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Dialogue and Truth

by Donald J. Goergen, O.P.

Just over one year ago, Catholic Christians were preparing to celebrate a Jubilee Year and all of us were anticipating a new millennium. Sometimes I ask myself where we as church will be at the start of the next millennium. If we look back one thousand years, not only the church but the church's teachings looked different. The definitive split between East and West had not happened. There was no Thomas Aquinas. The missions in the Americas, Africa, and Asia lay in an unknown future. There was no scholasticism, no Protestantism, no Council of Trent.

Likewise it is interesting to look ahead one thousand years to where the church and the church's teaching will be then. Just as a bishop or lay person in the year 1000 could not have envisioned post-Vatican II Catholicism and the end of the twentieth century church and some of its teachings, so we too cannot expect to see what lies ahead. But when it comes to the question of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue, we are talking about what may be a centuries-long process and theological struggle to put into words the faith we believe and experiences to which we must be faithful. Religious pluralism is one of the primary challenges facing the church in this twenty-first century.

If we were to listen to a gathering of preachers in the year 300, they might be talking about how to preach the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those were the days of an acceptable post-Origenist subordinationism, a soon to emerge Arianism, a pre-Nicene trinitarianism, that had not yet found the language that would really say what the Church believed. If we look at the history of christological doctrine, the Church in one sense was waiting for Chalcedon to give it the language to say that Jesus was two yet one, but two what, one what, and what common language could speak the faith across cultures, nations, and languages? Each of these doctrines was centuries in the making. So likewise will be the Church's eventual doctrine concerning the primacy of Christ and the validity of many religions.

As often, we are attempting to straddle two convictions, to find the mean between two extremes. On the one hand the Church believes in a primacy for Christ, a singular uniqueness, a distinctive role for Jesus Christ in God's dream for the universe. We cannot let go of this conviction of our faith. It is at the core of the Christian Tradition and the New Testament. At the same time we are aware, and more aware than ever

before, of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in other major religious traditions, that God is present there, and that they too are works of the Logos. Where the Spirit is, there the three-in-one are, the divine triune life.

Each of these other religious traditions is also distinctive. So the challenge is how to express our faith in Jesus Christ and at the same time show our respect and reverence for other magnificent and manifold works of God outside the confines of visible Christianity. Have we found the right formula to say what we believe? what we know in our hearts to be true? Not yet, but it is this search for truth that requires dialogue. Truth requires dialogue, and yet there is more to truth than dialogue alone.¹ But the search for truth, religious truth, the fullness of truth cannot neglect truth that is present in religious systems other than our own. We cannot say in advance whether that truth is the same truth as ours, expressed differently, or whether it is incompatible with our own truth, or whether it might not also be from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, whether it complements our own understanding, or simply helps us to understand more deeply what we already claim to believe. The search for truth requires an openness to dialogue with those whose truth seems at first to be other than ours, with those who are others, whose beliefs may even appear strange, an evangelical openness that we find in Jesus of Nazareth who recognized the presence and action of God in the other, and from whom he learned (e.g., Mt 8:10-11; 15:21-28; John 4:1-15).

What is truth?² Surely not something deposited as if in a bank from which we can withdraw what we might need at any particular time. Rather it is more like an attractor, an Omega Point, drawing us toward itself, something, let us say Someone, we may never completely reach, or grasp, but toward which we journey. And there are different

¹ Following John Paul II in Dives in Misericordia, #3, Dialogue and Proclamation, # 9 states, "...in the context of religious plurality, dialogue means 'all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment,/'..." This is the sense in which dialogue is understood in that document, as one of the integral elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. The same is expressed in The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions, Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission, #3. The latter is a document of the Secretariat for Non-Christians (1984). The former, D&P, is a joint document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples (1991). Also see John Paul II's message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, "Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace" (Jan 1, 2001): "...the theme of dialogue between cultures and traditions. This dialogue is the obligatory path to the building of a reconciled world....I am pleased that the United Nations Organization has called attention to this urgent need by declaring 2001 the 'International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations' (#3); and "dialogue is a privileged means for building the civilization of love and peace..." (# 10); and "The different religions too can and ought to contribute decisively to this process" (#16).

