

Interfaith Dialogue Guidelines

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Lucien F. Cosijns spent 14 years in Japan as a Catholic missionary of the Belgian CICM Congregation. In 1965, he became a businessman in international trade and trade-consulting between Europe and Japan. Since 1994 he has been actively involved in the interfaith dialogue movements worldwide.

In 1994 he was inspired to compile the “Interfaith Dialogue Guidelines”, later on adding further elucidations. This happened as the result of many meetings & discussions with abbots of Catholic monasteries in Europe, with Catholic priests, Anglican and other Protestant Ministers and with Buddhist church-leaders in Japan. The text of these guidelines are the summarized personal expression of the basic ideas which are gradually becoming a common theme for many meetings of religious leaders and interested academics the world over: a pluralistic attitude in respect for the values of others, resulting in a deepening of the own belief, as a sine-qua-non basis for real dialogue towards world peace and more just wealth-sharing by all.

These texts are now in possession of the main international interfaith dialogue organizations, of the Catholic bishops of Belgium and of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue of the Vatican, and of religious contacts the world over. They are now available in English, Dutch, French, Japanese, Turkish, and Arabic.

*This and other inter-religious texts can be found at Lucien Cosijns website:
<http://user.online.be/gd32926/elucidation.htm>*

These ‘Interfaith Dialogue Guidelines’ will, no doubt, be judged by many as a dream. Having dreams however, belongs to the essence of the progress of human civilisation and human society. Dreams are a source of development and of progress. To realise these dreams, they must have a foundation in a system of values assuming, among others, that:

- all human beings are equivalent with equal rights and also equal duties,
- human happiness lies in love and in returning in that love to the divine reality,
- confrontation should be replaced by collaboration in mutual respect,
- support of education and science should be the fundamental aim of all development aid assistance,
- all wars and acts of violence are a loss to all,
- limitation of arms-production, traffic and possession is the shortest way to peace and to a peaceful society,
- a common universal language, besides one's own native language, should be promoted as a much needed carrier for smooth world-wide communication.

On the basis of these values, these guidelines aim to be a basis for mutual acceptance and cooperation between the world religions, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Baha' i, etc., spiritual movements, humanists, and other convictions. Its seven paragraphs are limited to what can be considered as the essential requirements for arriving at the intended objective 'peace and justice on earth to all people of goodwill'. Remarks and advice of many readers have resulted in various adaptations over a period of 5 years, while the original conceptions have been maintained.

1) WE BELIEVE that dialogue is only possible, not in mere tolerance, but in acceptance, in mutual respect of the others in their typical individuality. Knowledge of others in their cultural setting is an essential condition towards such acceptance. By recognising and accepting diversity on the social, cultural and religious levels, an exchange of mutual values and a union in collaboration will ultimately lead to the final unity of humankind.

Real dialogue is only possible when knowledge and acceptance of the cultural and religious values is present on both sides. Racism can be described as intolerance and non-acceptance of other cultures and of the people belonging to them, with ignorance as its main cause. All opponents of racism argue for tolerance. Tolerance is a word which, in recent years, has been used commonly in almost all intercultural and interreligious activities, in meetings, in the media and in the mouths of the common people as an attitude to be recommended in ecumenical and in intercultural and interreligious encounters. The word itself, however, implies a certain discrimination because one tolerates something which one would prefer that it is not there. Tolerance cannot be a basis for a real dialogue and should be replaced by acceptance of the others in respect of the values inherent in their

culture, in their religion and in their peculiar customs. Accepting others has to mean more than just tolerating them. It should mean acceptance of the others as members of one's own community, without necessarily losing their own identity. This acceptance from both sides should result in an integration of the values of both sides into a culturally richer community. Where there is respect, there will be willingness and readiness even to take over some of the other's values to integrate them in one's own way of life as a means of enrichment of one's own cultural and religious values. It is obvious that this attitude of respect of the other is not possible without a certain knowledge of the other, their history, their historical and cultural development, their way of life. The increase of such knowledge in the last twenty years has come about in many ways: the expansion of means of communication, the availability of books on other cultures and religions, a growing number of articles devoted to cultural and religious subjects—all have been valuable stimuli in intercultural encounters all over the world. This attitude of accepting the others in mutual respect is becoming the attitude of more and more religious leaders, and to show that even in my Catholic church, although the time is not ripe for their supporting publicly these 7 points, remarkable changes are occurring from the grassroots up to the highest level in the Vatican. I quote the words of Pope John Paul II which he pronounced on occasion of the Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace in Assisi on January 9, 1993: "...only in mutual acceptance of the other and in the resulting mutual respect, made more profound by love, resides the secret of a humanity finally reconciled... we wish to oppose the wars and conflicts, with humility but also with vigor, with the demonstration of our harmony that respects the identity of each one".

