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The Prospective Eye of Interreligious Dialogue

Richard E. WENTZ

Professor Giles Gunn writes of Walt Whitman: "Here was a poet who wanted to cultivate the prospective rather than the retrospective eye." (Gunn 1981, p. 241). The metaphor is mixed but it bids us see with the prospective eye, a westering eye. Like Emerson, Whitman was the frontier American, ever on the move, seeking to explore and exploit on behalf of a restlessness, a sense of driving destiny, moving *against* the past. "Years of the modern!" he wrote,

> years of the unperform'd!
> Your horizon rises—I see it parting
> away, for more august dramas;
> I see not America only—I see not only
> Liberty's nation, but other nations
> preparing....
> I see that force advancing with
> irresistible power on the world's
> stage....
> I see the frontiers and boundaries of
> the old aristocracies broken (Gunn 1981, p. 248).

America was first the prospective eye by means of which Europe fixed its vision westward, creating frontiers in the mind and on land, hoping always to find a new opportunity for wealth, for truth, for salvation!

> The perform'd America and Europe
> grow dim, retiring in shadow
> behind me,
> The unperform'd, more gigantic than
> ever, advance, advance upon me (Gunn 1981, p. 248).

Always the prospective eye, catching an image of "the unperform'd," the frontier that permits movement, a new chance for the human race.

> Passage to more than India!
> Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights?
> O soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyage like those?
> Disportest thou on waters such as those?
> Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas?
> Then have thy bent unleash'd.
> . . .
> Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
> Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
> For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
> And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
> O my brave soul!
> O farther farther sail!
>
> O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God?
> O farther, farther, farther sail! (Whitman 1982, pp. 539-540).

The prospective eye casts its sights westward, westward, across "the seas of God," and now searches eagerly for signs of welcome and promise among the universities, monasteries, and temples of Asia. The westering eye may have been drawn to the Orient some centuries ago, but it is the events of the twentieth century which have given spiritual force to this prospective seeing. The present century has been the setting for at least three religious enterprises which are evidence of seeing with the prospective eye. These ventures are: (1) the projects in theology and religious scholarship acknowledging the encounter between East and West; (2) the continuing search of Euro-Americans for a new spiritual frontier—a search which began in the late nineteenth century with theosophy and today extends its life among Zen centers, ashrams, and cultic orientalism; and (3) the increase of formal inter-religious dialogue during the past twenty years.

While I assume that the three enterprises are interrelated, even interdependent, I shall focus this essay primarily on the phenomenon of inter-religious dialogue. I want to suggest the thesis that the character of this dialogue is strongly affected by the westering, prospective eye of the West. Furthermore, it may be understood as part of the Western movement toward spiritual revitalization. During the nineteenth century American intellectuals found themselves faced with sources of spiritual tradition that were foreign to the prevailing course of Christendom, yet seemed to be in harmony with the need to make sense of the American wilderness in relation to the driving force of civilization. Thinkers such as Emerson, Thoreau,

and Whitman seemed drawn to the Orient and its literary wisdom. Their understanding of these matters may have been somewhat superficial; however, their response to the symbolic power of the language and literature of Asia was very compelling. The mysteried isles of Japan had just opened their shores to commercial and cultural influences. And the passage to India had revealed the fabled realms of China and Southeast Asia.

Along with intellectual curiosity there emerged a growing body of scholarship designed to understand the early spiritual history of humankind. The religious practices of the folk, in nonliterate and literate societies, were under investigation; and the comparative study of the living world religions made an early appearance on the scholarly scene. The discovery of other religions and other spiritual paths was not limited to academe. The World Parliament of Religions of 1893 had a popular effect and soon brought eminent Asian lecturers and teachers to North America. The prospective eye, the reckless exploring of the Western mind, had indeed *drawn* the East to the West.

> The unperform'd, more gigantic than
> ever, advance, advance upon me.

From Japan came Zen masters like Soyen Shaku, Lord Abbott of Engaku-ji and Kenchō-ji in Kamakura, Japan. His lectures were directed toward Americans whose westering eyes searched the horizons for religious truths missing in their own environment. The call of the West continued to bring emissaries of the East, particularly from Japan, India, and later Tibet.

