

## *Responsibilities for the future: toward an interfaith ethic*

Paul F. Knitter

There are many people, especially within the halls of academia, who would have grave reservations about what I should like to propose in this chapter. I want to explore possibilities of an 'interfaith ethic'. I am suggesting that 'responsibility for the future' might provide the common ground on which religions can meet and fashion what Hans Küng and the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993 called a 'Global Ethic'. The hope is to form some kind of ethical unity out of the vast diversity of religious perspectives.

But such aspirations, for many of our contemporaries who bear or are burdened with a postmodern consciousness, are a very difficult, dangerous, perhaps even impossible, task. These critics, friendly and not-so-friendly, would warn of the pitfalls lurking within all universalizing programmes that try to set up any kind of 'common ground' between differing cultures or religions. There is no common ground that can sustain the vast variety of incommensurable particulars. Any attempt to formulate a common ground or a global ethic – especially when such attempts are organized by people who have most of the world's wealth and weapons – will end up smudging, or suffocating, or exploiting particularity. Thus, many would see the intent of this chapter, and much of what is going on in meetings like the World Parliament of Religions, as another camouflaged manoeuvre to control the inter-religious and intercultural discourse with a Christian or Western agenda.

In what follows, I should like to respond to this postmodern criticism – not because I enjoy the bickerings of academics, but because I want what I am suggesting to be taken seriously. I shall offer some reasons why I think it is not only possible but also promising for members of all religious communities to take on responsibility for the future and to work toward what we can call an interfaith ethic. In more philosophical terms, I shall try to lay out what seem to me to be the 'conditions for the

possibility' of an interfaith ethic. And I shall do this by drawing on data from both the religious and secular world which, I think and hope, many, if not most, representatives from differing religious traditions can agree on.

In the first part of this chapter, I shall try to show that the very nature of religion and religious experience, as we view it in its many-splendoured forms, indicates that all (or at least 'most') religious traditions have the capability, if not the established record, of affirming global responsibility as a common ground for interreligious encounters. As I shall argue in part 2, this capability is all the more enhanced today when our earth, in both its sufferings and its newly discovered mysteries, is becoming a locus for shared religious experience and vision. In part 3, I shall take up the sticky question of how an interfaith ethic might adjudicate between competing ethical claims – that is, how eco-human 'justice' or 'well-being' can serve as a universal criterion for truth without becoming a new foundational or absolute norm for truth.

### *1 Global responsibility – can all religions endorse it?*

Both from what we can see in the world of religions and from what the academicians tell us, religion, in all its exuberant forms, has to do with changing this world for the better. Yes, religion has to do with what is called God or the Ultimate, and with life after death, and with altering or expanding our consciousness – but it also has to do with confronting, specifying and then repairing what is wrong in the way human beings live their lives together in this world. Whether you call it evil or ignorance or incompleteness, there's something wrong with the state of the world as it is, and religion wants to do something about it.

In other words, the religions call on what is more than human (at least the human as we now experience it) in order to transform or liberate the human. In the words of V. Harvey, '[W]hen we call something religious we ordinarily mean a perspective expressing a dominating interest in certain universal and elemental features of human existence as those features *bear on the human desire for liberation and authentic existence*'.<sup>1</sup> To transform the human context will mean, generally, to oppose or resist the forces that stand in the way of change or newness. Thus, David Tracy, ever cautious about general statements regarding religions, can recognize:

Above all, the religions are exercises in resistance. Whether seen as Utopian visions or believed in as revelations of Ultimate Reality, the religions reveal various possibilities for human freedom . . . When not domesticated as sacred canopies for the status quo nor wasted by their

own self-contradictory grasps at power, the religions live by resisting. The chief resistance of religions is to more of the same.<sup>2</sup>

*The mystical–prophetic dipolarity of all religion*

Naturally, in claiming that all religions are world-oriented and bear an energy that can change the earth, I am not saying that this is all they contain or that this is their only concern. Besides this world-transforming energy, there is another category of power that is just as important. Scholars have spoken of both the *prophetic* and the *mystical* power of religion.

