eventually, the analytic approach became the dominant means of achieving awakening in Buddhism. The Buddhists themselves give the main reason why the enstatic meditations were marginalized.[5] Indeed, in the *Bodhicaryâvatâra* one leans that, "The mind that has mental objects has to dwell on one thing or another (including Buddhist ideas). Without emptiness, the mind is constrained and arises again, as in a non-cognitive meditative equipoise."[6] What this means, is that the enstatic meditations can only suppress the emotions, feelings, actions, etc., but not eradicate their causes. Although the state of suppression could be quite extraordinary, it is still not considered to be a liberating experience. It is like pushing down an inverted bucket, full of air, to the bottom of a pool; it takes an enormous effort to maintain it in position and as soon as this effort is relaxed, it comes right up to the surface. One can easily imagined that, knowing the nature of human emotions and feelings, the efforts to implement any Golden Rule in such a way would be comparable to that of maintaining our bucket at the bottom. In fact, I believe that such an effort is impossible and that, any one attempting to do it, may incur serious psychological and traumatic damages.[7] The analytical approach is therefore the only approach. What, then, does it consist of?

The last quotation gives us a clue; it says that the mind should be without mental objects and that without emptiness the mind arises again. This means that emptiness, a key Buddhist concept, has to be "thought about" as if it is not present in the mind. This seems somehow paradoxical. Indeed, how can we think about something and not imagine it at the same time? The solution of this paradox is, however, the key to understanding the analytical approach.

Let's begin by saying the Buddhist philosophers usually believe that there are two kinds of knowledge: the first one is purely intellectual and objective; the second

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[4] Griffiths (1986): p. 13.

[5] In fact, they were maintained as preparatory stages for the analytical meditations, a kind of spiritual warming-up so to speak.

[6] BCA, IX: 47-8 (trans. Wallace).

[7] In this regards, I would direct the reader to the works of Eugen Drewermann, in particular, *Kleriker. Psychogramm eines Ideals*.

one is experiential or subjective. To understand the distinction between these two types of knowledge, it might be interesting to refer to Michael Polanyi, a philosopher of science, and his idea of twofold awareness.

Basically, Polanyi argues that when one is performing a task, one is paying attention to two things at the same time, but not in the same way. When driving a nail, for example, we focus our attention on the nail. At the same time, we feel the hammer in our hand. The feelings in our hand guide us in handling the hammer effectively; we are aware of them but in a way different from our paying attention to the nail. Put differently, these feelings are not objects of our attention but instruments of it. As Polanyi says: “They are not watched in themselves; we watch something else while keeping intensely aware of them. I have a *subsidiary awareness* of the feeling in the palm of my hand which merged into my *focal awareness* of my driving in the nail.”[8]

This idea of twofold awareness led Polanyi to make a distinction between what he called "tacit" and "explicit" knowledge. Explicit knowledge refers to what is directly apprehended (the intellectual and objective knowledge): the things out there. Tacit knowledge (the experiential and subjective knowledge), on the other hand, is not dealing with what is directly seen, but rather with that which gives meaning to our experiences. For example, we always see a person as something, a mother, a friend, a stranger, an enemy, etc. Seeing someone *as something* is the jurisdiction of the tacit knowledge. Another way to put it is to say that tacit knowledge is the background that defines our experiences of the world, like the screen on which a film is projected. From a negative perspective, it functions like a prejudice: it gives us a distorted view of reality. From a positive point of view, it is some kind of a force that transforms one’s entire way of relating and responding to the world.[9]

Given these two types of knowledge or awareness, the purpose of the Buddhist analytical approach consists in firstly, accepting on faith or trust any of their fundamental truths such as “Everything is empty.” At this point, the truth is still part of one’s objective knowledge of reality. Then one tries, by means of intense “investigation” and a good deal of imagination, to transform it into the background of one's awareness. Then, some kind of breakthrough occurs and the ability to see the world in terms of the truth accepted becomes natural. At this moment, one enters into a contemplative state; one is really on the path. To understand what exactly happens in the mind of a person undergoing such transformation, I would like to present an explanation of the *satori* experience of Zen Buddhism as related by Victor Hori, a Rinzai Zen monk and Buddhist scholar. The experience of *satori* is usually generated by a reflection on a *kôan*. A *kôan* is like a riddle such as "Two hands clap and there is a sound. What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Such a *kôan* has to be resolved by the student. Every now and then, he would go to the Zen master to give what he thinks to be the answer to the *kôan*, but the master will always tell him that his answer is wrong as long as it is formulated in an dualistic

[8] Polanyi (1962): p. 55.