After World War II the exclusivism of certain interpretations of Christianity was challenged by the global and widespread interaction of religion and culture. The residual isolationism of much of Western Christendom was forced to take account of Asia especially, where the promises of wisdom and profundity had beckoned the prospective eye. Christian theologians had to acknowledge the presence of world religions, especially *Asian* world religions. The internal dialogue began. That is to say, there is a kind of dialogue that takes place when I begin to engage religious ideas and convictions that have not previously been part of my intellectual frame of reference. When the Christian theologian studies seriously the thoughts of Buddhist thinkers, he is engaged in a kind of dialogue that is internal to himself. Now, of course, this kind of dialogue may extend itself to include external encounters as well. We have only to think of the work of Paul Tillich, Thomas Merton, Mircea Eliade, and W. C. Smith. There have been efforts at theology *about* world religions, theology *of* world religion; and there have been a variety of internal dialogues by philosophers and theologians East and West. There are the intriguing accounts of the so-called Kyoto School and the

efforts of scholars such as Heinrich Dumoulin, Hans Waldenfels, John Hick, and Raimundo Pannikar.

During recent decades the dialogue has become external and interreligious (Smith 1981, Van Bragt 1984, Franck 1982, Takeuchi 1983). Individual theologians, clergy, and monks have set up their own agendas for study and discussion with members of traditions other than their own. Ecclesiastical agencies, ecumenical commissions, academic symposia, and special institutes and organizations have directed considerable time, thought, and research to the enterprise of dialogue between and among religions and their representatives. All sorts of questions and issues have surfaced in the process. Principles have been suggested and theories have been advanced. Is religious commitment essential to dialogue? Should those engaged in dialogue be representative of communities, churches? Does dialogue call for a revitalizing of all truth claims? These are the kinds of questions that emerge. Theories of dialogue are associated with John Cobb, Arnulf Camps, John Hick,—to mention but a few.

In numerous conversations with scholars in Japan I have received the distinct impression that much of the external dialogue taking place today is by way of the initiative of Christian individuals and organizations. While it is true that many Asian philosophers and religious thinkers have studied in Europe and America, or spent years in the investigation of Western philosophy and theology, they have done so primarily to acquire a knowledge of Western skills and methods in order to reexamine their own traditions. Most of the openness to new levels of religious understanding and what John Cobb has called "mutual transformation" has been on the Western and Christian side. Certainly the motivation for external dialogue is primarily Western. There are exceptions, of course.

In a symposium at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in Nagoya, in September 1985, during which a group of Christian scholars investigated their "partners for dialogue," Jan Swyngedouw made some observations about the state of dialogue in Japan. Because of its unique position culturally, politically, and economically, Japan has been perhaps in the forefront as a setting for interreligious dialogue. Buddhism, said Swyngedouw, particularly Zen with its highly developed theory and interesting praxis, has been very much involved in dialogue with Christianity. Certainly Buddhism and Christianity tend to be the most visible traditions in the development of dialogue. Shinto and the new religions have also become active, but they are not likely to be as pre-eminent an international force for dialogue as is Mahayana Buddhism, in its many forms. Most of the dialogue is formalized and respectful, said Swyngedouw. His impression is that Christians are more open to influence, renewal, or transformation by

Buddhism. Buddhists may not be nearly so interested as Christians. The initiative and enthusiasm are predominantly Western and Christian.

There are, of course, many reasons for this. The scholar of religions recognizes that the East may be somewhat skittish, wary of the colonializing and universalizing tendencies of the Western mind. Asian thought and praxis may indeed be so eminently satisfactory that the Buddhist feels little need for the wisdom of Western tradition. However that may be, I would argue that the Western fascination with Buddhism and the Orient, and the initiation of interreligious dialogue, are evidence of the continued westering of the Euro-American frontier. The prospective eye seeks a "passage to more than India."

> Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas?
> Then have thy bent unleash'd.
> . . .
> O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God?
> O farther, farther, farther sail! (Whitman 1982, pp. 539-540)

Why should it be that interreligious dialogue is part of the westering search? If we examine the literature and program of the missions for dialogue and the writings of the theologians and historians, we observe the phenomena of an emergent religious movement. Indeed, what we observe has many of the characteristics of an incipient revitalization movement (Wallace 1956, McLoughlin 1978). In John Steinbeck's story *The Red Pony*, one of the characters speaks of the North American Völkerwanderung: "It was a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast. . . . It was westering and westering. Every man wanted something for himself, but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering. . . . When we saw the mountains at last, we cried—all of us. But it wasn't getting here that mattered, it was movement and westering."