In each religious tradition we can find both mystical and prophetic experiences and visions. And the line between them is not so much a wall that separates but a bond that unites and mutually nourishes. So we must admit and encourage the *mystical–prophetic dipolarity* that vibrates and flows back and forth within all religious traditions. This dipolar energy of religion animates a twofold project, each aspect essential, each calling to and dependent on the other, to transform both the within and the without, to alter inner consciousness and social consciousness, to bring about peace of the heart and peace in the world, stirring the individual to an earnest spiritual praxis and also to a bold political praxis.

The dynamic and call of this mystical–prophetic dipolarity is what tells Christians that they can love God only when they are loving their neighbour, or Buddhists that wisdom is not possible without compassion, or Hindus that the yoga of knowledge or devotion must be combined with the yogas of action in this world. Neither the mystical nor the prophetic is more fundamental, more important; each calls to, and has its existence in, the other.

Certainly the dipolarity, or the balance, will be maintained differently within different religions, or within different denominations of the same religion, or at different stages within an individual's personal journey. Frequently – all too frequently – the balance is not maintained; and then we have mystics whose spirituality becomes self-indulgent, insensitive, or irresponsible; or we have prophets whose actions become self-serving, intolerant, or violent. When the mutual feed-back system between the mystical and the prophetic within a religion breaks down, the religion becomes either an opium to avoid the world or an indulgence to exploit it.

So today, 'In all the major religious traditions, there is a search for new ways to unite those mystical and prophetic trajectories ...'.<sup>3</sup> In an age in which we are horrifyingly aware of human and ecological sufferings, and of the devastating dangers seeded within this suffering,

every religion is being challenged to rediscover the prophetic power of its tradition and to unite it to the mystical. The prophetic power is there, perhaps beneath a mystical overgrowth, perhaps hidden in narratives and symbols which spoke to a different age and which are in need of revising for this age. If this power is not tapped or refurbished, the religious tradition will lose its ability to speak to and engage the many persons today who feel the prophetic challenge of our suffering world.

*A shared diagnosis and remedy for the human predicament*

But I think we can go a step further. As we survey the vast terrain of religious history and experience, we can identify, I suggest, not only an undercurrent of concern for transforming this world, not only a dipolar flow between mystical and prophetic experience, but also an analogously similar *diagnosis* of what is wrong with our world and a *prescription* for what must be done to fix it. The operative word in that last sentence is 'analogously'. I am not suggesting that all the religions of the world are really proposing identical or essentially similar soteriologies – programmes for how the world and we humans are to be 'saved'. Rather, my experience in interreligious dialogue and social action has been that when one plunges into the vast diversity of religious analyses of what's wrong with the human predicament and how it might be set aright, when one wrestles with the very real and powerful *differences* in these analyses and programmes, one finds that the differences one is wrestling with turn out, for the most part, to be friends rather than foes.

More specifically, it seems that the analogous similarities between the differing religious views of humanity's fundamental problems take shape around the issues of the *nature of the self* and how the self can be understood or experienced differently. According to the myths, doctrines and ethical admonitions of most religions, humankind's woes flow from a pool of disunity and dis-ease fed by a false notion of the self. The problem, in other words, has to do with the way we understand and live out our sense of who we are. Either we understand ourselves incorrectly or our selves, in their present state, are corrupted or incomplete. In either case, something has to happen to the self, either notionally or in reality. We either have to understand or experience our selves differently, or our selves have to be infused with new or healing energies. Whether the fix is cognitional from within or ontological from without, it has to lead to a different way of acting in and of relating to the world around us.

