A Jewish Response

to

"Divisiveness and Unity"

by Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith

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Norman Lamm

Jakob Michael professor of
Jewish Philosophy

Yeshiva University

New York, New York

Reading Professor Smith's paper was a spiritually edifying experience. His breadth of vision, his open-mindedness, his combination of trenchant analysis and magnanimity towards alternative ways of approaching the problem, distinguish his essay and make it worthy of the most serious consideration.

Professor Smith has stated admirably the ambiguous role of religion in society, both its contributions to cohesiveness and, even more, its role as a divisive factor in the story of mankind. History offers ample corroboration of the thesis of his paper.

In my response -- which I specifically laber "A Jewish Response," not "The Jewish Response" -- I should like to focus on what I consider his main point: the distinction between society and community, and the assertion of a moral imperative to all faith-communities to use religion in order to turn what is merely world society into what should be world community.

The society-community distinction seems to me both valid and valuable as a tool for formulating the main purpose of the paper. I accept it fully, and would like only to add that the distinction as such -- as well as the question of whether faith is an expression of community, as Durkheim would have it, or the other way around as Smith would have it -- has precedence in antiquity. In the Hebrew Bible, there are two words generally used for a collectivity: Kahal and Edah. The first term denotes a conglomeration of individuals who happen to be assembled in one area at one time. It accords with a nominalist conception, and implies nothing more than a group of people gathered together, no matter the level of efficiency of organization. The second word, Edah is organismic, and implies a metaphysical dimension. The medieval Spanish-Jewish Hebrew grammarian, R. David Kimhi, sees the root of the word as Y-'A-D, implying a destiny, a calling or vocation. It denotes a group that feels itself called to some transcendent purpose. The Biblical terms thus seem to be parallel to Professor Smith's use of the words "society" and "community."

Moreover, the question of whether the calling or the community comes first, or which is the cause and which is the effect, has already been discussed in a somewhat different context by two of the most important Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages. Thus, Saädia Gaon (10-11 century) sees the people of Israel as coming into being as a nation only because of its spiritual vocation. R. Yehudah Halevi (11-12 century) would have it the other way around: the people of Israel begins as a "natural" people, and its spiritual dimension is superadded to it.

I mention these sources not for reasons of pedantry, or to assure myself that the ideas have warrant in my own tradition, but simply to illuminate the point that Professor Smith has made. If his ideas are implicit in Scriptural terminology, and if leading thinkers have already begun a discussion of a problem he poses, mutatis mutandis, almost a thousand years ago, these may not prove anything, but they certainly lend credibility to the raising of the question.

To turn, now, to the main thrust of the Smith paper: At the expense of being a spoil-sport, let me adumbrate some of the dangers of the concept of "world community," including, more explicitly, some of the caveats Professor Smith has himself hinted at.

The whole enterprise is not without considerable risk, despite the obvious desireability of achieving world community, especially by the inspiration and motivation of religious faith. I hope my comments will not be misconstrued as further evidence of Professor Smith's reiteration of the unhappy history of religion as a source of divisiveness. That is certainly not my intention. On the contrary, it is because the goal is so precious, that every precaution must be taken to avoid errors that may frustrate the attainment of this noble ambition.

The striving for world community is vulnerable to three fundamental errors or misinterpretations.

The first of these is the possibility that "world community" will become a euphemism for what can only be called religious and ideological imperialism, whether conscious or unconsciousness. Every great idea is in some ways a dangerous idea, and the more valuable the idea the more potentially disastrous can be its consequences: in the language of the Kabbalah, "the side of holiness" always has its concomitant "other side," that of impurity and evil. "The other side" of universalism, as sublime and even sacred it may be in its conception, is that of totalitarianism. Universalism, lofty as it is, may create a climate of contempt for those who do not share its basic ideological and theological presuppositions, forgetting that universalisms can be as narrow and idiosyncratic as particularisms. Many a universalist ideology, based upon the concept of election, is riddled through with the hubris of self-righteousness no less than what is usually described, pejoratively, as a "particularist" doctrine of chosenness. This kind of universalism may well be conceived as the only legitimate means towards the salvation of all mankind -- nulla salus extra ecclesiam -- with results that are too dreary and too well known to bear repetition here. The tendency of universalist religions towards self-identification with Hegel's "absolute religion" has littered the road to salvation with countless corpses of stubborn dissidents.

The second error against which we must be on guard, is the imposition of a kind of apologetic strait-jacket on individual philosophies, frequently distorting them in the course of striving for pre-conceived conclusions acceptable to others. I am worried, in this respect, not so much by Professor Smith's point that faith is an end in itself and must never be conceived as a means to some other end, no matter how desireable, as I am by the unintentional lack of integrity by advocates of specific religious traditions who are so enamored of the goal of world community, that they are ready to "prove" that their traditions always entertained such notions or, at the

very least, that such ambitions flow naturally from the historic principles of their faith. Exegesis or theologizing which lacks candor is a weak reed indeed on which to construct the unity of mankind. Jewish thought in particular has often suffered from this willful if well meant distortion.