In recent years the abundance of books in Europe and the USA on the Islamic-Arabic world and on Buddhism is a very fortunate development in the fostering of this necessary knowledge of these other worlds. The numerous Zen-meditation sessions now being held on a regular basis in many European monasteries and the more than 250 Buddhist societies in the UK alone, testify to the growing interests in the Buddhist faith and in its beliefs and prayer-practices. The growing knowledge and acceptance of the values in other cultures and religions and other faith traditions will ultimately lead to the final unity of humankind, as children of the same mother-earth.

2) WE BELIEVE that we, as human beings together with all of nature and with all living creatures, are actively involved in a continuous growth process towards a better world in an ever higher intellectual and spiritual environment (Teilhard de Chardin). In this optimistic life-view and in our new world of global trans-border communication, the awareness that all

human beings belong to the same brotherhood through their common Origin and their common Destination, should lead to a higher universal responsibility by all to put this into real practice in the everyday life.

To dream about the future demonstrates a sense of optimism, believing in a growth towards an always better world. The five volumes of the books of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), Jesuit, geologist and palaeontologist, — *Le Phénomène Humain*, *L' Avenir de l' Homme*, *La Vision du Passé*, *Le Milieu Divin*, *L' Avenir de l' Homme*—have given us a vision of hopeful expectation and confidence in the slow but sure spiritualization of mankind in its centuries long growth. Alvin Toffler describes in his book *Power Shift* (1990) the development of communication connections from an intra-intelligent and an extra-intelligent system towards an electronic nerve-network as an ever expanding web across our earth. Both scientists, each in his own way, see the future of the world in a growing value-shifting from the material to the spiritual, in which the human mind plays an always greater role. It is obvious that in this growth process a crucially important role is reserved not only for the Christian churches, which have been at the origin of this vision, but also for the other world religions and traditions. This growth process is being realised not only in and across human beings. All what lives and moves on earth is involved in this ascendance to a higher spiritualization, to a unitive approximation to the divine mystery, foundation of all beings. The 1992 10-pages document “The Global Community and the Need for Universal Responsibility” of the Dalai Lama remains a most valid document, calling the attention of all towards more responsible attitudes and a more responsible way of life by all members of the one human family. A most important and recent development is that this is now also in the progress of being recognised by political personalities in Europe, inside the EU Commission, as well as in the US.

The belief in the continuous growth of mankind from a animal-inspired way of life in the first thousands of centuries of the human existence on earth to an ever higher spirit-inspired way of life is an important asset of an optimistic view of the development of mankind over its long history. In ancient times and still in the beginning of our Christian era, the general knowledge of the time was the prerogative of a few. In a period of twenty centuries - a relatively short period in the history of mankind on this earth - the general knowledge of the time is now gradually becoming a common possession of all citizens. This knowledge, just like so many other all too fast changes in our societies, has known in the past 50 years an expansion which nobody could have foreseen a hundred years ago. It is already