² On truth, see Vatican II, Dignitatis Humanae, Declaration on Religious Liberty, # 3, "The search for truth, however, must be carried out in a manner that is appropriate to the dignity of the human person and his social nature, namely, by free enquiry with the help of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue. It is by these means that men share with each other the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in such a way that they help one another in the search for truth."

kinds of truth, of knowledge: objective knowledge, personal knowledge, symbolic knowledge, and religious truth contains all three.³ Ultimately religious truth is an invitation to enter a symbolic universe, a universe of meaning, that in our world today must remain conversant with other symbolic structures and universes.

We all have a lot to learn. The fullness of truth resides in the Catholic tradition, according to Catholic teaching. But this does not mean that it is all already within our grasp. It simply means that Christ is there, in the Church, and there in his fullness. The Church does not lack the presence of Christ who is there in Word and Sacrament. But to say that we have the Word of God and the sacraments does not suggest that we have individually or collectively come to a full knowledge of all Truth. The attitude of the Seeker is always one of openness, that of a student. The pilgrim church is both church and pilgrim, wayfarer. And we cannot afford to dismiss other pilgrims along the way, whether individuals or traditions. God is there too, and it is God whom we seek. We as church have made mistakes. His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, most vividly and humbly reminded us of the fallibility of the church this past jubilee year in his celebration of the Purification of Memory and Day of Pardon as he asked forgiveness for our sins, the sins of people but also the sins of the institution. Anyone who truly knows the truth cannot help but be humbled by it. There is no room for arrogance. The truth convicts us of our sinfulness at the same time as it reveals God's grace (John Paul II, Dominum et vivificantem, #35-41).

Truth requires dialogue as one of the methods of its inquiry as well as humility before the divine mystery. What is dialogue other than a search for truth, a search for the whole Christ, a search for Truth itself whom Christians call God and recognize as the God of Jesus Christ. We must never let go of our contribution to dialogue, namely Jesus Christ, but neither must we bypass engagement with what at first hand seems to be "outside Christ." For is there really any such thing as "outside Christ"? And to think so may mean that we do not yet know Christ. Or it may be that there is much outside Christ, namely sin, but there is much then that is outside Christ that is inside the church. We ourselves are not immune to sin and ignorance and error and misunderstanding. Perhaps it will be only in dialogue that we come to know ourselves and the truth to which we adhere, the truth that will set us free (John 8:32).

Dialogue is a search for truth, and truth needs dialogue because there is always "more" to truth, to the gospel, to Jesus Christ, a surplus beyond our present individual or collective or ecclesial grasp of it. God remains God and is not synonymous with our grasp of the truth nor with the Christian Church.

The church since the Second Vatican Council is learning to walk with both feet, the foot

³ See Donald J. Goergen, The Death and Resurrection of Jesus (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, 1988): 183-203; and Jesus, Son of God, Son of Mary, Immanuel (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995): 184-210.

of recognizing the value in other religions and the foot of proclaiming the primacy of Jesus Christ. These are the two poles that the document, "Dialogue and Proclamation," a joint document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, attempts to hold together, as does the teaching of Pope John Paul II, as we do as church.⁴ How can we at one and the same time both affirm other religions and cultures and proclaim the truth about Christ? Can dialogue and proclamation both be genuine dimensions of the church's evangelizing mission? Deep in our hearts, is the hope for interreligious dialogue that it will lead to conversion? Is that its hidden agenda?

Certainly this is a fear, and an understandable and reasonable fear, among many of our non-Christian brothers and sisters. Our historical record as church is not one of tolerance. We are strong proponents of religious liberty throughout the world. Such is the teaching of the church, of Pope John Paul II, of the Second Vatican Council. But we must admit that it is a recent teaching. A millennium ago, even a century ago, Catholics would have been surprised to hear it, unprepared for receiving it. Are we only in favor of religious liberty in countries and continents where we are in a religious minority, or where totalitarian systems prevent the practice of the Catholic faith? What does religious liberty mean in countries where we are not the minority, or what might happen if someday we became stronger? Is the present teaching of the church to survive? Will the pull toward the proclamation of Christ and the desire for conversion win out over the respect for other religions that is also church teaching? These are legitimate questions? What are our ultimate intentions, hopes, dreams for the world? Is living together religiously, pluralistically, in harmony, our innermost desire or only accomodation to reality? It brings us to the unanswered question about whether religious pluralism exists de jure or only de facto.