[9] There is a Taoist story from the *Lieh Tzu*, that beautifully illustrates this idea. A man lost his ax. He suspected his neighbor's son and began to observe him. He believed that, judging from his appearance, he was an ax thief; his facial expression was that of an ax thief; his way of talking was exactly that of an ax thief. All his movements, all his being distinctively expressed the fact that he was an ax thief. Some time afterward, this man, digging in his garden, found his ax. When he saw his neighbor's son again, all his movements, all his being had nothing of an ax thief about them anymore.

way; that is, with the awareness that there is a subject (the knower) distinct from the object of knowledge. Thus,

> At the extremity of his great doubt, there will come an interesting moment. This moment is hard to describe but on reflection afterward we might say that there comes a point when the monk realizes that he himself and the way he is reacting to his inability to penetrate the *kôan* are themselves the activity of the *kôan* working within him. The *kôan* no longer appears as an inert object in the spotlight of consciousness but has become part of the searching movement of the illuminating spotlight itself. His seeking to penetrate the *kôan*, he realizes, is itself the action of the *kôan* that has invaded his consciousness. It has become part of the very consciousness that seeks to penetrate itself. He himself is the *kôan*. Realization of this is the response to the *kôan*.[10]

According to Buddhism, the fruits of this breakthrough or this spiritual transformation are the following:
1] At the cognitive level, the shift from having an idea as part of our objective knowledge of the world to its becoming the background of all our experiences or making it our tacit knowledge of reality, brings about a destruction of our dualistic assumption concerning what is truly real. Indeed, everything is now defined in terms of a single idea, be it suffering or emptiness. Even the subject who "observes" the world (or the agent who acts upon it) is now included or has been redefined in terms of this single idea. It is like becoming aware that all golden objects are made of gold. From this perspective, there are no longer any fundamental distinctions between all golden objects. It is to be noted that this awareness does not annihilate the distinctions that exist at the level of what is objectively apprehended. For example, a golden ring is still a ring and not a golden chain.
2] At the psychological level, such shift is likely to bring about a state of mind devoid of any anxiety and a more stable experience of peace. It is also characterized by an experience of detachment. Seeing the world in its "proper" perspective also results in the experience of a sense of freedom from it.
3] And finally, at the ethical or behavioral level, despite the fact that one no longer needs to decide what the right course of action is, such realization is the guarantee of a behavior that is always beneficial to all without exception. At this point, a Buddhist has transcended karma (that which chains a person to determined courses of action, like having bad habits) because his or her actions are no longer intentional; what triggers them is the suffering of people combined with the perfect state of readiness to free them from it. This understanding of one's behavior is incidentally what explains how, in Buddhism, wisdom and compassion, as a pure desire to help, are considered to be the two sides of the same coin.[11]

There is one simile that illustrates well what the Buddhists are doing when they practice the analytical approach. In ancient India people would perfume clothes by putting in a box one piece of tissue that had previously been soaked in perfume under the pile of unscented cloths. By the process of suffusion, the perfume

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[10] Hori (1994): p. 30.

[11] These fruits, as well as the dynamic of transformation, are specific to the Buddhist tradition. In Christianity, for example, it can be said that the purpose of its "spiritual path" is not to transcend sins (our egoistical tendencies, to use a Buddhist way of thinking), but to reveal them so that one may reconcile oneself with them, to be more precise, the sinner. The act of reconciliation or forgiveness is, from this point of view, radically different from the Buddhist concept of compassion. Indeed, their understanding of compassion is, I believe, closer to the idea of altruism, that is, the readiness to help someone to be free from suffering and not, as in the Christian context, an act of suffering with.

impregnates all the unscented clothes. Similarly, the purpose of the analytical approach is to impregnate all our experiences of reality with a sense of pervasiveness of one basic idea, like that of the emptiness of all things.