Third, one must beware of falling into the trap of a theological indifferentism, which regards any form of theological and cultic exclusiveness as necessarily retrograde and reactionary. This has occasionally happened to more liberal theologians, particularly to those who were receptive to secularizing tendencies.

Does this mean that, despite my personal faith commitments, I prefer an exclusively secular effort at achieving world community?

Absolutely not. For what little consolation it can bring us religious folk, I quite agree with Professor Smith that secular motivations for human unity have proved to be abysmal failures -- at least as unsuccessful as religion, and far more cataclysmic in their consequences. All the negative aspects that adhere to the universalist persuasion of Christianity, for instance, may be found in the various secular ideologies often advocated by Western liberals and honorifically termed "progressive." These latter, to our dismay, do not always hesitate to denigrate all institutions which seek to retain their particular identities, and consider them obstacles on the path to a highly desireable universalist socio-political organization. The road to Utopia is frequently far from utopian.

The Biblical story of the generation that built the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) is one of the Bible's most sarcastic comments on human pretentiousness. "The whole earth was of one language and of one speech," and men, thus united, sought technological expressions of their combined powers, in utter disregard of the One Father of all humankind. The result, of course, was catastrophic. Our linguistic and cultural divisiveness today is, according to Scripture, the heritage of that primal act of universalist hubris.

But if I am apprehensive about the universalist aspirations of both the religious and the secularists, what then? Am I ready to abandon the human quest for world community?

No, not at all, not when the very survival of the species may be at stake. The caution that I am proposing is for the sake of promoting, not undermining, a cause the urgency of which becomes more evident with every passing week.

Permit me to offer, then, a slight but possibly significant modification in nomenclature. I trust that the substantive consequences of this distinction will become apparent, and will not be misconstrued as mere terminological quibbling. (I believe I first suggested this several years ago at a Christian-Jewish Consultation in Geneva.) In order that world community not be thought of as an imposed uniformity throughout the world, the concept needs to be restated as a "community of communities." The term suggest that the identity of each group must have its integrity utterly respected.

> World community is not only the sum of individual human beings; it is composed of communities of diverse kinds and of a variety of societal structures, some natural, some historically and culturally determined, some freely contracted (e.g., ethnic, linguistic, religious, political). Individuality can be expressed through membership in various communities. World community must recognize the value of such communities as they provide human life with identity and meaning and work towards overcoming the threats of loneliness and anonymity and uniformity. (Statement of the Joint Proposals of the Jewish-Christian Consultation in Geneva in April 1972).

Implicit in the substitution of "community of communities" for "world community" is a warning against universalist excesses.

Moreover, use of this particular term urges upon us a narrowing of ambitions for the sake of ultimate success -- a strategy of ideological modesty. It offers the "community of communities" not as an ultimate goal, but as a proximate one. The various religious traditions may not have ultimate goals for "the end of days," and these are not

necessarily identical. But these must be scrupulously excluded in the endeavor to establish a peaceful and just "community of communities."

The term, in other words, represents a de-eschatologization of the concept of world community. It obligates all participants to a form of collective self-restraint. Many religions entertain dreams or visions of universal acceptance, in one way or another. Many of the major faiths of humankind today, especially those of the West, envision the ideal state of mankind as one in which all humans will embrace their respective prophets or dogma. Judaism has been less of a problem than many other historical religions in this regard -- a good case can be made out for defining Judaism's eschatological vision as one of the universal moral edification and ennoblement, in which each people and community will worship God in its own way. But whatever, these ultimate aims of the various faith groups should not be denied, lest we cause them to be false to their individual outlooks. To confuse "world community" with the "end of days" is to risk the first of the three errors, i.e., to invite a clash of outlooks, each propounding a different universal goal, that can only result in realizing the full potential of religion for divisiveness and fragmentation and, perhaps worse, for triumph and domination. To ignore the historic eschatological visions of each tradition is to invite either the second or third errors I mentioned above.

If we are to achieve our goal of world community, all religions and ideologies may have to be called upon to make a clear decision, in common, in order to proceed both honestly and honorably on the quest for world community. That is, having openly acknowledged its eschatological goals, each group must affirm that our contemporary mutual quest for a world community of communities is non-eschatological or, at the very most, pre-eschatological. Allied with this must come a resolve that even if world

community represents, according to one's insights and orientation, a pre-eschatological state, such world community must never become the instrumentality for activistic eschatological realization, and the proselytization that it implies. Once we stray over the border from our political-social desideratum to eschatological aspirations, we may have forfeited everything.

That is admittedly asking a great deal from those communities for whom the achievement of the eschaton is an essential doctrine and an effective motivation of conduct. But unless such self-restraint is forthcoming, and unless it is forthcoming in a manner that will inspire trust by others, the quest for world community will be bedevilled by mutual suspicion and will die aborning.

This having been said, I still feel uneasy about the possibilities of success in achieving the state of a world-wide "community of communities." Can the magnetic pole of the Transcendent, as each of us conceives it, really evoke from amongst us, all the disparate members of the human race, those sublime elements from within each tradition and ideology that, together, can weld us into a world community or even merely a community of communities?