But let us return to this question of interreligious dialogue and conversion. The current understanding within the church of dialogue as a component of evangelization does not see the goal of dialogue as being conversion.⁵ That is clear. Its purpose is mutual respect and understanding, one might say for Christians that dialogue is faith seeking understanding. It is our faith that we bring to the dialogue, but it is also our own faith that we seek to penetrate more deeply along with discerning more sincerely the grace and truth present in other religious traditions. So from one point of view, ad extra one might say, vis a vis the other in the dialogue, our goal is not their conversion, but at the same time, ad intra, vis a vis ourselves, our Catholic faith and life, the goal is conversion, our conversion to a more profound grasp of the mission and message of

⁴ Dialogue and Proclamation, # 81, states concerning proclamation, "Proclamation, on the other hand, aims at guiding people to explicit knowledge of what God has done for all men and women in Jesus Christ, and at inviting them to become disciples of Jesus through becoming members of the Church." Proclamation is distinguished from dialogue as two different dimensions of the evangelizing mission of the church. See fn. 1 above.

⁵ See note 1 above.

Jesus Christ. To use the language of Raimon Panikkar, there can be no interreligious dialogue without intrareligious dialogue.⁶ The latter dialogue is as important as the former, and perhaps one that we ourselves at times fear, for it is one that ought to take place not only personally but also ecclesially. It is the very continuing conversion of the church itself to the mission of Christ.⁷

The conversion of the other, not to the gospel as such, but to the church, is overladen with the risk of westernization, legitimately feared by cultures still able to resist it. Can there be complete and total evangelization without cultural domination? Only through a profound respect for inculturation, something for which the church in modern times also does not have that great a record. Religious fundamentalism in the West fears the almost irreversible effects of Western secularization.⁸ But in Asia religious fundamentalism's fear can be christianization and its embodiment in the Western church. At the same time we must acknowledge fundamentalism's own aggressive, exclusive, non-pluralistic religious agenda. We come back to the question of whether religious pluralism is actually desirable or whether it is even possible for religions to exist together in harmony. For ourselves as Catholic Christians, we must find our response to those questions in the gospel and in Jesus Christ. What does our faith have to say, recognizing the newness of this question, or at least the context in which it is formulated today. New wine may not fit into the old wineskins (Mk 2:22), and a new theology into an old mindset.⁹ This is why one of the purposes of dialogue is

⁶ Cf., Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, revised edition (New York:Paulist Press, 1999). "The real religious or theological task, if you will, begins when the two views meet head-on inside oneself; when dialogue prompts genuine religious pondering, and even a religious crisis, at the bottom of one's heart; when interpersonal dialogue turns into intrapersonal soliloquy" (p. 48). "I would like to begin again by stressing the often-neglected notion of an intrareligious dialogue, that is, an inner dialogue within myself, an encounter in the depth of my personal religiousness, having met another religious experience on that very intimate level. In other words, if interreligious dialogue is to be real dialogue, an intrareligious dialogue must accompany it; that is, it must begin with my questioning myself and the relativity of my beliefs (which does not mean their relativism), accepting the challenge of a change, a conversion, and the risk of upsetting my traditional patterns" (73-74). "All these traits can be summarized in one: the passage from interreligious dialogue to intrareligious dialogue; from exteriority to interiority, from the condemnation of others to the examination of one's own conscience, from the problem of political power to personal issues, from dogma to mysticism, if you prefer" (114).

⁷ On conversion see *The Attitude of the Church...*, # 37, and *Dialogue and Proclamation*, # 41.

⁸ See Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000). Also see John Paul II, "Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace," # 9, "...no less perilous is the slavish conformity of cultures, or at least key aspects of them, to cultural models deriving from the Western world."

⁹ "I submit that the one category able to carry the main burden in the religious encounter and in the further development of religion (and religions) is growth....Also, because religious consciousness is an essential part of religion itself, the development of this consciousness means the development of religion itself....So there is not only a development of dogma; there is also a real development of consciousness....I interpret this not to mean that the Church has betrayed the message of Jesus (this is not my point now) but that Christ would introduce another revolution, another step, a new wine that he would not allow to be poured into old skins." Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 98-99.

conversion, but our own. What is the Spirit saying to the Church today (Rev 2: 7,11,17,29;3:6,13,22)?

Does any one religion have more of a claim on God? Does God have favorites? (Acts 10: 34, “And Peter opened his mouth and said: Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality...”) Here I am talking about the God of Jesus Christ, the Father, Son and Spirit. Does the God of Jesus reject other religious traditions other than the Christian? How does God understand them? Are they the effects of sin in the world, or are they works of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the risen Christ, the one and selfsame Spirit through whom Jesus was conceived and raised from the dead?