At this point one can anticipate the extent of the conditions by which this process of suffusion is achieved. The practice of the analytical approach is likely to require more than just a limited environment to thrive. Indeed, an entire culture is necessary to help the individual maintain the process on course. Disruptions in the cultural and social landscape are likely to distract his or her attention, thus running the risk of aborting it altogether. Concretely speaking, it means that a religion like Buddhism, even if it is tolerant of any culture, has to create a Buddhist culture to grow and produce fruit. Such culture is always specific and is thus likely to be different from other cultures. Let's give another example to illustrate this point.

One method used in Tibetan Buddhism to arise the Thought of Awakening is the "seven-point cause-and-effect method." The method consists in extending the benevolent feelings one usually has for one's mother to all sentient beings starting with one's own friends, then to people one is normally indifferent to and, finally, to one's enemies. The justification behind this method is that, because everyone is reborn an indefinite number of times, each and all of us has been at least once each other's mother. In other words, the method is efficient if one accepts specific cultural, religious, or philosophical presuppositions, in the present case, the doctrine of reincarnation. It goes without saying that these presuppositions are not universal, although they have to be perceived as such by those who are following the method. To some extent, one can say that any system of thought, whose purpose is to actualize a Golden Rule, is relative when viewed from the outside and absolute from the inside. To put it succinctly, the relative nature of a system of though with its supporting culture is relative as well. What do we do now?[12]

Before suggesting a model that takes into consideration this double nature of any system of religious and spiritual thought, I would like to look at one attempt to avert the clashes between religious and philosophical cultures. This attempt is quite popular today among people involved in interreligious dialogue and it is largely known as the pluralist view of religion. There are many versions of this pluralist view but, for the sake of the present discussion, I would like to retain the one that views the practice of religion as true only within the private sphere, in other words, relative to one's own religious and spiritual commitment. At the social level, this means that no religion can claim to have the monopole of truth, that the finality of each religious system of thought is equally valid. This conviction implicitly means that there are many "salvations" to be experienced.

This view of religions is the result of a specific problem: how can people of different faiths live peacefully together and respect each other? The problem is essentially social. It directly addresses the type of attitude one, as believer of a specific creed and committed to certain practices, should entertain in order to minimize frictions with people having their own faith, or even claiming to have none. This problem is an objective reality in today's cosmopolitan world and attempts at finding viable solutions to it are not new. Already Locke proposed that philosophic doubt would appease religious fanaticism and Bertrand Russell could not state it more clearly by saying that dogmatism is the greatest of the mental

[12] To say that a system of thought or value is relative requires a tacit assumption of an absolute. If, for example, one affirms, "Everything is relative," the absolute is implicit in the "everything;" that is, an all-encompassing vision of reality. To relativize this tacit assumption as well, leaves us in a kind of void or in an infinite regression, like two mirrors reflecting each other.

obstacles to human happiness. The pluralistic view of religion is just a variation of these systems of thought. In theory, this appears to be quite acceptable, but there is a major problem with this view.

In effect, what is happening here is that the pluralist view of religion takes on its own finality and in the process destroys the finalities of the spiritual systems of belief it tries to harmonize. Because its finality is to maintain social harmony, any element from these spiritual systems that is likely to disrupt that harmony is leveled out. For example, claims to universal truths are to be banned, that is, relegated to their own private sphere. The end effect of this process of harmonizing the systems of belief is that they lose their distinctiveness. Attempts, even from the point of view of the scientific study of religions, to identify substantial distinction between religious beliefs and practices, are inhibited. What a pluralist view of religion is doing is exactly what a reductionist interpretation of the religious phenomenon is accomplishing.[13] Let me give a concrete example of this point.