Both experience and intuition -- and perhaps a dash of quietism that has historically insinuated itself into my Jewish tradition which is largely activist -- make me pessimistic. Even if (or maybe because) we keep clearly within the non-eschatological realm, then I doubt -- much against my own wishes and hopes -- that humankind is ready for this historic state of cooperation and collaboration as an act of faith and spiritual generosity. The spiritual temperature of mankind is simply not high enough.

What then? I invoke here an important principle of the Talmud, when it discusses the question of motivation. Not only must one perform "good deeds" in practice, not only must one live a life of virtuous "works," but the intention that informs them must be elevated and sacred. Not only must praxis be in conformity with the divine will, but inwardly man must be

motivated by a selfless submission to the divine moral order. This is known as lishmah, "for its own sake." Yet the Sages of the Talmud offer us a perspicacious psychological insight: few humans are capable of such immediate high-mindedness. Better (more accurately: le'olam,"always") begin on the right path she'lo lishmah, even for reasons of self-interest (within certain limits) and not for the purest of motives. The Talmudic Sages are confident that "in the course of (acting properly) for improper reasons, one will (eventually) come to do so for the right reasons."

It is this principle that I would apply to our quest for a universal "community of communities." Initially, the appeal to men and women and to the various communities -- ethnic, religious, national political -- must be on the basis of shared perceptions of mutual danger, rather than the promise of mutual uplifting. Before we can achieve the new definition of "we" as the entire family of mankind, as Porfessor Smith would have it, and his dream is unexceptionable, we must clearly perceive that all of the lesser "we's" must work together or perish together.

Religious and secular leadership alike must arouse the world to the awareness that our self-interest demands a new level of international and intercommunal collaboration. The religious principle is simple enough: life is sacred, and further lack of cooperation across political, national, ethnic, and religious boundaries poses a clear and present danger to the continuation of life on this troubled planet.

Perhaps if another Orson Wells would arise and convince us of the imminent invasion of Earth by spacemen, or if our governments were strong and brave enough to impress upon the world population the frightening facts about the crises that bedevil us and their probable conclusions in apocalyptic cataclysms, and if all of us would learn that our smaller collectivities, all of them no more than partial wholes, are simply inadequate to the task of solving such overarching problems -- then, the very process of collaboration not because of idealistic reasons, but specifically because of global mutual

self-interest, might teach us the practical techniques of world-wide

cooperation. Perhaps we must first learn to live together because we have

to, and only then because we want to. Let us begin to act as we must, and

the proper intentions will come later and inspire even more heroic collaboration.

Permit me to conclude with a parable. An ancient Jewish tradition,

recorded in the book called Mekhilta, tells us the following about the

revelation of the first of the Ten Commandments:

> When the Holy One stood up and said, "I am the Lord thy God,"
> the earth trembled... and the very houses of the Israelites were filled
> with the splendor of the divine Presence.

> At that time, all the kings of the nations of the world assembled
> and came to Balaam the son of Beor (the pagan prophet). They said to
> him: Perhaps God is about to destroy His world by a flood? He said
> to them: Fools that you are! Long ago God swore to Noah that He
> would not bring a flood upon the world... Then they said to him:
> Perhaps He will not bring a flood of water, but He may bring a flood
> of fire. But he said to them: He is not going to bring a flood of
> water or a flood of fire. It is simply that the Holy One is going to
> give the Torah to His people... As soon as they heard this from him, they
> all turned back and went each to his place.

The legend is suffused with bittersweet humor. The nations indeed

came together. The kings showed a penchant for unity. But why? Because

they misinterpreted the theophany as an impending catastrophe -- a deluge

of water or fire. The threat of common disaster impelled them to unite.

Balaam tried to tell them something: that God was revealing Himself, that

what was taking place was quite the opposite of crisis or danger. But when

the kings perceived that they were not confronted with terrible danger, they

were relieved -- and packed their bags and went home. Common calamity would

have united them. Mere revelation of God was inadequate to the task...

I wonder what, with the benefit of hindsight, I would have done had I

been Balaam. Perhaps I would not have revealed the secret. I might have

permitted myself a holy falsehood -- forgive the term! -- and told the kings

that floods of both fire and water were upon them, and thus would have set

in motion a unity neither of spiritual commitment nor of hubris, but one of

banding together against the external danger, in the hope that out of this

intensive pre-occupation with survival would emerge a deeper and sublimer consciousness of shared destiny, and that thus they would have been ready for the Word of God.

Maybe that old wizard Balaam knew this all along and feared unity, and that is why he was being so honest...
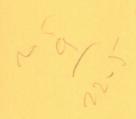
Divisiveness and Unity:

The Rôle of Religion in Politics and Society

Wilfred Cantwell Smith
McCulloch Professor of Religion
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

It is manifest that religious faith in its many forms has been a divisive and a cohesive force. This has been so throughout history; it is so to-day. The divisiveness, the cohesion, and the force of faith continue major. In an age such as ours not conspicuously religious, the activating forcefulness of faith is at times obscured. In an age such as ours that other forms of social and political ordering dominate, the cohesive quality of the religious may not come to the fore. Yet however one may rejoice in or deplore a waning of faith in our era (or discern or minimize a re-waxing of it), the divisive potential of religious loyalties stands, it would seem, ever clear and firm. Even those who might belittle the capacity of traditional religious motifs to-day positively to galvanize individual action or to generate corporate unity, or otherwise to matter very much, yet are reminded by northern Ireland, Pakistan/India, the Middle East, that negatively in any case religious differences can and do still disrupt. In the complicated problem of world community and concord, even of world viability, the religious is hardly to be gainsaid.