All of the world’s great religions must be looked at as living traditions, full of life and in the making, as is our own. We must look at them at their best. All concrete religious histories are sources for disappointment and shame. Yet each one is a gift, a creation of God, whose intentions at every point in the unfolding of revelation may not be clear. What is clear is that all religious men and women are loved by God, all the great religious traditions chosen by God, and that there is no such thing as an unchosen people, at least not unchosen by God. God wills salvation for all, as we so well know (1 Tim 2:4). The interrelationships among the religions must be left to the mystery of God, the mystery of the triune God. But in the interim, what we do know, and have always known, what is the core evangelical teaching, is that God, the God of Jesus Christ, is love, agape. Others, religiously speaking, are also God’s friends. And it is to friendship with them that God invites us and encourages us. They are our partners in the human quest, not our competitors.

The purpose of interreligious dialogue is learning, respect, understanding to be sure, but also our own deepened knowledge of Jesus Christ and the God of Christ, in other words our conversion. The call to this conversion is continuous, ongoing, and is both a call to each of us personally as well as to the church collectively, ecclesially. Dialogue is imperative for the sake of the church as well as for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:23).

Dialogue then brings us to the question: who is Jesus Christ? Not simply the question, who do you say that Jesus is (Mk 8:29), but Peter’s response, our response, what do we mean by “the Christ”? What do we mean by the words, “Jesus Christ”? The expression is first of all a profession of faith, that Jesus is the Christ, the singularly unique one, God’s Messiah or most distinctive messenger and mediator of salvation. Nevertheless, what do the words “Jesus Christ” mean? We are not dealing here with ordinary language, not literal language, not simply analytical or objective knowledge. “Jesus Christ” are not simply words, simple signs, conventional signs whereby we can say that this means that. Rather “Jesus Christ” is in the order of what we call tensive or symbolic language.¹⁰

¹⁰ Donald J. Goergen, Jesus, Son of God, Son of Mary, Immanuel, 184-220.

Jesus Christ, of course, refers to Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, the earthly historical Jesus, whose life, mission, ministry, and death have been the object of historiographical scrutiny for two centuries now. Jesus Christ is that Jesus, who lived and walked and talked among us. But “Jesus Christ” also refers to the risen Jesus, the risen Christ, the only Christ there is, “Jesus Christ, our Lord” (Acts 2:36; Phil 2:11). This is the selfsame Jesus to be sure. There is only one Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one. Yet the denotation, point of reference, meaning is not always the same. We are saying more when we say “risen Christ” than when we say “Jesus of Nazareth.”

“Jesus Christ” also means the incarnate one. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word. Yet Christ can also refer to the pre-incarnate Word, the eternal Son who was with the Father in the beginning. We are familiar with the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1-18), but the letter to the Colossians suggests a pre-existent Christ (1:15-20).¹¹ As we see, the words “Jesus Christ” are polyvalent, multi-levelled, containing layers of meaning, all rich and suggestive: Jesus Christ who was, who is and who is to come, the Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8). Not only the pre-incarnate Christ, but also the One who is to come. But even here, with all this meaning, we still have not called to mind the whole Christ, the totum Christum (Paul, Augustine), for what is Christ without his members? Jesus is not who he is by himself alone. His singularity is not isolated, disconnected individuality. In him, we have all been made whole, been made one. Jesus Christ also refers to this total Christ, cosmic Christ, the Christ of creation, the universal Christ, in whom and through whom God will be all in all, who will hand everything over to the Father (1 Cor 15:24-28), who is incomplete apart from his members.¹²

As in the vision of Teilhard de Chardin, the body of Christ is not simply that flesh and those bones, not simply a portion of the universe that he possesses totally, but the totality of the universe that he possesses partially.¹³ “Jesus Christ” are not words that have only one meaning. Ultimately they mean the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, but the whole Christ, head and members, the incomplete Christ who is still in the process of coming to completion because his body is not yet fully formed, the Christ in whom those who are not explicitly Christian have their place and space, the mystical Christ, the mysterium christi, before whom, before which we stand in awe, the one who invites us into the very mystery of God, makes us sharers in the divine life. Not only who is Jesus, but who is the Christ, is also our question.

The Christian’s Christ can sometimes be too small. There is more to Christ than we may

¹¹ The pre-existent Christ and the pre-existent Logos are in fact the same, but the use of pre-existent Christ indicates again the manifold richness of meaning in the expression Christ.