A few years ago, I participated in a group discussion on the works of Eugene Drewermann, a German theologian and psychoanalyst. One of the participants said that Drewermann's analysis of the Bible allowed her for the first time to make sense of this text, that she could now concretely relate it to her own experience of life. This testimony made quite an impression on the audience as it came from a lady of over seventy years old. For her, reading Drewermann had been a revelation like a sudden and abundant rain on the parched land of her spiritual life. Stepping back from the emotional charge of the situation, one may, however, legitimately ask what was the exact nature of her experience? Is it a Christian experience? Or, it is the type of experience Christians should be aiming at through their reading of the Bible? I believe that the answer is no. The psychoanalytical discourse is centered on a more or less explicit view of what the human experience ought to be. It is often expressed in terms of self-emancipation, ability to function well in society and to contribute to it, or just to achieve a certain degree of freedom from one's impulses and habits resulting from past experiences. From a Christian point of view, and from other religions' as well, these goals fall short of what is believed possible to experience as human being. The finality of the psychoanalytical system of thought is therefore different. Of course, one is free to choose one's aspirations in life but this is not the issue here. What is at stake is what happens when one system of thought, like that of the psychoanalytical discourse, hijacks another system by infusing in it its own finality? The most serious consequence, as mentioned above, is that the hijacked system entirely loses its distinctiveness; its symbols are now being used to serve a finality different from what it had articulated in the first place. This means that the hijacked system is now deprived of its capacity to generate the experiences for which it was designed in the first place. Moreover, in the case of the psychoanalytical interpretation of the Bible for instance, the discourse of the Bible takes a subordinate position. The language of psychoanalysis, because it is now the focus of attention, will inevitably render the language of the Bible obsolete. In this regard it is worth mentioning that Drewermann also uses the psychoanalytical paradigm for the analysis of folk tales. The end effect is to view the Bible at par with these stories, that is, to overlook their possible differences.

The question posed above regarding what should be done is now clearer. How can we reconcile systems of thought that make universal claims without "relativizing" their distinctiveness? Which model could be used to conceptualize a

[13] It is not a coincidence that the pluralist view of religion, whatever its characteristics, is an outcome of the scientific study of religion that has evolved in the last hundred years.

harmonious relationship between antagonistic systems of thought? In my discussion of the pluralist view of religion I introduced the idea of finality. This is the cornerstone of my model. Let me make this idea more explicit.

The finality of a system is what defines its elements. For example, a veil worn by a Muslim woman is not just a piece of cloth but a sign of her submission to the will of Allah; that is, of being Muslim. A piece of bread eaten by Christians as the Eucharist is not just a piece of bread, but the living presence of Jesus-Christ. One can go on with many examples from any sphere of life to support this idea. Here one can say that the meaning of an element is relative to the finality of the system it belongs to. But we can also say, using Polanyi's description of hammering down a nail, that the elements "absolutize" the finality of the system they are part of and, as such, preclude any relativization of their value. Think of a mirror. How do we know that what we see through it is a reflection? One way is by being aware of its frame. A frame can be of any shape—so we may think that its present shape is relative—but the moment we experience the insight, "Ah, this is a mirror!" the frame that allowed this experience is absolute. The idea that the frame may be made of various shapes is an after-thought that is unconnected to the experience of insight. In fact, deliberating on its relative nature not only inhibits the insight but also keeps us from looking at the mirror altogether. Again, on the basis of what has been previously discussed above in the context of the analytical approach, the absolute is not a static experience but a dynamic one. It is dynamic in the sense that it does not rest on a single object but rather on a view that can be supported by all objects. This explanation may appear complicated, but in fact it is very simple because everyone experiences it all the time.

Indeed, the name of a person is a good example of this dynamic absolute. Being aware of a person's name put us in contact with her reality. This contact is always influencing us in some way or another. Its influence makes it real. We may have ideas about this person, ideas that act as a filter, but nevertheless, some transformation occurs by the very fact that one is aware of her existence. The ideas we may have about a person are therefore relative, because they change no matter how hard we resist, but the fact of the existence of the person, around which all our ideas are constructed, is absolute. To some extent, the more we do relativize our ideas about a person, the more one is transformed by her existence, provided that we do not forget her. The willingness to disregard any judgment about a person while maintaining an awareness of her existence puts us, however, in a state of constant tension. In other words, the finality of a system does not only define its elements but also keeps us engaged in it. From an ethical point of view, it is this engagement that allows any Golden Rule to produce its fruit. One can now see why it is important to maintain the tension. The very purpose of the system of thought one adheres to is at stake. Consequently, because the state of tension provides the justification of the truthfulness of the elements of a system of thought, it is the tacit rule that allows the acceptance or rejection of elements from other systems. In other words, that standard by which one judges the validity of foreign ideas does not rest on an idea itself but rather on what this idea makes us experience. It is, again, a dynamic process. I am now ready to present a model where every system of belief (including cultural and scientific systems of thoughts) may coexist in harmony without compromising their integrity or identity.