Recently prevalent, especially among operative groups in Western society and highly popular with them, was a "piecemeal" view of human affairs, dividing life up into parts and settling down to dealing then with problems one at a time. This outlook presupposed that in principle one had plenty of time: that the system in general was stable enough to allow for the solving of one difficulty after another. Although it might be a pity to have to await the resolution of some problems, yet in principle this was unfortunate but required patience. Or, if not the system, at least the planet, the race, were reliably stable enough for such procedure. The outlook, moreover, presupposed also that in princi-

ple the various "parts" of life were independent and separate. The economic, the philosophic, the political, and alongside the other categories also the religious, were conceived as each discrete or at least distinguishable realities, complicating life no doubt by influencing each other in surreptitious and admittedly intricate ways, yet ultimately distinct -- at least in the sense that problems in social life are technical and difficulties in any sector can be treated technically. Objectificationist trends also meant that the fundamentally human question as to what sort of person one is or shall become, or what overall vision deserves one's loyalty, were hardly incorporated into the model. In this scheme, the religious tended, as we have remarked, to be seen also as one more factor in the social complex, although it was tacitly recognized as being different from the others at least by the consensus that it was to be left alone(whether because it did not really matter any more, or because it was too unmanageable).

One reason why the food and energy crisis of to-day is a crisis (or, in the plural, they are crises) is that these presuppositions are seen no longer to hold. The threat of large-scale starvation is so massive and so multi-faceted that we may not have time to deal with its "causes" seriatim. The energy crisis is so involuted that it calls in question the very foundation of the theory that problems are technical and can be solved technically (--which, moreover, has regularly meant, by the application of more industrial energy).

Given problems of this magnitude and of this multi-dimensionality, one begins to think about bringing to bear upon their solution all resources, from whatever source. Maybe even religion could be used to help deal with these threats?

The idea is attractive because of the potential activating force-

fulness of religious faith. Since heroic measures, on a wide base, seem requisite, and since faith, apparently, even and perhaps especially among the rank-and-file of society, can call forth concern, dedication, hard work, stamina, then might religion not be enlisted in the service of this goal?

Two caveats, however, present themselves. One is that divisiveness matter. Responsible world leaders are given pause by their sense that once religious feelings are aroused, even in a good cause, who knows but what they may eventuate in internecine conflict. Each religious community is committed within its own terms of reference to the problem of hunger, presumably, even if not necessarily to that of energy. Yet given the fact that to-day (for the first time) this is a global problem, clearly requiring the co-operation of all mankind, can the disparate religious communities be counted upon to work together? Even if they avoid mutual bickering, rivalry, or anyway embattled collision, can they be expected to know how to collaborate positively? (Or even to learn how to do so, in time?) Is secularity, whatever efficiencies it may have, the only basis for world order; and secular language, whatever its other limitations, the only one in which men and women of diverse forms of faith can speak to each other?

The second caveat is that religion must not be "used". Not even for a good cause. Faith is man's relation to ultimates, to absolutes. To subordinate faith, or to try to subordinate it, to any practical purpose, however worthy, is explosively distorting. Even those who may not be too concerned over the possible distortions must be cautious about the possible explosions.

To the problem of distortion persons of religious faith are primar-

ily sensitive, more than the socio-political leaders. On the former

problem, the fissiparous quality of religious life, both groups are

alert. Men and women of faith within each community, and not only

secularizing observers on the outside of all, take note of and weep

over the deep divisions that scar the religious history of our planet,

the scars not yet healed, the scarring itself not yet over. We are

haunted by an awareness of the devastation that we human beings have

wrought in the name of God, the gulfs that we have dug among men and

the woes that we have inflicted. At least, we should be haunted, the

awareness should be stark; although self-rightousness also has been a

besetting sin of the religious man or group, and we have often, each

of us, written and read a history that justifies our own community and

is blind to our treatment of others.

I as a Christian am very conscious that the Christian Church has

been exceptionally guilty in this matter. I wonder if any other re-

ligious group on earth has such a sorry record of internal strife and

external negativity as do we. Yet none is fully innocent. I still

remember the sharp sorrow with which I first learned of the violent de-

struction in 1465 of the Honganji Temple in Kyoto at the hands of armed

monks from Mt. Hiei of the rival Buddhist sect Tendai. My sorrow was

due to finding thus shattered my earlier impression that in one instance,

at least, the Buddhist, we human beings had been peaceful in our visions

not only but also in our religious practice. Buddhists and Taoists have

a far better record than others of us, no doubt; and other communities

will, I hope and advocate, be able to learn from them in this matter.

Yet all mankind has yet to learn to be one community. Twentieth-century

life has juxtaposed us, intermingled us; but our becoming a community is

a general religious aspiration to which specific religious aspirations
and traditions are still an obstacle.