common knowledge that this growth will know a still faster development in the years to come. This growth in knowledge has resulted in totally different ways of life —from feudal societies through the Middle Ages to our modern democratic systems of government, free trade and free travel —with an ever higher intellectual heritage passing on from one generation to the other. In olden times just a few were the owners of the land, while the common people were the subjects who by the work of their hands had to sustain the wealth of the owners. The common wealth has now become shared, at least in most of the democratic countries of the West and in Japan, by almost all citizens on an improving and relatively equal basis. Nobody can deny that, generally speaking, the life of the people of our times is of a higher intellectual and therefore of a more human level than in the past centuries. The remarkable increase of cultural activities and of interest in these activities in most countries is surely a sign of this higher quality of the daily life. The whole of the relatively recent world developments also in transport and in other communication means has automatically resulted in a tremendous increase in traveling for business as well as for leisure, in immigration and emigration movements of millions of people, to which, regretfully, also the domestic revolutions and wars between countries have contributed their part. Millions of people have in this way come in contact with cultures and with religions, other than their own. This also is a way of no return and is only the very beginning of the new multicultural and multiplural world of tomorrow, which will become a reality much sooner than is normally thought of. Already in Europe, and this in spite of the language differences, frontiers between the countries of the European Union have been removed. As a totally normal consequence, the importance of the countries as geographical and political entities will rapidly decline, while the language regions are becoming more and more preponderant as new important entities in the Europe of tomorrow. This has been well understood by the government leaders of India when they decided the state borders to be on the basis of the language of the region, which is maybe in this scale unique in the world.. A very important point in relation with the interreligious and intercultural dialogue is that in parallel with this global trend towards unification, there is a strong tendency to stress the identity of communities belonging to the same culture and language and the stress on keeping on to that identity. This development towards unification and homogeneity on one side and towards a protection of the own cultural identity on the other side is a development which is and will become more than ever an object of discussion by all political leaders, first of all in Europe and in the US and of course also by all who are active in the interfaith dialogue

movements, the world over. Governments of countries having problems with separation movements should be aware of this world trend and try to find solutions not in separation but in collaboration towards federal state solutions.

Jacques Delors, former president of the EU-Commission in Brussels, has created inside the Commission a “Forward Studies Unit” with as purpose the study on the ethic dimensions of the European Union. This unit has organized already some interreligious symposia, one in Toledo in 1995, one in Florence in 1996, and the most recent one in Brussels, to which also Bishop William Swing was invited to give a talk on the United Religions Initiative. This study unit has also produced some very interesting reports and documents on the relation between religion and politics and on ways of coming to a collaboration. In this way, I believe that the European Union can be considered as a forerunner in this field, and let us hope that this example will be followed by many other governments. I quote EU Commission Director of the Forward Studies Unit, Dr. Wolfgang Pape in one of his 1997 thesis-papers : “Values and religion are now expected in Europe to provide us with a new source to legitimize the necessary ethical limitations on science and rights/democracy (“progress”) for the common good without borders in space or time” —“Ethics will no longer be deducted from abstract eternal principles of thought, but communication and worldwide dialogue on the values necessary for our individual and collective survival will take center-stage”.

3) WE BELIEVE that, towards the creation of a better world order in peace and in justice, the inspiring role of the leaders of world religions and traditions, in whatever form they may be organised, is of prime importance. Their churches, organisations and institutes are, in their cultural and philosophical traditions, the organisations par excellence, capable of proclaiming and of sustaining universally accepted moral principles.

After world war II, there was hope and expectation that Man would now at last draw the necessary lessons from the traumas of this war. The dream of a world at peace was there. Again our world politicians have not been able to realize this expectation. And yet, we continue to believe that this dream will come true somehow and sometime. In a long-term view, the world religions can fulfill their important task, on condition that they achieve dialogue and cooperation on a worldwide scale. It is the task of popes, patriarchs, bishops, priests and ministers, imams, gurus, geshes, rishis, ripotches, lamas or whatever their names might be, in short of the leaders of the religions and traditions to stress the essentials of the faith of their founders, and to find therein the necessary basis towards unity in di-

versity and in collaboration. This collaboration should manifest itself in one authoritative voice from a global supranational organisation like e.g. a “United Religions” as proposed in 1995 by the Episcopal bishop W. Swing, San Francisco, and an “Organisation des Traditions Unies” as proposed in 1997 by the Tibetan Buddhist center in France, the Karma Ling Institute. These recent organisations can become a bridgehead for the religions, traditions, spiritual movements and others to support a global ethic and to contribute in an effective way to a new world order in which the human individual stands central in his social and spiritual dimension. In the individualistic world of the west, there is a growing tendency by which the individual is placed in the foreground as the decision-maker in moral matters, on the basis of his individual conscience. This comes to expression in the attractiveness of movements like New Age and the innumerable new religious sects which are fighting for new adepts also in the countries where poverty and misery are still rampant like in some South-American and African countries. Many of the deep-believing faithful of the Catholic church and of other Christian churches have lost faith in their churches as institutes. This is, in my personal opinion, a dangerous trend, which is due for a great part to the slowness of the highest church authorities in following the needs and the trends of the time, of the progress in science, in scriptural studies, in the new comprehension of how biblical and other old religious scriptures have come into existence. It can be explained also as a normal evolution in the general trend towards more independent thinking and behavior based on individual intelligence and conscience. Because man/woman on this earth will always remain man/woman with their good and their bad sides, it is obvious that a guidance from above remains an essential and irreplaceable element in the moral behavior of people in general. It is also clear that in the absence of world religions as institutes, there is nothing which could actually replace these organisations. On the contrary, the world religions, as institutes, should become united on a global scale in a union of collaboration to increase the effectiveness of their moral and ethical guidance not only in personal matters but also in world matters. This is still a dream, and at that a most difficult to realize dream, which however, could and should be the final aim of all interfaith dialogue movements. This kind of global dream will, without doubt, receive the enthusiastic support of the young people all over the world who are searching for a new ethical basis for their lives. The ethical basis for such a union in collaboration is available in the global ethic declaration as worked out by the Catholic theologian Hans Küng and his colleague Karl-Josef Kuschel of Germany. This global ethic, after vigorous discussions, has been enthusias-