A system of thought that is in constant state of tension is what I call an open system. It is open because its finality is never fully accomplished; that is, its tension is never resolved. A closed system, by way of contrast, is considered closed because the solution of its problem has been solved; there is no more tension. A pluralistic

view of religion is in effect a closed system because it is believed to solve the problem of religious differences in a cosmopolitan environment. A psychoanalytical explanation of the Bible is also a closed system because its application only confirms its basic assumptions. Any new observation is reintegrated in its explanatory matrix and remains as such unchallenged from this perspective. It is in effect self-sustaining. It is like the rules of grammar of a specific language. Their explanatory power is confirmed by every analysis of the language they are derived from. A closed system, however, is not a dead system of thought. New articulations of its tenets are always possible; there are always new cases to prove the assumptions on which it rests. To use an analogy, it is like an organism that procreates. But like any organism, its entire offspring are determined by a specific genetic code, that is, in the case of a closed system of thought, its basic tenets.[14] This is not the case for an open system where encounters with the environment constantly produce a state of tension. In this regard, paradigms in the field of natural sciences are open systems because they are constantly challenged by observation and ultimately transformed. In fact, one can say that the moment a paradigm is formulated, the moment it appears to close itself by resolving the tension between the phenomena it has observed, it is already outmoded. Like a camp fire at night that allows us to see the firewood scattered around, the more one feeds it with the firewood, the bigger it becomes and the more firewood it allows us to feed it with. As such, the pursuit of understanding the nature of the universe, to "touch" reality as it is, as entertained by natural scientists, is comparable to the pursuit of ever fulfilling satisfaction by religious believers. Both endeavors, because their respective tension is not likely to be resolved soon, result in maintaining their system of thought constantly open to new ways of seeing and experiencing reality. In fact, making sure that their system remains open is what would guaranty their commitment to the finality they set out to fulfill, even if they feel that this moment is far away. For believers, this can be achieved, among other things, by the practice of religious dialogue.

Using the ideas discussed so far, religious dialogue can thus be defined as a means, among others, to maintain the openness of a religious system, which is usually manifested by a desire to experience its potentials, to resonate it in its infinite ways depending on the dispositions of its believers, by integrating the products of closed systems of thought. Let's use a simple example. Let's say that one has to understand the meaning of a particular text written in an unknown language. Because the understanding of the meaning of this text may vary according to the cultural presuppositions of the reader, one can say that its system of interpretation is likely to remain an open system. To understand the text, however, one may need to study the unknown language it is written in. This language, with its fixed rules of grammar and vocabulary, is a closed system. It will have to be mastered to a point where our reader will be able to make some sense of the text. Thus, the finality of the closed system of grammar, which is to make sense of sentences written in the language it is issued from, is integrated to that of the attempt of figuring out the meaning of the given text. Contrary to what is happening with the psychoanalytical explanation of the Bible, the closed system, that is, the grammar, is not violated in its integrity. In fact, its integrity, its potential to make sense of the unknown language, is needed. Without it, the search for the meaning of the text would be impaired. Using the same analogy, what happens when a closed system is not integrated into an open system, when the study of the unknown language becomes an end in itself?

[14] One can think here of technological applications derived from a scientific law or even a social policy based on a certain understanding of society.