This is painfully obvious in the Christian case; especially to non-
Christians. It is fairly obvious in the Islamic, especially to non-Mus-
lims. It is obvious, alas, in the Hindu case, despite disclaimers:
along with the admirable conceptual universalism go fierce sociological
rigidities and rejections. Of Jews, a small group and in the past but
the victims of others' exclduing communal solidarity, and harmless, the
cohesion has in Israel become also a divisive matter (although Chris-
tians must never forget that it is the implacable extrusions of Chris-
tendom that in significant part lie behind also that). Through Shinto
the Japanese people have been welded into a community, from which fact
outsiders have sometimes not profited. Christians may lead in the need
for repentance, in this realm, but we are not alone.

Repentance, however, is a proper yet not adequate response. For
the problem is not an aberration from religious ideals and faith, but
inherent. It is a function of them, central to them. Divisiveness is
not a failure of the religious (as we have inherited our traditions),
but an ingredient of its success. It is for this reason, I take it,
that a conference of this sort wrestles with such an issue, and re-
quests among its agenda items a paper such as this addressed specifi-
cally to it. It is demanded of us not only that we bewail our sins but
that we reconceive our virtue. For a virtue of our religious faith is
that it binds persons together into partial wholes.

One solution to inter-religious strife, the one that the modern
West has most seriously tried (and recently has insistently pressed on
others), is to play down the religious, or at least religious loyalties,

and especially in social ordering. Two dramatic fallacies in this position have shown up, to wide dismay. One is that secular substitutions of other forms of community -- most conspicuously, nationalism and the nation state -- have proven a deceptive solution. Nationalist wars in the twentieth century have been unprecedentedly violent. The United States approaches its two-hundredth anniversary less confident of its nationalist dream than it has been for long. Nor has any nationalism clearly worked where there have been serious religious differences.

(The Soviet Union and other ideological states seem perhaps to combine the failings of both secular and religious orders. Moreover, it was the secular nation-state, of Hitler's Germany, that perpetrated the holocaust. The Christian Church's treatment of Jews has been horrendous; but even at its worst never went so far ... .)

The second sorry disillusionment with the irreligious outlook has lain in the discovery that it is not enough to get rid of obstacles to unity (such as religions and their divisiveness) and community will emerge -- global or other. It is not so automatic: on the contrary, unity is a positive thing. It has to be attained, and sustained. Religious faith, even if at times only within certain boundaries, has turned societies into communities. Remove it, and there is danger of atomism, isolation, the juxtaposition of lonely individuals. A congeries of those alienated from both the universe and each other is a high price to pay for the "Let's get rid of religion" dream (or even, "Let's make it an individual matter"). The only way to transcend the limited loyalties of extant traditions is through a transcendence greater, more serious; not less.

Durkheim is of central importance for us. He saw religion as the

expression, the symbolization, of community. Our problem will be more intractable, not less, if we ignore, or endeavour to gainsay, his powerful point. Is it not feasible, however, and truer, and more helpful, to accept his position but to turn it upside-down, seeing community, even society, as the expression, even the symbolization, of faith (—of not necessarily explicit religious faith). He was Jewish, which accounts in part for his sensitivity to this particular aspect of the sacred. He took community for granted. His being turn-of-the-century accounts also in part for these things; about them we to-day, alas, are sadder and wiser. We know about anomie and the potential of dis-intergration in place of community. Society, in his cohesive sense, is not "natural" in the sense of being able to give a naturalistic explanation for faith. Rather, vice versa. Faith is (in part!) the capacity that persons have to enter into, and to sustain, and to let themselves be sustained by, a group. (I say "... that persons have ..."; but one may rather insist, "... may have": theists remind us that it, too, is not to be taken for granted, by their phrasing about its being a gift from God.) Faith, I may repeat, and would urge this sociologically on Durkheim's modern successors, is what turns a society into a community.

Faith is personal -- not in the sense of "individual": an individual becomes a person only in community, and the degree to which a society is personal or impersonal varies -- it becomes impersonal (as ours are visibly doing) through lack of faith.

In the twentieth century one of our most challenging tasks is the requirement to turn our world society into a world community. As a juxtaposition or congeries of individuals, nations, or religious systems,

our planet flounders. To the extent that each individual, nation, and religious community does not learn to think, to feel, and to act as a participant in and loyal member of humankind in our global context (that is, humankind as transcending his or her or its own limits), to that extent the floundering will get worse, not only, but also each of our separate loyalties and visions and faith will be seen less than truly fulfilled. (Canada's ability to serve its national interests by protecting the fishing rights of Canadians in off-shore waters will probably fail even as a selfish aspiration insofar as, at the Law of the Sea conference, it -- and other nations -- pursue their own rights rather than strive towards a rational law of the sea for the whole human community. Somewhat similarly, Christian theology will fail so long as it thinks of itself as merely Christian theology ... .)

My own view is that religious faith is probably the only force capable of engendering and sustaining the larger vision, allegiance, and activity requisite to the building of the new world community and the superseding of the floundering. Yet whether I be right or wrong on that point need not be an issue; so long as we feel religious faith to be at least a force germane to this task. If others can arrive by other routes, splendid; but let us push on on ours. We, at least, must recognize, and act on the recognition, that community means faith; and that world community involves faith, both our own and our neighbours'.