¹² “Yet this, also, must be held, marvellous though it may seem: Christ has need of his members.” Pius XII, Mystici Corporis Christi, #44.

¹³ Teilhard de Chardin, “What Exactly is the Human Body,” in Science and Christ (New York:Harper and Row, 1968):11-13.

have thus far appropriated. Our own christianization, our own conversion, is not complete. We know Christ in spirit and truth, but there is always more, the surplus. Not simply, do I believe in Jesus Christ, but who is the Christ in whom I believe? "Jesus Christ" is tensive, symbolic language and the words are not exclusive and narrow. They draw us into a world that is bigger than what we may have thought. We find ourselves in the grips of what we thought we could grasp. We are taken beyond ourselves, beyond our intellectual understanding, to contemplation, even infused contemplation apart from which the Christ is not truly known.

Truth is not only objective knowledge and the language of faith not simply literal. We are talking about our access to the one, ultimate, holy mystery, the "first without a second" of the Upanishads (Mandukya, Chandogya, Swetasvatara Upanishads among others). In my Father's house, there are many rooms (John 14:2). To know Jesus Christ in truth is to become his disciple, according to the Gospel of John. I believe that. But to know Jesus Christ in spirit and truth also means to know that Jesus was never nor is ever exclusive. Jesus does not confine God.

Christ does not confine God. Christ rather reveals God. Christ unveils God, but does not limit God. Christ is the image of the imageless one (Col 1:15). Christ belongs to all, and not to Christians alone, even if Christians have a singularly unique access to Christ through the Church and sacraments. Christ is the Logos incarnate, but according to the Catholic Tradition, and in patristic theology, the Logos is not confined to its presence and action in Jesus. There is more to the Logos than Jesus alone. The Logos was already present and active in creation and history before Jesus was ever conceived. Seeds of the Logos were present there, and the Logos himself was present there. Nothing came to be without the Logos (John 1:1-14).

The incarnate Word is the Word, and the Word is the same Word that is incarnate. Yet the presence and action of the Word is more extensive than its historical presence and action in Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe that Jesus is the most intensive presence of the Word in history, unsurpassed and unsurpassable, but not the Word's only or exclusive presence, but rather the supreme manifestation of what is present elsewhere. Jesus fully embodies the Word. That's who Jesus is, and that's who the Word is, but God's presence in Christ does not confine God's presence, but rather reveals it. The Word reveals. That is what the Word does as God's self-communication, self-revelation. The Word was with God, the Word was God, the Word is God as self-communicating, as self-disclosing, as reaching out, as coming near, as close at hand, as in our midst, as Immanuel (Is 7:14; John 1:1-18) The Word grounds all religious truth and is the underlying interconnection of the religions of the world.

So there is more to the Word than its incarnate presence in and self-identification with Jesus, and more to the Spirit than its activity in Jesus and the church. The Word and Spirit are present and active in all the major religious traditions of the world -- the

selfsame Word that is Jesus, the one and only Holy Spirit, source of unity and diversity in the world and in the religions of the world. The Holy Spirit and the only-begotten Son do not confine God. They are not God confined but God unleashed, the sources of God's immanence and presence. They are God as self-revealing and self-giving.

In the innermost recesses of our souls, in the human spirit or pneuma, in the soul of our souls or as the Upanishads might put it, in the cave or lotus of the heart (Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Brihadaranyaka, Swetasvatara Upanishads among others), there dwells the Holy Spirit, and it is there where God and I become one, where the Holy Spirit and the human spirit become one. The Son and Spirit are God as reaching out ad extra, they are the basis of our unity with God, the principles of our deification. They never limit God's presences to and among us.

The sense of the freedom and power and grandeur of God is central to all Catholic theology and Dominican theology in particular. We are familiar with the later opinion of Aquinas in the Summa on the purpose of the Incarnation and whether God would have become incarnate had humanity not sinned (III, 1,3). The opinion as articulated in the Summa is different from Thomas' earlier opinion in the Sentences and different from his master Albert's opinion, who held that God probably would have become incarnate even if Adam had not sinned, although Albert maintained that we cannot be certain of this.¹⁴ Albert's opinion was grounded in the freedom of God and hence its incomprehensibility. We cannot proscribe God's freedom. We do not define God's freedom; God's freedom defines us and comes to us as grace. Nor can God's power be limited. God will be God, and we are to let God be God, and whenever we confine or even define God, it is not God, the God of Jesus Christ, about whom we speak. We are saying more about ourselves than about God. God will be who God will be (Ex 3:14) and is not subject to our prescriptions.