So the problem recognized analogously by different religions has to

do with separation or selfishness: and the remedy has to do with relationship and mutuality. In many different ways, most (all?) religions seek to convert the energies of one's self from a centripetal to a centrifugal movement and so to broaden the focus of concern from not only me or us (egocentricity) to Other or others (altruism). We have to find ourselves outside of ourselves; to realize who we are, we have to experience ourselves as part of something that is greater than what we understand ourselves to be right now. John Hick, using Western terminology, seeks to summarize all this by describing the analogously common goal of most religions as a shift from self-centredness to Reality-centredness.<sup>4</sup>

Admittedly, as feminist critics point out, such ideals of a selfless self have been fashioned by patriarchal religions – that means, by men whose primary 'sin' has been an inflated self that abuses other selves, and not by women whose primary sin has been a deflated self that allows itself to be abused by others. Thus, what I am proposing here as a diagnosis common to all religions requires a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion that will assure that the selfless self does not become the enslaved or subordinated self.<sup>5</sup> Still, I think feminists would agree that the 'saved self' or new self is one that is sustained in the web of mutuality rather than in the cell of egocentricity.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 *The earth: common ground for encountering the sacred*

So far, our proposal has been that differing religions can and must share a global responsibility for eco-human wellbeing and justice. Even though many contemporary scholars are extremely uneasy with such a universal proposal (and would want to cut it up into socially-constructed pieces), I think that global responsibility for the future enables religious persons to take an even bolder step. So I would like to explain why I, along with others, am convinced that the kind of global responsibility we have been talking about can be not only a shared commitment but also a *shared context for religious experience*, feeding and reforming our different religious traditions. Global responsibility is not only an *ethical task* that all religious persons can take up together but also a *religious task* and a source of shared experiences by which believers from different communities can better understand and communicate each other's religious stories and language.

To feel global responsibility, to give oneself to the task of struggling for *soteria* in this tormented world, to join hands with victims and to experience victimization in the struggle for justice, to feel claimed by the sacredness of the earth and called to protect the earth – such human experiences and activities constitute a universally available locus, an

arena open to all, where persons of different religious backgrounds can feel the presence and empowerment of that for which religious language seems appropriate.

Working for eco-human justice becomes a common context in which we find ourselves using our different religious stories and symbols. So our experiences of injustice are different, as is our language; but at the same time, these differing words are flowing from a common experiential process. There is, I dare say, something 'common' within the diversity. We are 'communing' with that which sustains or might be the goal of our various traditions. Working together for justice becomes, or can become, a *communicatio in sacris* – a communication in the Sacred – available to us beyond our churches and temples. But just how does this work?

*Extra mundum nulla salus – Outside the world there is no salvation*

Edward Schillebeeckx helps us to understand how global responsibility can be a 'communication in the Sacred' when he takes the long-standing ecclesiocentric dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation) and turns it on its head to read *extra mundum nulla salus* (outside the world there is no salvation). Here Schillebeeckx is speaking not just to his fellow Christians but is announcing a reality that he feels can be recognized and affirmed by all religious persons. It is precisely in the confrontation and struggle with a world littered with limitations and inadequacies (to put it philosophically), or with suffering and injustice (to put it existentially), that we can, and do, encounter the divine. Again, his language is Christian, but the experience he is describing can, I believe, be caught and illuminated by a variety of religious symbols and narratives.

Schillebeeckx describes a basically identical worldly process in which many people, from a variety of religions and cultures, find themselves today. They encounter situations of 'negative experience of contrast' before which they find themselves pronouncing, first, a spontaneous and forceful 'no' to what the situation is, and then a resolute 'yes' to how it might be transformed. In this explosive 'no' and then in this determined 'yes', we find the first stirrings of religious experience – what Schillebeeckx calls 'pre-religious experiences'. This 'natural' or 'given' human response of resistance leading to hope and action is the raw material, as it were, out of which religious experience or faith can take form. This is what Schillebeeckx means by 'no salvation outside the world'; it is in the confrontation with and struggle to improve the world that the reality of the Transcendent/Immanent makes itself felt. For Schillebeeckx, the praxis of involvement in the world has a primacy in

religious experience and in what Christians call revelation.<sup>7</sup>

My suggestion, therefore, is that just as persons from various spiritualities have sought for a multifaith *communicatio in sacris* – a sharing of religious experience – in ashrams and monasteries, and in participation in each other's meditational or prayer practices, so today they can also share their religious experiences and language in the concrete praxis of a global spirituality and the struggle for eco-human justice that such responsibility demands. We can commune in the sacred as we commune in the sufferings of our world. Thus, a group of sixteen representatives of various religious paths in India could conclude their dialogue with this joint statement:

When we stand for justice and freedom and for people's right to life with dignity, we stand for those realities and values, in terms of which *all faiths image the Mystery of the Divine* . . . The downtrodden people with their history of hope and struggle is the *locus*, the place, of authentic encounter with God. In confronting injustice and working for a new India, a new world, where people are equal and free, and where resources are for all, there exists a profound spirituality even if it is not recognised, made explicit.<sup>8</sup>

### *The threatened earth: a common ethical challenge*

But there is another way – broader and both more challenging and promising – in which our world can provide common ground for dialogue toward an interfaith ethic. I am not talking here about what some are proposing as a 'common creation story', based on what science tells us about the origins and functioning of the universe; they suggest that this creation or cosmological story can serve as the umbrella myth, as it were, under which all the creation stories of the world can be reordered and assembled together alongside each other.<sup>9</sup> For many, however, such a common cosmological story is highly suspect, not because it is proposed as *common* but because it is proposed by Western *science*. Rather than find myself caught in the tangle of such justified concerns, I prefer to point out, in what we know about the earth today, not so much a common creation story but, rather, a common *ethical story*.

I am suggesting that our present-day 'common knowledge' about the earth can provide religions not only with common knowledge about our shared origins in the big bang and the wondrous complexity of evolution but also, and more clearly and urgently, with common knowledge about a shared ethical task and shared guidelines to carry out that task. It is especially on the ethical level that the so-called

'universe story' can exercise a practical unifying force among the religions.

The chapter in the universe story that is presently being lived out and written might fittingly be titled, in the words of biologist Edward O. Wilson: 'Is humanity suicidal?'<sup>10</sup> We are indeed 'flirting with the extinction of our species' as we witness and cause the extinction of thousands of other species, and in general strangle the life-sustaining capacities of the planet. The task of preventing this suicide, and the broader geocide, is the most compelling and unsettling ethical imperative facing humankind today. 'In spite of continuing political tensions among nations, the most dangerous threat to the world's well-being is not war but the closing down of the earth's most basic systems, which support us and all other forms of life.'<sup>11</sup> Not to respond to this threat and this ethical imperative is to renounce or diminish one's humanity. Because this is true for peoples in all cultures, of all religions (in different degrees, of course, for the impoverished campesino than for the multi-national executive), our common universe story, with its ecological awareness and demands, provides us with the motivation and the means to break the roadblock that many people try to place before any kind of a common ethical venture based on common ethical criteria.

To the postmodern insistence that every value or every moral project is but an individual social construction valid only for its own backyard, to the refusal of many today to endorse any kind of universal or 'meta' discourse that would rally the troops in a united campaign, we can hold up our common universe story that tells us we are all interrelated in our origins, in our functioning *and* in our responsibility for saving our species and endangered planet. With Charlene Spretnak, I think we can speak of 'the "metadiscourse" of the universe' which can link our individual discourses, or of the 'grand cosmologic' that can inform the logic of all cultures. Before we are located in our separate, diverse cultural-religious houses, we are located, more deeply and decisively and responsibly, in the cosmic neighbourhood, in the one world in which we all share and which connects us all with each other and which, today, pleads with us for its own salvation.<sup>12</sup>

There is, therefore, a 'place' where we all stand together, where we share both common experiences, concerns and responsibilities: our earth – beautiful in its mysterious connectedness and evolution but also menaced in the devastation that the human species has wrought upon it. This earth provides the religions not only with a religious community in which they possibly can share myths of origin, but also, and more imperatively, with an ethical community in which they can and must identify and defend common criteria of truth. In their basic content, such criteria will probably be something like those being worked out by

international ecological groups, especially non-governmental – criteria that seek to balance the promotion of life for individuals and for eco-systems. I am not claiming that such universal ethical criteria are ready made or that they can be neatly articulated in a kind of ecological decalogue. But I am stating that the universe story, which today we read as a drama whose outcome is still to be told, can provide religions with the materials and perspectives with which successfully, though never finally, to work out global ecological norms.<sup>13</sup>