No other viable human world order is theoretically conceivable, I would argue, and would expect this conference to agree, than one to the building of which the faith of each of us will inspire, and the sustaining of which once achieved the faith of each of us will find worthwhile. The world's corporate goal must be one of which not only we jointly ap-

prove, but to which also we severally are impelled.

Throughout human history, the relation between community and faith has been close. It has also been dynamic. It has also been dialectical: faith generates community, and vice versa. Each conditions the pattern and process of the other, in unending turn. The relation has also been uneven, often far from smooth: each not only posits but in part criticizes the other, the degree of tension between the two varying, and the degree of the effectiveness of the criticism, or of the destructiveness or creativity of the tension.

Furthermore, the community to which faith pertains may be closed or open. More accurately: it is both closed and open, in sharply varying degree. We have said that every faith system, in ways and to an extent that differ from system to system but also in each particular case from century to century, from village to city, from class to class, has been related to a social grouping internally coherent, cohesive, and at times closed against outsiders -- and we have said that this is both a virtue and a vice. In addition, all faith, in ways and to an extent that differ even more markedly, aspires to a community open to all; at the least, to all humankind.

The Christian tradition, to take that example, has in its metaphysical teaching (e.g., "the saved and the damned"), its liturgical procedures (e.g., denial of inter-communion among Christian churches), and its social behaviour (e.g., the scandal of anti-Semitism, the Crusades, and other doleful treatment of outsiders) dug deep gulfs and bred chronic or strident hostilities. On the other hand in its moral imperatives, its universal vision, and even some of its behaviour, both internal and outward-oriented, it has striven, even mightily, to bridge

gulfs, to seek reconciliation, to generate peace and harmony. Moreover, the strength of the one force and of the other, and the ratio between them, have varied historically -- in part, with the varying visions of the leaders. Something of the sort has been true also for other traditions. The historian may trace the varying forces and study the varying ratios.

We are back, then, to our opening sentence: "... religious faith ... has been [both] a divisive and a cohesive force". In the light of where we have come, however, we are now ready to deal with this double truth, and not simply to be teased by it. We need not adjudicate the formidable question, whether in general or in any given case the cohesive outweighs the divisive, or vice versa. Recognizing the dynamic quality of this ineluctably historical problem, the analytical observer may address him- or herself rather to the more crucial question, whether the movement of religion in general in our day, or of any particular religious group or school of thought, is towards or away from a higher ratio of the force for unity to that for divisiveness to-morrow than yesterday. And we men and women of faith, members of this or that group or sub-group, may each of us try to see to it that our contribution be towards raising that ratio.

It would be hypocritical not to recognize the problem; and irresponsible not to recognize that what we do can effect the ratio: the strenghtening of the one force and the weakening of the other. As intellectuals, our business is to discern, to understand, and to clarify, the forces at work. As leaders or participants, it is to fortify those processes that are headed in the direction of community (which to-day must mean, both partial and global); and to illuminate and to attenu-

ate those making for narrowness and discord.

The problem is not so much the academic question of whether we are more unifying than divisive, as the moral and trenchantly practical one of whether we shall be more unifying to-morrow than we are to-day.

This view goes with my general interpretation (observation) of the history of religion, whereby each tradition is seen as historical, as constantly in process, each generation being entrusted sub specie aeternitatis with the on-going and not unmalleable process during that phase of the development in which it itself participates -- its participation being, one prays, responsible: to the inheritance from the past, to the contemporary community and its environing problems, to generations yet to come, and above all to that timeless truth (Whom those of us who are theists call God, although not those of us who are Buddhists; and so I leave it as timeless truth, paramartha saddharma) in the vision of and commitment to and apprehension by which faith consists, and in which the forms of the tradition are the mundane and historically changing expressions of that faith.

This thesis presumes that to the construction of world community, truth or God is in our day calling us: that our faith involves many other things also but also this. We must so move as not to endanger the islands (or continents!) of community already attained over the centuries, and not to jeopardize those nurturing sources of faith committed to us from the past -- lest both community and faith be dissipated. Yet in the late twentieth century the vision of faith, nurtured by those very sources, is, I am contending, of a convergence of community such as to embrace in mutual trust and loyalty all inherited communities: the emergence, if one will, of a new humanity-wide community

pluralist in form but true in substance -- pluralist in religion but one through faith, which last is what true community means.

- II -

With this vision some may not agree. In particular, I suggest that the most ardent universalist must treat with respect a thesis that this vision of global harmony and transcending loyalty is too utopian, too liberal-humanist, and does not reckon with the negativities of history, with sin, with the possibility of failure. It is possible to argue that the task of faith in our era of formidable crisis is not to modify inherited forms in the direction of a deceptive romanticism, fallaciously thinking to bring in the milennium by human contrivance; but is rather to steel men and women against the impending doom, giving them in terms of the traditional forms, however tightly preserved, the courage to face the coming catastrophe in the conviction that a man's true home, and faith's true focus, is not this crumbling earth but a transcendent realm, a quiet but firm orientation to which endues one with serenity and transcending hope stable against all mundane disaster.