Thomas Aquinas himself shows great awareness of the freedom and power of God. He speaks as a theologian who genuinely knows God, who has met God, who has experienced God. When, in the tertia pars of the Summa (III 3,7), he raises the question whether God could have become incarnate or could become incarnate in more than one numerically distinct human nature, that is more than once, he replies yes. Now Thomas in the Summa is more than aware of the uniqueness of Christ, which he resolves later in the Summa to his greater satisfaction in the famous question 17 of the tertia pars, but yet Thomas is quite aware that nothing can limit God, that God could become incarnate, truly incarnate in our Christian way of understanding incarnation, more than once. This may be hard to comprehend, but for Thomas such is the reality once we know God. The point of these examples is that the Christian dispensation, revelation, in no way limits God's freedom and power. Rather they manifest it.

¹⁴ Donald Goergen, "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on the Motive of the Incarnation," The Thomist 44 (1980): 523-38.

And so to return to dialogue and truth. These two are companions, not adversaries. Can we have one without the other? "What is truth?" is a perennial question. It is not something that we possess, but something that possesses us. There are kinds of truth and layers of truth. There is the truth in knowledge that comes from a correspondence to reality. There is the truth that lies underneath contrasting realities and experiences. There is my personal truth, my Self. There is Truth itself. But the search for truth involves dialogue, with myself, with others, with scholars, with the poor, with both women and men, with people of other religious convictions, with God. Dialogue simply put, is a search for truth. In the end it is the search for God, the path of the seeker. Be wary of the ones who say they love the one they cannot see, but do not love those they can see (1 John 4:20). And likewise be wary of the ones who say they have the truth and no longer need to seek it. Truth calls us into a journey and there are varied companions along the way. We ought to be careful lest we think that we don't need them. Dialogue does not deny the validity of proclamation. But neither can proclamation deny the importance of dialogue. Dialogue is the effort to understand more profoundly the Christ that we do proclaim. The goal of dialogue is truth, its *raison d'être*, its final cause.

There are various levels or kinds or forms of dialogue:¹⁵ the dialogue of life and witness where we interact with one another, the dialogue of human interaction in the quest for a more just and humane world, the dialogue of the heart and soul wherein we come together in prayer, and the dialogue between minds that search intellectually for an understanding that is never once and for all, as well as a profoundly spiritual dialogue wherein we come together person to person and attempt to see what the other sees.¹⁶ Each form of dialogue has its contribution to make to the search for truth. Liberation theologies make us aware that truth is not simply a coming together of minds but human promotion and contextual theologies caution us not to assume that we come to truth or express it in a vacuum. Our God is a God of people. In the end perhaps the contemplative is closest to the truth in knowing that we do not know. He who knows not and knows that he knows not is wise, says Confucius.

For can we really know God? Is God knowable? If I think that I know God, is it really God that I know? Did Job not think that he knew God? After his God-wrestling, did he then know God? Or did he only know God when he understood the question, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4) Both truth and dialogue are grounded in humility. The closer we are to that, the closer we are to truth.

This leads me to one last question. Is dialogue not the path of the future, the path of the new millennium, in our common human search for truth, for ultimate truth, for the divine? Is it not more congruent with what the sciences of complexity are telling us? If

¹⁵ See Dialogue and Proclamation, #42, based on The Attitude of the Church..., # 28-35.

¹⁶ For this latter dialogue, see Panikkar, The Intrareligious Dialogue, 37-39,47-50,61-63,73-75.

truth involves a correspondence with reality, discoveries in science tell us something about the complexity of the universe. That's how the universe is. Modern science has moved toward a new cosmology, chaos theory, and the sciences of complexity.¹⁷ Science itself is teaching us about the unpredictability of the universe, the kind of order that persists within the disorder of the universe, the interconnectedness of all reality, that the universe is made up of disorderly, not chaotic, but interlocking connections, complex systems that thrive in a zone between stagnation (too much order) and anarchy (too much disorder). At each level of complexity, something new emerges, unforeseen, unpredicted, as the evolutionary process gave birth to life, to sentient life, to human life, to religious life. At a certain threshold, complexity is creative and there is novelty in the universe. These "phase transitions" combine both order and chaos, the place wherein the Holy Spirit is particularly alive and active.