The lad asks questions and the grandfather finally replies: "No place to go, Jody. . . . But that's not the worst—no, not the worst. Westering has died out of the people. Westering isn't a hunger any more. It's all done" (Steinbeck 1980, p. 81).

The boy's father angrily cries out: "All right! Now it's finished. Nobody wants to hear. . ." (Steinbeck 1980, p. 89).

But it was never finished. As Walter Prescott Webb has shown, "the frontier is not a line to stop at, but an area inviting entrance" (Webb 1964, p. 2). Since the sixteenth century, Europe acquired the concept of a moving frontier. I would argue that the acquisition was as early as the eighth or ninth centuries, that it was a mythic and religious force in the development of the Western mind. In those early centuries Europeans knew that there was a

land to the West, across the vast and terrible waters, a "Land Promised to the Saints"—a land offering salvation to the dying spiritual embers of Europe and refuge from the disease and famine of an Old World. They expressed their knowledge in stories such as the legend of St. Brendan. The moving frontier was always and mostly a "promised land" and it was central to the hearts and minds of Euro-Americans.

Much of the interreligious dialogue is an extension of this westering hunger for another chance, for a useful wisdom. Floating and drifting aimlessly and joblessly with the American youth of the 1930s, Loren Eiseley "avoided jails. By no one but the law could I be regarded dangerous. I was just floating, waiting for something I didn't understand" (Eiseley 1975, p. 59). It has been difficult for the Westerner to accept the idiosyncrasies of history. We do not like history because it never takes shape according to our desires. History is defiant, real. Our response is westering movement, hope for another opportunity to escape history, to find ourselves in some mossy, pristine wilderness, a garden where we may dwell securely, have another chance. Such is our spiritual inclination; and such is the motivation of much interreligious dialogue. It is the remnants of Christendom who initiate dialogue because they cannot live with history where their desires are never met. The remnant begins drifting, then drives purposefully on its "passage to more than India."

"Awakenings," writes the historian William McLoughlin, "—the most vital and yet most mysterious of all folk arts—are periods of cultural revitalization that begin in a general crisis of beliefs and values and extend over a period of a generation or so, during which time a profound reorientation in beliefs and values takes place" (McLoughlin 1978, p. xiii). McLoughlin moves into an analysis of American history in which he finds five distinct periods of awakening and cultural revitalization. Using anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace's model of cultural change found in his essay "Revitalization Movements" (Wallace 1956), McLoughlin sets forth his own adaptation of the three or four stages of a revitalization movement. There is first of all a period of personal stress, during which individuals, one by one, seem to lose their ability to cope with life, to find it meaningful and trustworthy. A second stage is one of cultural distortion during which it is recognized that the spiritual malady is due to the failure of societal and cultural foundations which are ordinarily responsible for assisting in the reduction of tension. The old "mazeways" are no longer effective. This will be a time of alienation and of traditionalist reaction. There must be a third and fourth stage during which there emerges a prophet or vision of new order that is capable of instituting "a new world view or mazeway and the restructuring of old institutions" (McLoughlin 1978, p. 16).

According to McLoughlin we are in the midst of a fourth (or fifth if one counts the Puritan movement of the 17th century) "Great Awakening," which began in 1960 and whose resolution is not yet in sight. Inasmuch as I believe that America has never ceased being Europe's moving frontier, I would suggest that interreligious dialogue is part of the Western world's continuing struggle for spiritual wisdom as well as a symptom of its image of a "new worldview or mazeway" which may enable us to accept our history. In other words, perhaps we should revise McLoughlin's thesis concerning the succession of "great awakenings," to speculate that American history may very well be the story of one "great awakening" which is not yet resolved. The fact that European and American history have been strongly influenced by legendary and mythic elements of promised land to the West and passages to "more than India," that there have been the America of Europe's moving frontier and the westering restlessness of the American people, are indications of a vast movement of individual stress and cultural distortion. Interreligious dialogue, in both its internal and external forms is evidence of personal crisis, of cultural distortion, and perhaps of an emergent new world view.

In his evaluation of what he calls the fourth awakening, McLoughlin speaks of the current popularity of neo-Evangelicalism:

> The old Bible-centered faith in an omniscient, omnipotent, yet personal, loving, comforting God, who forgives sins, answers prayers, and helps us solve problems by his direct spiritual presence and guidance is, of course, the kind of religion many Americans want today. Its conception of God is the opposite of the current impersonal, uncaring, frustrating, bureaucratic authority that controls our lives through science, medicine, government; this God is familiar and comfortable in a stressful world. However, the worldview of neo-Evangelicalism, by concentrating on the individual, is essentially an escape from seemingly insoluble, tension-ridden social and political problems (McLoughlin 1978, p. 213).