One can easily see that the pursuit of finding the meaning of the text is completely abandoned. As explained before, both systems, with respect to their finality, are mutually exclusive. This is the danger with the study of religions and with interreligious dialogue as well. It may result in the formulation of a common model of explanation regarding the inner workings of any religion. This model should not be allowed to take a life on its own by supporting a view that negates the distinctiveness of all religions. On the contrary, such a model should be integrated into the finality of each respective religion. This new understanding should help believers to better understand their own religions and thus allowing them to strengthen their commitment. Let's say, for example, that one decides to find out whether there is such a thing as an altruistic act. One could do that in the light of the claims made by neurobiologists that all human actions can be reduced to neuronal activity. Such a view is likely to undermine one's confidence in trying to act in an altruistic way. Thus, once it has been determined that an altruistic act is truly possible, one is likely to feel more confident in doing such act. The newly formulated knowledge has therefore been integrated into another system. Its finality—understanding human nature in a way as objective as possible— is now serving another finality: the perfection of one's altruistic behavior. In the light of this understanding, one can see that open systems are inclusivist. It appears to me that the inclusivist model is more natural that the pluralist view which puts all systems at par. Science would not function at all if it were to entertain the idea that all explanatory systems of the world, all conceptions of reality share an equal level of merits. Some views have to be true; they cannot all be true at the same time. In spite of this discrimination, the relative value of any system of thought is not denied. Its value is, however, always determined by the finality of the system that includes or integrates it. Since the finality of the Christian system of thought is to maintain a state of tension, anything coming outside it, be it from other religions, cultures or even science, is likely to be used to maintain that state, or even to increase it. This is why dialogue with other religions, as well as with the scientific world, has to be valued and developed. This way of integrating the fruits of other system of thought may appear to be a selfish endeavor, but this is done reciprocally. It is for that reason that all believers, whatever their faith, have a duty to maintain its integrity and to proclaim it: doing otherwise would be to forsake their responsibility as members of the world community, like a scientist who hides knowledge that could be of benefit to others. Once they truly live their faith, which means above all to let their Golden Rules produce effects, problems related to living in a cosmopolitan world should resolve themselves. In this regard, I would like to cite a personal anecdote to illustrate the gravity of the pluralistic view of religions. When my son reached the age of about three and a half, we had to fill a questionnaire regarding his health condition. Basically, the usual questions are asked, for example, previous ailments, allergies, etc. There was, however, one curious question. It inquired whether the mother thinks her child beautiful. The question is odd, because one would not expect a mother to ask such a question about her child. This is in fact the point of the question: whether the mother, by finding the question acceptable, objectifies her child. Such objectification is the sign of a problem, that the connection mother-child has been broken. In a similar way, a pluralist view of religions objectifies the beliefs of all religions. Those who entertain that view are in reality disconnected from their own tradition. Reconnection is possible only when this view is abandoned; because all systems of thought with their finality are mutually exclusive, holding a pluralistic view of religion and efficient engagement in one's faith are impossible. The other problem of those who advocate a pluralistic view of religion is that they

do not understand, when, for example, a Buddhist affirms that "Everything is suffering" or a Christian maintains the universality of Jesus; it is not to test their claims in the light of other beliefs or even scientific knowledge, but to let himself or herself be transformed by it. Using the Christian context, if Jesus is universal, if he is a king in his own way, to see him as such means to experience his kingdom or to aspire to it. The experience of the ever presence of Jesus, here and now, is for the believer an objective experience that can be shared. This is how he lives his faith. Therefore, because his experience hinges on that belief, it cannot be relativized. In this regard, new ways of reinterpreting, understanding, appreciating Jesus Christ proposed by some Christian theologians are again just showing their disconnection with the experience of their own tradition. They are not better than a religious fundamentalist who hijacks the symbols of his religion to construct his identity. On this last point, let me share another anecdote that, to some extent, provoked my reflection on the present model.

When I was a student, I was invited with my colleagues to a mosque to meet the local imam. While we were waiting for him, an important member of the regional Moslem community spoke to us. He talked mostly about what Moslems believe in. His address was a little bit unsettling though. To be honest, I was always on the defensive. Then came the imam who talked about what he believed as a Moslem. This may be a subtle distinction but, although his statements were, from a certain point of view, the same as that of the preceding speaker, I felt calmed and genuinely interested in listening to him. His words had an entirely different effect on me. He was clearly presenting to us his beliefs without any coating to make it more acceptable for people of other faiths and most importantly, without any hint of contempt for the "infidels." Reflecting back on my visit to the mosque, I may explain my experience in the following way. The imam looked sympathetic to me because I felt that his faith, even if I do not share it, was more than empty words. I felt that he was speaking from his heart, that he was sincerely telling us what his faith meant for him. The way he was living his faith had even an inspiring effect on me; it encouraged me to be more serious or committed to my own convictions. This was not the case with the first speaker. What I felt while listening to him was something like "I am proud of what I believe" or "This is what you ought to believe and you are wrong to believe otherwise." In other words, his convictions were not used to make his life more fulfilling, but rather to assert his identity. The claims of his faith were secondary. The affirmation of his identity was therefore the primary motive for talking about his faith. This is what resonated from him and as a result triggered in me my own sense of identity. If I had not been polite, I would—and I have to say that I really felt like it—have responded in an aggressive way by showing the banners and colors of my own convictions. Again, the point of this anecdote is to say that someone's faith and affirmation of it do not necessarily lead to confrontation. The experience of an individual, whether one shares his convictions or not, can even be very inspiring.

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