My answer is first, as I have said, to honour this; and secondly to suggest that a deep sense of faith sees the two as not incompatible. The Bhagavada Gita has made the point unusually explicit, but in perhaps all our religious traditions a person can and indeed must stand responsible for his own actions without being responsible for the whole course of history or the fate of the world. The person of faith, and he or she alone, can strive with might and main for world peace, for an end to world hunger, for harmony and love among all religious communities,

knowing that he may fail (<u>aphala</u>). This dedication and perseverance require no assurance of success: only assurance that the objective is right (is the will of God; is part of the inherent and final truth of his faith). I am arguing that an interpretation, in theory and practice, of religious faith and of one's own forms that will conduce to the community of all men, and not only to that of one's own group, is in our day the interpretation most closely approximating to the transcendent truth historically enshrined in the separate traditions of each of us; and that for this reason (in addition to or over against any utilitarian goal) to work towards this, attempting to carry our own groups with us, is incumbent upon each community among us (although it be not the only incumbency -- not even in the matter of interpersonal solidarity).

This is not the occasion to argue this with my fellow Christian theologians and Church leaders. I can do so effectively, I realize (or at least: I hope) only if it can be shown that the move ahead in this realm can and must be accomplished without prejudicing, and indeed by more truly apprehending, the other truths vouchsafed in the tradition. This task I and others pursue elsewhere. This <u>is</u> the occasion, however, to suggest that this very task can itself best be achieved through collaboration. One could go further and aver that it can be achieved no other way. No religious community can learn to be less offensive and damaging, or at least irrelevant or unintelligible, to others unless it learn to listen to those others. More positively, also, I have already suggested, for instance, that Buddhists have much to teach the rest of us about living in peace religiously; and certainly Jews might teach the rest of us how to combine deep internal conviction with a

contentment in ~~that~~ outsiders' having other convictions. Certainly if I turn out to have anything at all significant to say as a Christian theologian it will be in large part because I have directly and indirectly learned much (about God, man, the world, Christ, faith, relious history) from Muslims and my study of Islam; and more recently also from Hindus and my study of things Hindu.

I have stressed that it will not be easy for any of our communities to move from our present inadequacies in the realm of human mutuality towards something more pragmatically genuine. We need each other's help. We must collaborate not only in treating problems of world hunger; we must collaborate also in learning how to collaborate. No one of us can learn on his own how to be able to work together. A demand laid upon every religious and social system in our day is the new one of becoming compatible with alternative systems. The incompatible will perish. (Also, it will be immoral.) Most of us do not even know how incompatible we currently are, let alone how to change this sorry state; and we can find out only in concert.

Some would call off in our day the missionary movement. Unless one has felt the enormous force of this argument, one is sadly insensitive. Nonetheless I would transform that movement, rather -- drastically: insisting that we must learn to invite missionaries, not only to send (on invitation) a radically new type of them. Any theist who feels that God has spoken, and to-day speaks, only to or through his own group, or through theism; or any non-theist who feels that he has nothing to learn from theism; is surely misinformed and unimaginative. Again, of course, I realize that the West, and the Christian Church, have been in recent centuries the most arrogant and the most at fault in this; but they (we)

are learning. (The institutional Church is learning perhaps more slowly, and more painfully, than other sectors of the membership at large; but it is learning.) The movement towards religion's (and religions') becoming a unifying more than a divisive force is in significant part a process of learning about those on the other side of each divide. That process is under weigh*, partly inescapably and now increasingly by deliberate resolve.

Faith, classical thinkers have long seen, is partly inscrutable ("the free gift of God") and is partly a matter of the will, partly of the intellect. (We may say that it arises in part from outside oneself, but insofar as the person is himself or herself involved, there is involved both will and mind.) The faith that may constitute the foundation for a global community is coming and will come through all three considerations. (Those modern Westerners who add feeling to will and intellect as three "parts" of the person, should say: through all four.)

- III -

So much for this matter at a general level. We move on to attend next to a specific point, one that will illustrate in a concrete and rather different way some of the larger issues that are, subtly, involved. The illustration still has to do with mankind-as-a-whole as a total community, and still has to do with religious sensibilities; but it presents the point in another fashion.

A traditional teaching in many religious systems (explicit in many; perhaps implicit in all?) has been that finally the subject/object po-

* (My nautical spelling)

larity is misleading (and mis-led). A traditional religious aspiration has been to transcend it. The significance of this seemingly remote idea impinges on our world at the present time sharply. Some of us are beginning to see that the current disillusionment with scientific objectivity and technological impersonalism results from an inchoate restlessness at precisely this point. Blindly, but increasingly, humankind is resentful of the sharp disjunction between man and nature, between knower and known, that science has been fundamentally errant in setting up. It has been wrong in this, intellectually and practically, despite its spectacular success, intellectual and practical, in limited areas. Humankind is beginning to recognize that this disjunction is potentially disastrous in its treatment both of object and of subject: its treatment of the natural world (the ecology crisis) and its dreary relegating of man to nihilistic impersonalism. The split between subject and object has led to the widespread, but again disastrous, view that the only alternative to objectivity is subjectivity. (Insofar as the young believe this much-preached fallacy, they are tempted to begin choosing subjectivity, eventually even in drugs or self-assertive violence, revolutionary or aimless.) To reconstruct a vision of man and nature in mutual relation, an understanding of truth that correlates knower and known, is perhaps the greatest challenge to thought (and faith) to-day. Traditional religious orientations encourage us to recognize the possibility of this, and its value, and even obligatoriness. Faith has traditionally been this. Yet traditional forms of faith have collapsed in our time partly because they correlate knower not with what to-day is known. (Quite apart from the vast new knowledge provided by science, the awareness of even explicitly religious matters with which most tra-