McLoughlin's diagnosis is not untainted, of course. There is present a subtle and implicit bias of unreconstructed liberal vintage. And I suspect that he fails to give due consideration to the wide-ranging (depth-plumbing) nature of religion. When he refers to Zen and native American wisdom as of a piece with neo-Evangelicalism in their divisive tendencies toward escapism, he reveals an inadequate understanding of religion, which is multi-faceted and dialectical in relation to such axes as individual-social, transcendent-immanent. However, the historical thrust of McLoughlin's evaluation is

well taken. Much of the contemporary spirituality seems to belong to the lingering reactionary phase of the great Western religio-cultural movement toward a new vision and worldview. The movement has been a full three or four centuries in the offing.

The stages of revitalization are not so discrete and consecutive as one might observe them in an anthropological study of a tribal and nonliterate tradition. They come and go according to the degree of stress and distortion and the power of reactionary movements and temporary palliatives or distractions. Certainly the emergence of existentialism, beginning perhaps in the nineteenth century with Kierkegaard's "individual stress" over the fragmentary condition of the church, philosophy, and any sense of dependable cosmos, can be understood as evidence of the beginnings of cultural distortion. But, of course, the emergent technological syndrome has always been able to produce diversions.

If I am correct in suggesting that interreligious dialogue is very much the result of a spiritual westering of the Euro-American frontier, then it may well be that this new phase of religious history is also evidence of the formation of new mazeways for the revitalization of the West, if not for the world. It should be possible to document this expectation by reference to the testimony of a sampling of the literature of interreligious dialogue. We should find there evidence of a sense of urgency and crisis, corresponding to the stages of individual stress and cultural distortion of Western culture. We shall also find a prominent belief in a new resolution, a universal age—a realm of open and creative mazeways. First, there is in this literature the widespread assumption that dialogue is essential because of what is termed a crisis (Smith 1979, p. viii; 1976, passim). In his 1974 study of Buddhism and Christianity, Heinrich Dumoulin states that these two traditions openly and intentionally face each other "in a time of change and crisis" (Dumoulin 1974, p. 1). It is one thing to say that dialogue is good and necessary for its own sake, for missionary purposes, or for what we may learn from it. It is quite another to say that dialogue is essential to a time of "change and crisis."

Some of the earlier encounters of Christianity and Buddhism were without this sense of urgency that flows from time of crisis. Thus, for example, Winston L. King writing in 1962 called merely for building bridges of understanding between Buddhism and Christianity, between East and West, that had been severed with the development of Latin and Romanized Christendom and the "intrusion of Islam" into the corridors of influence. King was responding to William Hocking's notion that the "separation between faiths is absolute and that they can communicate only by . . . the method of 'radical displacement' of the other;" responding also to Hendrik Kraemer's

defense of the unrepentant exclusivism of Christianity with regard to "naturalistic monism" (King 1962, p. 9). King wrote on behalf of "genuine dialogue" and thought that many previous efforts tended "to hasten joyfully and uncritically toward immediate syncretism or the discovery that they are at bottom identical." King's work is important because it represents the genuine beginnings of significant dialogue. Reflecting today on thirty years of his own "internal dialogue," King feels that not much has changed except perhaps the volume of material and the sense of urgency that is mostly Christian and Western. In a conversation at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in December 1985, King voiced the idea that much of the renewal of Buddhist interest in their *own* tradition may be the result of Western interest in them.