tically received, tentatively approved, and publicly declared on occasion of the Parliament of World's Religions meeting in Chicago in 1993, attended by 7,000 religious and spiritual personalities from all world religions and traditions. Its main ideas are summarized in following three catch phrases: 'No human life without a world ethic for the nations; No peace among the nations without peace among the religions; No peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions'. A second important ethical document is the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, announced to the public on September 1, 1997, by the InterAction Council, in Tokyo, supported by elderly statesmen of 28 different countries, headed by the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. This declaration can be considered as an emanation of the Japanese and Eastern way of life, reflecting the cultural values of Eastern civilisations, giving priority to responsibilities and duties above rights. It means also a most opportune addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is obvious that both documents are worthy to become central pivots in the lay-out of the planned United Religions Organisation.

After reading many books, magazines and news-editions on the subject of interfaith dialogue and after having participated in quite a few interfaith symposia and meetings, it appeared from all this that there are many ways to come to interreligious dialogue, ways which have consisted mainly of academic seminars and of prayer-meetings. What has struck me, as a layman and as businessman, is that the participants in those meetings were almost exclusively academic people and religious and spiritual leaders, while common lay-people, active at the grassroots, like myself, were a real rarity and an exception. Another matter about which I have been wondering is why there is not more effort to make these activities known to the general public. This is probably one of the reasons why so few lay people attend, though I suppose that many of the active grassroots people, women and men, who dedicate a precious part of their time to parish work and other social activities would be ready to dedicate themselves to this all-important dialogue task and to participate actively in the interfaith dialogue encounters. I am thinking here of the thousands of socially engaged people in most religions, of the volunteers in so many aid assistance projects in the poorer developing countries, of all the religious-minded persons who have in India and other south-east Asian countries put into practice the Jain motto "Ahimsa paramo dharma" —non-violence is the highest religious obligation —such as Mahatma Ghandi and his disciple Vinoba Bhave with their 'swadeshi' concept, Vivekananda and his Rama-Krishna Mission in India, Sheik Mujibur Rahman in Pakistan, Maha Ghosananda in Myan-

mar, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in Bangladesh, the Dalai Lama and many Tibetan monks now spread out over the world, and many others.