Hierarchy plays an important role in this evolutionary process whereby neither too much anarchy nor too much control is desirable.¹⁸ There has to be a hierarchy of control, lest the system become chaotic, but at the same time the hierarchical structures have to be open lest too much control be the stagnation or death of the system. Information needs to flow from the bottom up as well as the top down. Structures need to be based on feedback. These are referred to as complex adaptive systems, and one might describe the church in this way: a network of multiple agents acting in cooperation, with many levels of organization, always in transition and not existing in equilibrium, for equilibrium means death and is not the goal of the system, for it is not stability but life that we seek, not perfection but adaptability. We are at that critical threshold as church in our dialogue with the religions, a critical moment filled with potential, where the fear of chaos is real, and thus the desire for control strong, and yet the complexity itself provides a critical, creative opportunity for cooperation.

Where we go from here cannot be pre-determined before dialogue takes place. We must be careful lest our doctrine concerning the primacy of Christ and the plurality of religions gets "locked in"¹⁹ as the scientists of complexity call it. "Lock in" refers to an outcome that may not be the best but is prematurely chosen and then due to varied factors such as the market in the economic world gets "locked in." Examples include the keyboard on the typewriter and the VHS video system. VHS was chosen over the Beta system in the United States, even though the latter was slightly superior technologically. But by the late 1970s, the VHS videotape format was taking the lead in the market which gave it the advantage. Video stores did not want to stock two different formats and consumers did not want obsolete VCRs, and so they went with

¹⁷ See Mitchell Waldrop, Complexity, The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992). Also see Teilhard de Chardin as well as Ken Wilber and Sri Aurobindo for their integrations of science and mysticism.

¹⁸ On hierarchy as holarchy, and the distinction between healthy and pathological hierarchy, see Ken Wilber, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (Boston: Shambhala, 1995):13-78.

¹⁹ Mitchell Waldrop, 35-46.

the market trend, even though it was technologically inferior.

Likewise the arrangement of letters on the typewriter keyboard were arranged so that typing could not take place too quickly, since the early typewriters could not respond so fast. Thus we end up with the QWERTY factor and are now locked into a keyboard that impedes us. QWERTY are the first six top letters on the keyboard starting from the left. This standard keyboard layout was designed in 1873 to slow typists down so the then existing machines would not jam. Now this keyboard is standard, "locked in" even though not the most efficient technology.

A defined doctrine provides God's people with clarity, a sense of not living in chaos, but it ought not be a "lock in" with no room for its future development. For the history of the Catholic tradition is a history of development. Dialogue provides us a fruitful even if complex moment, and it would be interesting to be able to look back someday from the vantage point of the next millennium and see where we were and what the Holy Spirit had in store for us.

In the dialogue among the religions and in our search for truth, we come back to the Holy Spirit, the source of both unity and diversity, the source of stabilization or conservation and of renovation or rejuvenation. Pope John Paul II himself has said, "One and the same spirit is always the dynamic principle of diversity and unity in the church."²⁰ And the philosopher Ernst Cassirer in his analysis of culture observed, "In all human activities we find a fundamental polarity, which may be described in various ways. We may speak of a tension between stabilization and evolution, between a tendency that leads to fixed and stable forms of life and another tendency to break up this rigid scheme....In all this we feel very distinctly the presence of two different tendencies -- the one leading to the conservation, the other to the renovation and rejuvenation of language. We can, however, scarcely speak of an opposition between these two tendencies."²¹

²⁰ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, apostolic exhortation on the laity, # 20, *Origins* 18 (Feb 9, 1989): 570.

²¹ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (Yale University Press, 1944): 224, 226.

Let us keep open the dialogue. There is much to learn. Let us not get locked in. We cannot yet see where the Spirit is taking us. The Spirit, while inseparable from the Logos, cannot be limited to the already accomplished works of the Logos in history. As Teilhard de Chardin had already perceived, a new cosmology requires a new christology and vice-versa, and both along with ecclesiology will be grounded in pneumatology. Just as this may seem unfathomable, or dangerous, so would Thomas Aquinas, the discovery of a whole new world, and modern medicine have been to our brothers and sisters in the year 1000. But the Spirit cannot be confined by the present; the Spirit is the source of hope in a future that is not completely pre-determined by the past. Dialogue and truth must tread the path into our common human future hand in hand.