There is little doubt that a quarter of a century of increased study, encounter, and dialogue has accelerated the Western sense of crisis. Twenty-five years ago Winston King could recognize only the West's eagerness to passage eastward with either exclusivist zeal to convert the Orient in order to satisfy millennialist conditions for the advent of the new age, or with reductionist notions about the essential identity of religions. Today the passage eastward is done in a time of crisis. From the standpoint of revitalization theory the crisis has existed for some time. The crisis persists, whether in terms of individual stress or cultural distortion. Reaction, exclusivism, and nativist sentiments recur in the midst of the stress and distortion. And perhaps, as we move toward what McLoughlin calls "the new world view or mazeways and the restructuring of old institutions," the crisis will heighten. This may be especially true in a time when society and culture do not *seem* to require the actual religious consensus of the people. That is to say, former times and their revitalizations related to the people within a manageable geographical area where the religious foundations themselves reflected a commonality of experience, and where the development of effective social structures and control depended upon a heightened and developed religious experience and consensus. Today the process of revitalization cannot be but global because the structures of society and communication are already interdependent. (The golden arches of McDonald's rise in sacral authority and synthesis in remote corners of the planet.) What is more, these structures are something new entirely—they are techno-corporate. They exercise external control and regulation of beliefs and values; they no longer seem to require the internal control brought about by the commitments and experience of the people (Samartha 1981, p. 14).

The sense of crisis and urgency typical of revitalization eras is intensified in our time because those who are aware of and sensitive to these issues are faced with considerable frustration and helplessness in a techno-corporate

society which requires only the functioning, the performance, the labor and consumption of its constituents. This society requires no consensual or experiential base from within. It is controlled from without. Recent literature concerned with dialogue expresses the *critical* necessity of dialogue; it also expresses concern for globalization brought about by technology and the opportunities for dialogue effected by "improved" communication. Dialogue must take place, say many of these documents, because modernization threatens the extinction of the transcendent and spiritual dimensions of existence. "What is it, in our times," asks Hans Küng, "that brings Buddhist and Christian thought together? Mainly the impact of the question how an old religion can survive in a new age" (Takeuchi 1983, p. viii). It may be, as Küng suggests, that such a question is just as important to Japan as it is to the West; but the fact remains that it is *expressly* so in the West, less so in the East.

Whether one peruses the works of theologians like Cobb, Dumoulin, Gilkey, and Harvey Cox, or of the historians and philosophers of religion, like W. C. Smith, Robert Neville, John Hick, or Frederick Copleston, there is present the sense of crisis and frustration before the external controls of a techno-corporate world (Samartha 1981b, p. 337). When an Asian like Stanley Samartha writes of the urgency in the crisis of impersonal forces and deterioration of personal values, he writes from the perspective of one for whom the full force of Christian eschatology and Western longing is present.

But there is one other important bit of evidence in the literature of dialogue that permits theorizing about dialogue as part of westering and as an important force in a continuing West-inspired revitalization movement. Whether the hope is for "mutual transformation," "renewal," or "understanding," the expected result is, as Dumoulin states it, a "universal human culture [which] is clearly discernible" in outline (Dumoulin 1974, p. 7). In a volume of essays, *Christianity and Other Religions*, edited by John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, W. C. Smith states: "Perhaps the single most important challenge that mankind faces in our day is the need to turn our nascent society into a world community . . . My own view is that the task of constructing even [the] minimum degree of world fellowship that will be necessary for man to survive at all is far too great to be accomplished on any other than a religious basis" (Hick and Hebblethwaite 1980, p. 95; see also Samartha 1981). And, of course, the whole point of Cobb's "mutual transformation" is that we might go "*beyond* dialogue." If we ask why it is necessary to go *beyond* dialogue, it is because a millennial vision impels us, and because "dialogue that does not intend to go beyond itself stagnates" (Cobb 1982, pp. ix, viii, 47). It is not at all clear to me that this is necessarily so. As

a matter of fact, what I learn from the masters of spirituality in traditions East and West suggests to me that too much *intention* may be destructive of the illumination and union that are central to the way of the disciple. Certainly we could make a significant case for the idea that dialogue must be done merely because people encounter each other or simply because another tradition exists. One may engage in dialogue with no attachment either to the dialogue itself or to any preconceived intention or goal. It is conceivable that this attachment to some kind of millennial and universal goal may be prejudicial to all the traditions involved in dialogue. Intentionality may corrupt. Writing of this notion in the works of John Cobb, Gordon Kauffman, and David Tracy, John B. Chethimattam puts the matter this way:

> This conception of Christianity as being one religion among many, and of every particular religion as the manifestation of universal religion centered in Logos is quite widespread among Western scholars. What is at issue here is an emphasis of universalism at the expense of particularity, the impossibility of the universal God identifying himself with any particular instance. *In this way the decisive meaning of history itself is being challenged* (italics mine) (Chethimattam 1981, p. 332).