4) WE BELIEVE that the tenets of all world religions and other faith traditions have their roots in the culture where they originated, that they have developed on the basis of the philosophical and moral concepts of that culture, and that they have approached and proclaimed the faith in transient expressions and in ceremonies proper to the culture to which they belong. As pilgrims on their way to always new discoveries and subject to change, no adherents to whatever religion or other faith tradition should claim exclusive representation of the Truth nor superiority over others. This position is more and more being accepted and postulated by Bible and Koran exegetists and by many theologians in the Christian and Islamic faiths. It is now being considered as self-evident that the formulation of a divine revelation is influenced for a great part by the culture in which it originated, and that this form of presentation is not revelation itself. These presentations and interpretations have to undergo a continuous change, appropriate to the ever changing knowledge and ever higher conscience-level of the faithful, without therefore changing the essentials. The revolution in the biblical exegesis from the literal interpretation to a describing and relating interpretation, appropriate to the culture, especially in Christian theology, is the most valuable evolution and development of the last 50 years towards interfaith dialogue and real inculturation. The liturgical changes in the Catholic eucharistic ceremonies, by which the Latin language has been replaced by the local language, have been so many steps in this adaptation evolution. It is regrettable that this has resulted in the disappearance of the atmosphere of 'mystical divine presence' in the church buildings. Also in the Buddhist churches of Japan, voices for renewal and adaptation are being heard, e.g. to replace the old semi-Chinese semi-Japanese language of the prayers into a language more understandable by the faithful, while, hopefully, keeping the main statue(s), representing the divine mystery, in their symbolic semi-darkness. Acceptance of the above position has as automatic result the acceptance of the others on a basis of equality, limiting to a reasonable degree whatever kind of superiority there might still be felt. Since many years, interfaith dialogue has been a subject and even an action program for many religions. Baha' u' llah, the 19th century prophetic founder of the Baha' i religious community has, much in advance of the times, maybe been the first to proclaim the need for a world government as unifying organisation and as the only real solution to prevent wars and social injustice. The ecumenical movement between the Catholic church and other Christian churches has been a subject for many meetings in the last

50 years. After a long period of silence after the first interfaith world conference in 1893, organized by the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago, on which occasion Rev. Vivekananda of India was one of the most remarked speakers, it is only in the last 30 years that interreligious meetings have followed each other successively, starting with the New Delhi International Interfaith Symposium by the Ghandi Peace Foundation in 1968.

It has to be recognized that the interfaith dialogue movement up to now has been a meeting place mainly of religious academics and of religious leaders at prayer-meetings such as the Buddhist Tendai Church yearly Summer meetings in Japan, and many others in Europe and in the US, the monastic exchange-visits between Catholic monks of Europe and Zen Buddhist monks of Japan, the Muslim-Christian Consultations, which have been held with several partners in Europe on a yearly basis since 1984 through the collaboration of the Al Albeit Foundation in Amman, Jordan, and the numerous conferences organized by the main international interfaith organisations the world over. All this has certainly resulted in a growing understanding of other religions and cultures, and also recently to a growing mutual respect and acceptance of the values of each other. This has even resulted in an integration effort of cultural and religious values of the others in the own faith-life as a rethinking and a deepening of the own faith. It is however only in the last decade(s) that, on one hand, the technological advances of the global communication network, and on the other hand, the growing migration of multitudes of people into countries of other cultures, followed by an unavoidable inculturation process, have created the necessary conditions of a fertile soil for the interfaith dialogue on a worldwide scale.

5) WE BELIEVE that, as an apparent consequence, there is need to convert the missionary activities and goals of the world religions from an "approach of converting" to an "approach of testifying". The essential valuable elements of the own faith should be presented in a language understandable by the local faithful, so that the dialogue between the world religions and traditions should lead to a better mutual knowledge and understanding, and to an exchange of the mutual values as an enrichment of one's own faith and of the faith of the others.

Most of us accept the existence of a spiritual power, of a spiritual 'being', whether it is considered and believed in as a person with æublimation of human characteristics, such as compassion and love, or as a difficult to define 'karma' or 'buddhahood', to which spiritual existence all human beings and all existing matter belongs as its origin and as its final destination. It is now being admitted by most religious scholars, that each world

religion has its origin in a particular culture and that the wordings of the eternal truth and the religious ceremonies of each religion are part of that culture. It is a fact of history that culture changes through the centuries, because of the continuously upgrading changes in general knowledge, in science, and in the ways of life. Life at the time of the founders of the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and other religions, or at the time of the Veda's, Upanishad's and other holy Scriptures of India, was totally different with the life and conceptions of our times. The ways of expressing things 2000 years ago were very dependent on the life conceptions of those times, and therefore liable to erroneous interpretations in later times. Thanks to the development of philological, archeological and anthropological research, it has now become possible to better understand and to more rightly interpret the old writings on which the world religions have been founded and developed in their contemporary context and surroundings.