ditional forms of faith integrated man was much more restricted than
we now have, especially of each other's faith -- as per the earlier
part of this paper -- and of our own and their history.)

I will certainly not develop this matter here. The relation be-
tween religion and science is a vast question. It remains so even when
reduced to the particular question of science's tendency thus far to
eliminate all human community, to isolate individuals into meaningless
atomistic "subjects", over against religion's tendency thus far to weld
persons into partial communities. One particular issue, however, I
will raise, as I have remarked, to illustrate the point: the outlook
whereby one perceives the population problem.

Because of the subject/object orientation of science and technology,
and by transference then even of social or behavioural science and policy
planning, this and other questions have been conceived in "we/they" terms.
(This scientific objectivity re-inforces the traditional religious pro-
pensity to regard outsiders as "they".) Basically this particular prob-
lem has been posed as "population control" -- an inherently immoral
concept -- and in the form of "What can we do such that they will have
fewer children?". The Ford Foundation, governments (whether in Washing-
ton or New Delhi), research organizations, proceed fundamentally within
such a framework. Some years ago the Center for the Study of World re-
ligions at Harvard, of which at that time I was director, was approached
in connection with a programme in this realm for India. I responded
that the "we/they" conceptualization was in our Center's judgement
wrong; and proposed instead a joint Western-Christian-Hindu team aimed
at reformulating the question rather in terms that would be simultane-
ously intelligible and cogent within the on-going Hindu moral tradition

(<u>dharma</u>) and to outsiders (particularly touching also on the rather
novel question within the Christian community of the ethical problem
of Christians' and other Westerners' participating in moral choices of
Indians, and vice versa). In other words, I was striving to concoct a
programme to enable the issue to be seen and dealt with as a joint world
issue, whereby "we" human beings, <u>some of us</u> being Hindus in India and
<u>some of us</u> being Christians or humanists in the West, could intelligibly
and jointly articulate what before us is possible and what desirable; but
specifically to generate the terms of reference that would elucidate the
population matter in India seen from within as a moral matter of choices
by Indians (and not a policy <u>for</u> Indians implemented either by the West
or by the New Dehli government).

I have since learned to conceptualize this sort of goal as "cor-
porate critical self-consciousness." Probably at the time my formal
submission was inadequately worked out. In any case, the Ford Founda-
tion dismissed it as of no significance, my concern with ethical and
religious and human-community issues striking them as a distraction,
irrelevant to an urgent practical task.

It has since turned out that the operationalist, not to say manip-
ulative, approach of the foundations and of research centres and of
governments, based as it is on a we/they polarity and secularistic
view, has been proving ineffective, and not merely immoral. No popu-
lation "policy" can be wise that is not correlated with, even rooted in,
men's and women's faith, or that is correlated with or rooted in reli-
gious faith that is particularist without yet being global. Population
is a problem of the world-wide society of our day, which can be dealt
with only by and for a world-wide human community not yet attained.

(It may help us to attain it; but it takes more than problems to turn a society into a community.)

I mention this point, as I say, illustratively. The population problem is simply one instance of a general point: namely, that if we human beings are to confront modern world problems adequately, our most important move is that we should become a new type of person.

Requisite in all realms are not merely new programmes for these problems, but new persons to draft them who have the sophisticated expertise to be technically proficient, but also who see and feel those whom the programme will affect not as those others, those people over there, whose behaviour is to be controlled, or who are to be persuaded, but as constituting along with themselves as drafters a corporate community, a "we" whose future is at issue, and whose free and now newly informed moral choices will conduce to that joint future.

Our modern world has hardly yet come to recognize that practical matters involving many millions of dollars of expenditure and several years of valuable and nowadays non-expendable time may turn on the issues of religion as a cohesive and divisive social force. (Operationalist programmes have begun to recognize, of course, that religion cannot be ignored, as used to be imagined or hoped; but the tendency then would be to consider it a "factor" in the total complex, something that "they" have whose objections to what "we" propose may be overcome or whose potential contribution to our goals may prove serviceable.) Yet those of us of faith must not simply berate the secularists for their blindness. The point of my paper is that the task ahead of us, religiously, is indeed important to all humankind, but has as yet to be discharged, and it is we (in a conference like this) who must tackle it.

My submission may be summed up in three sentences. One of the most important facts about any human being is, whom he means when he says "we". One of the most important facts about any social group (such as the whole of humanity or any of its parts) is what each person within that group means when he uses that word. One of the most important religious imperatives of our day is that faith must, and probably alone can, lead us to mean by it all humankind.