The plot thickens. The attachment becomes evidence of endemic Westernism, which, says Chethimattam, "has no philosophical tools to validate the particular. A proper explanation or proof always involves relation to a universal rule or truth. . . . Even history which deals with the course of individual events often tends to become philosophy of history" (Chethimattam 1981, p. 333). The west is searching for transformation—for a resolution of its movement toward revitalization—through dialogue.

During a recent sabbatical in Japan, spent at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, I had long conversations with a Korean theologian, Nam Key-Young. Nam is a unique figure in the contemporary interreligious scene. He is a Korean and *not* a Christian, and has spent many years at the University of Louvain taking licentiate and Ph. D. degrees in theology. He is a keen student of Buddhist philosophy. Our own dialogue had no agenda, no intention. I think it was profound, at times intense. I came away from the experience with the insight that that dialogue may be best for which we advance no great expectations. In the West we may be in danger of imposing our westering desire for "a new chance"—our visions of a universal goal—upon the people of Asia. For one thing, it may not be true at all, as W. C. Smith believes, that world fellowship can only be achieved on "a religious basis." That is so obviously a Western religious conviction, a dream. It may

very well be true that traditional religion in a pluralistic world must be used as a resource for those who wish to find wisdom and insight. The traditions may preserve the way of the disciple—those disciplines and teachings that prepare us for transformation and superordinary knowledge and perception. However, the world fellowship Smith seeks may very well be achieved by the techno-corporate instrumentalities of our society, acting in a religious manner. Religious power is not found only in religions; religious needs and ends are frequently served by other than the maneuvering of traditional religions. "The maligned multinational corporation may prove to be a more effective vehicle for achieving a stable world order than either ecumenical activities among the traditional religious communities or a vital United Nations. . . . A broadly economic framework which seeks to relate perceived self-interests to awareness of interdependence probably has promise of being more effective than explicitly universal religious or political worldviews" (Wilson 1979, p. 173).

There is a great deal of piety that accompanies the prescriptions of interreligious dialogue, even among the intellectual elite who foster its programs. I am not convinced that we advance the cause of religious insight and illumination by agreeing with dialogists like Paul Knitter, John Hick, or Hans Küng that "all religions possess elements of goodness and truth." (Cobb 1982, pp. 43-46). That is folk wisdom and, like all such insights, it emerges from the discovery that we are human beings. The most erudite and cerebral of persons is also an individual who eats, sleeps, urinates, has sexual feelings, *and* thinks and acts in many ways that defy his feigned "rationality." "What we must understand," writes Harvey Cox, "is not the symbols themselves but what they mean to real people" (Berger 1981, p. 302). "Real people" are folks; and theologians and historians of religion are also folks—real people at some level of their existence. "Real people" within the Western intellectual traditions may need to believe that "all religions possess goodness and truth," that we must go beyond dialogue on a moving frontier to see a new horizon, where the "loss of Western self-confidence" (Hick and Hebblethwaite 1980, p. 7) will find revitalization in a "new religion" (Dunne 1972, p. 24), a "true cosmopolitanism" (W. C. Smith in Hick and Hebblethwaite 1980, p. 87), or the "common goal of a new world, a new society and a new humanity" (Waldenfels 1980, p. 3).

Yes, the people believe because they are looking, hoping. God is calling us, writes W. C. Smith, "to let Him act through new forms, continuous with the old, as we human beings across the globe enter our strange new age" (Smith 1981, p. 194). This we believe, or something like it, we Western "folks" of all intellectual and academic levels.

Religion stands a tiptoe in our land,
Ready to pass to the American strand.

So wrote George Herbert in the seventeenth century. It was Europe doing its westering, searching for revitalization. But it was like a moving beast, on tiptoe looking ever westward to the Orient, *past* the American strand. "Let us settle for the fact that it *feels* as if we were reaching the end of a historical era (that of the Enlightenment). . . . The final element of the watershed . . . is the present close encounter of religions . . ." (Gilkey 1981, pp. 3, 12). The ending of such an era in an encounter that is facing westward to the East is, for many, a sign that Robert Bellah's world civil religion may emerge "as a fulfillment and not a denial of American civil religion. Indeed, such an outcome has been the eschatological hope of American civil religion from the beginning . . . It is in need—as is any living faith—of continual reformation, of being measured by universal standards" (Bellah 1967, pp. 18-19). That civil religion is the result of Europe's westering dream. And in the midst of our sense of crisis, with its individual stresses and cultural distortions, is this hope that the close encounter of religions may bring about the revitalization we have long sought.

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