These venerable texts are therefore, because of their local and not global origins and characteristics, subject to change and can therefore not be claimed as exclusive, nor as total and final. The eternal Reality cannot be limited to one particular culture or religion, because it must be, by its essence, global and universal. Returning to the roots and to the essence of those teachings, not encumbered by the influences of olden times, next to the recognition that some concepts of belief may be subject to interpretations based on new scientific grounds, will help to overcome a lot of problems in practical dialogue consequences. From all kinds of publications and public declarations of religious authorities, it appears that there still remains an underground aim of converting the others to the own faith. This apparently is still the case in the Roman vision of the Catholic church and in some Protestant churches where Jesus Christ is still being proclaimed by some as the only Redeemer of Humankind, and partly in the Islam. In the Christian churches, the infallibility claim in possession of the whole truth has become an unsustainable dogma in the light of modern research in the historical development of the doctrines of the Old and New Testaments, from the origins up to the present state of the Christian faith. The same is true for the study of the Koran and for the historical development of the Islamic doctrine. Buddhism, with the exception of some of the post-war new religions in Japan, has not proclaimed this kind of exclusive dogmatic doctrine.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-5) has authorized a significant shift in attitude within the Catholic Church. *Nostra Aetate*, one of the sixteen documents of the council, dealt specifically with the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions. It declares : ‘ The Catholic Church rejectsnoth-

ing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of the Truth which enlightens all men.' That all is not yet well becomes apparent when one listens to another document *Ad Gentes* of the same council, which declares: 'The Church is missionary by her very nature', and in which the purpose of mission is defined as 'evangelisation and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where she has not yet taken roots'. Since there is however only 'one Mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus' and 'neither is there salvation in any other', the text concludes: 'therefore, all must be converted to Him as He is made known by the Church's preaching. All must be incorporated into Him by baptism, and into the Church which is His body'. These texts of *Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes* seem and are intrinsically contradictory, as one does not see how they can be combined in practical life. An encouraging evolution has however been going on in the Catholic Church, not at the highest top yet, but at the grassroots and even among the priests, bishops, and monastic monks, by which in the practical religious life the rather exclusive text of *Ad Gentes* is being ignored and the text of *Nostra Aetate* has become the common practice and attitude of the grand majority. As long as there is no real and public renunciation of this centuries old dogma of the one-time complete and final revelation of the divine mystery in the Bible as well as in the Koran, a real dialogue in mutual acceptance seems rather inconceivable. Although more and more people are acknowledging that the origin of most of what has gone wrong in Western history—inquisition, crusades, colonisation with its repudiation and even destruction of other cultures and cultural assets, slavery, and last but not least the superiority mentality of the Western people—has to be found in this claim of exclusivity, the renunciation of this claim will, without doubt, still take some time in mental preparation. This renunciation would, without doubt, eliminate one of the main obstacles to real dialogue and be the bridge for a mutually enriching exchange of each other's values. Many fear that the acceptance of other cultures within the own cultural borders means a loss of the own values. This fear comes mainly from those who have no or little knowledge of or contacts with other cultures. Anyone who knows another language, learns by experience that the knowledge of another language brings each time an important human enrichment. The same can be said of each globetrotter with an open mind towards other cultures. Each encounter with people and values of other cultures brings an enrichment of one's own culture-values. A unification and further homogeneity of the

world population in acceptance and acknowledgement of the cultural values of others can only result in an enrichment of the own culture and of world-culture in general.

This can also be applied to religious perception. From the moment there is a renunciation of claiming the possession of the absolute truth, there is no sense any more in the attempt to convert believers of other religions to one's own faith or church. As each world religion has its own unique values, the passing on of these values, not for converting but for deepening the faith of others, means an important element in mutual drawing together. This can also mean, as a consequence, an end to the rivalry between the churches, allowing individual free conversion from one church to another as fully acceptable and understandable. Each of the world religions has through the ages developed a core of religious values, resulting in a proper identity of their own, with an inherent right to keep to that own identity, which however should be kept open for growth and amelioration. The acceptance and even the taking over of values from other faiths should mean in any case an enrichment and deepening of one's own faith. Such acceptance and experiencing of these values and truths will also result in a growth in knowledge and perception of the divine mystery, the final and eternal truth. The evident aim of all interfaith dialogue is to come to a better mutual understanding and, which I personally believe to be most important, to common activities in an attitude of reconciliation to avoid the mistakes of the past centuries and with the aim of arriving at a better world in peace, in a more equal sharing by all in the wealth resources of our earth, and in a better providing for the underprivileged of our world. As it becomes more and more evident that a union in doctrine is as remote as ever and that it should even not be the real aim to strive at, the drive for union in doctrine or in one church or in one religion should be converted into a drive for union in collaboration to do something together, rising above discussions on similarities and differences in doctrines and ceremonies.. Such union in collaboration is only possible in diversity and in conserving as much as possible the own identity in a world growing unavoidably more and more homogeneous, which are not contradictory but rather converging developments. This is true for nations and countries where borders are becoming less important or even disappearing, and also for religions. It seems evident that such union can only be realized by collaborating with each other in a global common range of activities.