So when our efforts toward an interfaith ethic based on justice are challenged with the fitting question of ‘Whose justice are you talking about?’, we can give one clear and equally challenging response: the earth’s justice! Yes, the critics are right – every understanding of justice is socially mediated and motivated. But here is one form of justice that we must all not only be concerned about but also in some way agree on: all nations and religions must devote themselves to the common task of saving and sustaining the integrity and life-giving powers of the planet. If the job isn’t done jointly, it won’t really be done! It’s as simple, and yet as profound, as that. So the hope expressed by Thomas Berry is as idealistic as it is imperative, and it seems to me that we have no choice but to endorse it: ‘Concern for the well-being of the planet is the one concern that hopefully will bring the nations [and the religions] of the world into an inter-nation [and inter-religious] community.’<sup>14</sup>

### *3 Eco-human well-being: a universal criterion for truth*

Having proposed in part 1 that all religions show the capability of genuine concern for human wellbeing in this world, having described in part 2 how the state of the present world (especially the drama of the universe story) is calling forth this capability, I must recognize the stubborn truth that there is no clear, identifiable unity among the religious communities on how we are to respond to the needs of this suffering planet, no agreement, yet, on the essential elements in an interfaith ethic. The spectre of diversity once again rears its defiant head and announces the counter-claim: ‘Okay, the sufferings of people and planet may present the religions with a common problem. But just because you have a common problem (maybe even a common diagnosis of the problem), you don’t have the assurance of a common answer.’ Thus, the question of ‘Whose justice?’ can never be simply or totally dismissed. The diversity of religious experience and traditions will not allow it.

David Tracy states the problem more academically and more pointedly:

There are family resemblances among the religions. But as far as I can

see, there is no single essence, no one content of enlightenment or revelation, no one way of emancipation or liberation to be found in all that plurality . . . there are different interpretations of what way we should follow to move from a fatal self-centeredness to a liberating Reality-centeredness . . . The responses of the religions, their various narratives, doctrines, symbols, and their often conflicting accounts of the way to authentic liberation are at least as different as they are similar. They are clearly not the same.<sup>15</sup>

*Eco-human justice: a cross-cultural criterion*

How can we fashion consensus out of such stubborn diversity? How can we mediate between two differing views about what will ensure authentic liberation? In a particular context, for instance, a Buddhist may call for the total selflessness of non-violence, while a Christian may urge the self-giving of armed resistance. How might a shared commitment to global responsibility and eco-human justice help adjudicate the truth between them?

David Tracy tries to answer that question. He outlines three general criteria for religious truth which he thinks could be acceptable to persons of different religious traditions and which therefore can enable them to reach joint judgements:

- a 'The truth of a religion is, like the truth of its nearest cousin, art, primordially the truth of manifestation.'<sup>16</sup> In religion, we know something to be so because it *manifests* or reveals itself to us; we know it because, like the beauty of art, we feel it. More practically, it *makes a claim* on us; it grasps or lays hold of us. So, if the stories or rituals of your religion can tug at and claim my heart, if I feel their truth manifested before me at least as a 'suggestive possibility',<sup>17</sup> I can share your truth, and so we can come to mutual agreement.
- b But what touches the heart must also listen to the head. Even though there is no cross-cultural consensus on what 'reasonability' means or requires, Tracy believes that all religions will recognize the need for some kind of 'cognitive criteria of coherence with what we otherwise know or, more likely, believe to be the case'.<sup>18</sup>
- c Finally, there must also be 'ethical-political criteria on the personal and social consequences of our beliefs'.<sup>19</sup> How do our religious experience and beliefs make for a better world, both our own and that of society?