6) WE BELIEVE that in the passionate search for the truth and for a more comprehensive approach to spirituality, meditation should be re-evaluated and more universally practised as the road by excellence to a

deeper awareness of the Divine presence. Meditation is the crucial approach to the Divine that crosses the boundaries of religious culture and is also universally shared and accepted. Meditation in silence should be a part of all interreligious encounters. The growing contacts in the past decades with Hindu and Buddhist spirituality and their religious practices of meditation have most probably contributed a great deal to the recent interest in all kinds of spiritual practices, from Yoga up to Zen meditation sessions and New Age meetings and even to many of the songs and musical texts of the popular jazz, hippy and other song-festivals. Where the West has been used to more active prayers and active intellectual meditation as religious practices, the East has surprised us by their other ways in their holy scriptures of approaching the inexpressible Divine Mystery. In their dictionary, there is no comprehensive word like the word 'God' in the monotheistic religions. The Divine lives and is present in everything and especially in the self of each human being. Doing away with the 'self' to discover the real 'Self' by becoming free of thoughts, of desires, by becoming empty of the 'self' so the 'Self' can reign has been the way of Buddhist and Hindu meditation and contemplation. This is a way maybe still reserved for a few, but these few are on a remarkable increase, not only among the elder but also among the young. To dedicate each day some time to this kind of meditation, there is no direct need to sit in the lotus position which may be reserved still for a few. Meditation can be practised by everyone. It is a matter of living the daily life in conscious awareness of the others as members of the same family and of all the things around us. Just being aware helps to concentrate on the essentials, to eliminate stress of all kinds, and especially to become aware of our brothers and sisters of the one earth-family under the same Heaven.

7) WE BELIEVE that a permanent awareness of and solicitude with the escalating ecological, social, economical as well as financial problems of our world should always be present in the minds of all people involved in interreligious dialogue. Acceptance of these guidelines could become a major stepping stone to a union in collaboration between the world religions and other faith traditions, transcending the doctrinal differences. Such interfaith dialogue in collaboration with the political world would be the most effective contribution towards more efficient solutions to the world problems, and at the same time an important stepping stone to a new world-order in more peace and justice for all. In the present stage of the growth-process of the doctrines of the diverse religions, it is obvious that they are not ripe yet to come to a unity of fusion. The unity which should be aimed at by all world religions and other faith traditions in the actual conditions

is only possible in collaboration. All the world religions , traditions, spiritual movements are, to a greater or lesser degree, concerned with the welfare of all human beings as individuals and also as global community. Searching together for solutions to the acute and escalating problems of mankind, such as poverty, wars, manufacturing, traffic and possession of arms, unjust sharing in the earth resources, and so many others, should be a priority aim of the collaboration between the religions of this world. Only with this clear goal in mind, rising above the doctrinal and other differences, can a unity in collaboration be achieved.

A growing interest in religious matters in the media and the general interest of the public in general is apparent in the search for a new moral basis in a world of rapid changes on the road to a multicultural and multi-religious society. Even in the political world there is a growing tendency to look for closer collaboration with the religious world in the search for solutions to our world problems. This presents an extraordinary opportunity, unique in the history of the world, to all religions and traditions to become a guiding beacon, proclaiming to the whole world universally accepted moral codes from a unanimous single-voiced authority of a world-organisation, like a United Religions or a United Traditions, as mentioned above. It is obvious that the Global Ethic as proposed in 1993 by the theologian Hans Küng (Germany) and the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities (Japan) in 1997, the ‘Turning Point for all Nations’ a 1995 document of the Bahà’i community and last but not least the 1992 document of the Dalai Lama ‘The GlobalCommunity and the Need for Universal Responsibility’ are so many appropriate complements to the Declaration of Human Rights, which could and should become the basis for the religions and other faith traditions to effectively contribute toward a new world-order in which man/woman stands central in their social and spiritual dimension.

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