Tracy's first two criteria – revelatory power and rational coherence – are much more subjectively or culturally conditioned than his third criterion – the ethical demands arising from starvation or destruction of

the rain forests (though all ethical responses are to some extent culturally coloured). Ethical and liberative criteria, insofar as they are directed toward problems or issues that are truly common to us all, are better able to serve as the starting point or foundation with which we can move on to discuss the revelatory power and the rational coherence of our individual truth claims.

So of the three cross-cultural criteria for working toward shared assessments of truth among the incorrigible diversity of world religions – personal experience, cognitive coherence and ethical fruits – it is the last criterion, it seems to me, that is ‘most cross-cultural’. Questions concerning the ethical fruits of a particular belief or practice – that is, whether it does remove suffering and promote wellbeing – provide common ground on which persons of differing traditions can stand and effectively discuss their differences and work toward consensus. The critical data regarding the ethical effects of one’s claims are, as it were, much more ‘at hand’ than are appeals to one’s religious experience or to what makes rational sense.

If followers of various religious traditions can agree in the beginning that whatever else their experience of truth or of the divine or of enlightenment may bring about, it must always promote greater eco-human wellbeing and remove the sufferings of our world, then they have a shared reference point from which to affirm or criticize each other’s claims. Such ethical concerns do not provide immediate solutions to interreligious disagreements; but they do constitute a walkable path toward such solutions.

So I would agree with Francis Schüssler Fiorenza when he proposes ‘solidarity with the suffering’ as the source of criteria that will enable persons from diverse cultures and religions to come to shared conclusions about truth and value and action.<sup>20</sup> Precisely because human and ecological suffering is both *universal* and *immediate* it can serve all religious persons as a common context and criteriological resource for assessing religious truth-claims. In its universality, human and ecological suffering confronts and affects us all; in its immediacy, it has a raw reality and challenge that is somehow beyond our differing interpretations of it. This is why ‘suffering brings us to the bedrock of human existence and cuts through the hermeneutical circle’.<sup>21</sup> The stark image of a child starving because of poverty or of a lake polluted because of chemical dumping has an immediacy that breaks through our differing cultural interpretations of it. It stares us in the face and questions us before we fully understand or interpret it. It is this questioning face of the suffering that enables religions to face and question each other and come to joint assessments of truth. Thus, a concern for ethical-political criteria in the face of suffering can work cross-culturally.

But in order to work, it is not enough that the participants in interreligious dialogue simply 'bear in mind' the reality of the suffering of the victims of human or ecological injustice; it is not enough that they all announce to each other and the world that they are 'globally responsible' for the future. If ethical-political criteria resulting from 'solidarity with the suffering' are really to bear fruit in the elaboration of an interfaith ethic, the suffering victims must have a 'hermeneutical privilege' in dialogical decision-making about such an ethic; this means that the suffering oppressed themselves, together with those who can speak for the oppressed species and earth, will have to be not simply the *object* of the dialogue but active *participants* in it. If their voices are to be heard, they will have to be present as they have not generally been present within the arena of interreligious dialogue.

The suffering, the victims, will have to have an active part in determining the agenda for the dialogue – the procedure and format, yes, the place and the language, too! Just how all this can be arranged is not easy to say, for certainly this has not been the style or the practice of dialogical conferences as they have been planned and practised over the past decades; the excluded will now have to be included. If religious spokespersons are serious about basing their discussions on ethical-political criteria and on global responsibility, then they will have to prove this seriousness by inviting to the dialogue those most affected by present ethical and political realities.

But what is required is more than simply inviting the suffering and oppressed to the table of dialogue. If their voices are not only to be heard but also to be understood, if the reality of their suffering and ethical concerns is to be felt and not just registered, then somehow all the participants in the dialogue need to be *actively involved in the praxis* of working against eco-human injustice and promoting more life-giving, just ethical-political policies in the structures of governments and economics. One can hear the message of the suffering only if one is struggling, and therefore suffering, together with them. Dialogical conversation must include, in some way, dialogical praxis for liberation and wellbeing. Just what this means and how it can be carried out will vary from context to context.

With these other voices representing the suffering of humanity and of the earth actively present in our interreligious discourse, participants will be able to apply ethical-political criteria all the more realistically and effectively. Those representing the marginalized and oppressed can serve, as it were, as 'arbiters' or a 'court of appeal' when there are differing views among the religious spokespersons as to just what are the ethical fruits of a particular religious claim. Such decisions, in other words, are not to be made only, or primarily, by the 'religious experts'.

The persons directly affected will give witness about just how their lives have been changed and enhanced, or limited and threatened, by a particular religious conviction or behaviour. They will make known, for instance, how images of God as transcendent or immanent affect their attitudes to this world, how beliefs in karma or after-life have contributed to their wellbeing now, how non-violent or armed forms of resistance can improve their situation. Not that their views or experiences will be the final verdict in any discussion. Still, I am convinced that their voices will generally be an effective, if not decisive, help in the difficult task of honouring the diversity of religious views and yet formulating out of that diversity decisions and programmes that will promote global responsibility and an interfaith ethic.

We must hope that the individual religious communities of the world will build a 'community of communities', a paradoxical but actual community in which we belong both to our own religion and culture and yet genuinely participate in the global community struggling for eco-human justice and wellbeing. It will be a community in which we are both particularists and universalists, making strong claims on the basis of our particular religious convictions but knowing that such claims might be relativized in the wider conversation with other strong claims and with the even stronger demand to remove human and ecological suffering.

If there are those who say such an ethical community of communities among religions is a pipe dream, then I respond respectfully but firmly that we have no choice today but to dream such dreams.

### Notes

1 Quoted in David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 54. Emphasis mine.

2 David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 84. Therefore, according to Raimundo Panikkar, even to raise the question whether religion has anything to do with changing this world is to fall victim to a dualism that runs contrary to the ideals of most, if not all, religions. It is a dualism between God and the world, or religion and politics, that stems, not from the content of religious experience, but from external efforts (especially in the West) to spiritualize, or privatize religion and thus dilute its political power: see Raimundo Panikkar, 'Religion or politics: the western dilemma' in Peter H. Merkle and Ninian Smart (eds), *Religion and Politics in the Modern World* (New York: University Press, 1983), p. 52. Gandhi, then, was right when he announced 'I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means': *My Autobiography* (Boston:

Beacon Press, 1957), p. 504. Or maybe they know very well what it means, but seek to deny or stifle the power of religion.

3 David Tracy, 'God, dialogue and solidarity: a theologian's refrain', *The Christian Century* (10 October 1990), p. 900.

4 John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 299–309.

5 Valerie Saiving, 'The human situation: a feminine view' in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 25–42; Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980), pp. 51–94.

6 Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

7 Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), pp. 5–15.

8 Final report of the consultation organized by the Indian regional committee of EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians), 27 February–2 March 1989 in Madras. Privately distributed.

9 Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story* (HarperSan Francisco, 1992); Sallie McFague, 'Cosmology and Christianity: implications of the common creation story for theology' in Sheila Greeve Devaney (ed.), *Theology at the End of Modernity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 19–40.

10 Edward O. Wilson, 'Is humanity suicidal?', *New York Times Magazine* (30 May 1992), pp. 24–9.

11 McFague, 'Cosmology and Christianity', p. 20.

12 Charlene Spretnak, *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age* (HarperSan Francisco, 1991), pp. 81, 105.

13 One set of such general norms was suggested by the International Coordinating Committee on Religion and the Earth for the Rio Conference. The committee formulated a statement of 'Ethics for living' which called on all people to live: sustainably (with a concern for the present *and* for the future), justly, frugally, peacefully, interdependently, knowledgeably (recognizing the need for ecological education) and holistically (fostering the whole person, spiritually, physically, intellectually). See 'An earth charter', distributed by the International Coordinating Committee on Religion and the Earth, Wainwright House, 260 Stuyvesant Avenue, New York, NY 10580.

14 Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p. 218.

15 Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, pp. 90, 92.

16 Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 43.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

18 Tracy, 'God, dialogue, and solidarity', p. 901.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Theological and religious studies: the contest of the faculties' in Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (eds), *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), pp. 133–4.

21 Ibid., p. 135.