A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH: RE-VISIONING WORLDVIEWS FOR RELIGOUS COOPERATION AND HARMONY RATHER THAN COMPETITION AND CONFLICT

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Rather Than Competition and Conflict"

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"Religion cannot come to an end, and a particular religion will be lasting to the degree in which it negates itself as a religion...as long as it breaks through its own particularity. The way to achieve this is not to relinquish one's religious tradition for the sake of a universal concept which would be nothing but a concept. The way is to penetrate into the depth of one's own religion, in devotion, thought and action. In the depth of every living religion there is a point at which the religion loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom and with it to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence."
    --   Paul Tillich, CHRISTIANITY AND THE ENCOUNTER OF THE WORLD
            RELIGIONS, pp. 96-97.

"When the Tao is in the universe the horses haul manure. When the Tao is absent from the world, war horses are bred outside the city."
    --   TAO TE CHING, Poem Forty-Six

"Paul Tillich was convinced that the secular cannot, by definition and in reality, live by itself. That is why he was a theologian, and that is why he believed and argued that religion would never pass away. He was fully secular in fighting against the domination of life by the historical manifestations of the Holy, but he was fully religious in proclaiming the divine depth of the secular in the face of its threatened emptiness."
    --   Jerald C. Brauer, Preface to Paul Tillich, THE FUTURE OF RELIGIONS.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: 'Now at last God has his dwelling among men! He will dwell among and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them.'"
    --   New English Bible, Revelation 21:1-3

ABSTRACT

"A New Heaven and A New Earth:
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Rather Than Competition and Conflict"

Thesis:

Persons and religious communities are very complex entities; they are not possessed of single-faceted, simple, uni-dimensional characters. One cannot document that all individuals are selfish whereas all societies executively restrain individuals for the social good and order, as Sigmund Freud was want to suggest. (Rf. CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS.) One cannot document that individual humans are moral but that societies are immoral in their use of power as Reinhold Niebuhr tried to maintain. (Rf. MORAL MAN AND IMMORAL SOCIETY.) Contrary to what many of my pro-religion students want to suggest, not all religious persons, communities or systems are examples of promoters of peace and harmony. Contrary to what my anti-religion students want to declare, not all religious persons, communities or systems advocate violence, conflict or just war theories. The history of religions and religious persons is a large and deep mixed bag of peace and war, conflict and harmony, creativity and destructiveness, good and evil. Such as it is, such has it been. But that does not mean that is how it has to be. Human persons and groups have created that past; and, out of our existential freedom and responsibility, we can create--i.e., re-create, re-birth and resurrect--a new future. Pragmatically, we can create a "new heaven and a new earth"--certainly within, in inner space, but we even have good and better chances (than earlier eras) for creating it in "outer" space as we, in the historical and cultural realms of our living and breathing brother and sisters around the globe.

INTRODUCTION

Religious persons and religious communities are very complex entities; they are not possessed of simple, single-faceted, uni-dimensional characters. One cannot reasonably document, on the one hand, that all individuals are egocentric and self-seeking whereas all societies (with their legal and social consciences) executively restrain individuals (and their uncivilized ids) for the social good and collective order. This was the interpretive orientation of our father of modern psychology, Sigmund Freud. (Rf. Civilization and Its Discontent; The Future of an Illusion; and Moses and Monotheism.)[1] Emile Durkheim's justification for the use and study of religion was compatible with the Freudian perspective, in that every society needed a socially cohesive agent to bond these potentially chaotic and disordered units, and religion had proven, historically and anthropologically, to be a powerful social "glue" in many human communities.[2] On the other hand, one cannot reasonably document that individuals are basically moral but that societies are immoral in their use of power for self-preservation and domination, as the Protestant ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr tried to maintain. (Rf. Moral Man and Immoral Society; The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vols. I and II; and, Children of Light and Children of Darkness.)[3] William James affirmed that the healthy individual was endowed with a natural and even mystical appetite toward spiritual growth and self-transcendence, which pragmatically and organismically expressed itself unless thwarted and frustrated by self-preserving institutions which embodied social mediocrity.[4] Contrary to what many of my pro-religion students want to suggest, not all religious persons, communities or systems are examples of promoters of peace and harmony. And just as contrary to what many of my anti-religion students want to claim, not all

religious persons, communities or systems advocate violence, justify conflict or pronounce "just war" theories. To be fair and open to the historical data, I have to remind both sides of these generalizations that the history of religions, religious individuals and religious societies constitute a very large and deeply mixed bag of war <u>and</u> peace, conflict <u>and</u> harmony, creativity <u>and</u> destructiveness, good <u>and</u> evil.

Religions and religious values are part and parcel of human cultures. Religious values exist and are created to justify and shape virtually every aspect and activity of cultural and social behavior. No single and simple diagnosis, medicine or prognosis can be rendered from the prospective of the study of religions to telos of war or peace, struggle or ecumenicity. Human persons had groups have created all of our historical past(s); and, out of our existential freedom and responsibility, we can create--i.e., re-create, re-birth, and resurrect--a new future. We can re-write a new future, different from the past--if we <u>will</u>. Pragmatically, we can create a "new heaven and a new earth"[5]--certainly within inner space, but we have even good and better chances (than earlier eras of humankind) for creating it in "outer" space as well, in the historical and cultural realms of our living and breathing fellow humans around the globe. This is the major religious, moral and human calling and challenge of the 21st century, and the resources are realistically available for doing so, if we but <u>will</u>.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Religion was and is not as simple and predictable as Freud and Freudians have assumed. Religion was not just a system of "illusions"--supported by related myths, dreams, magic and taboos--manufactured by the childish minds and psyches of primitive, immature

people to deal with their perceived needs and wants, neuroses and psychoses until they were intellectually grown up and come of age with the epistemology and content of empirical science. Neither individuals or groups, religions or cultures were or are as predictable as Freud assumed and maintained.[6] We have witnessed tremendous religious change in this century, to be sure; and some forms of religious belief and behavior have been eclipsed in favor of other and newer forms of expression. But religions have not died, and new resurgences have occurred; and a broader menu on the religious smorgasbord or communion table of faiths exists now than existed a century ago. They have proven tempting and appetizing for peasants and educated folk alike. Rather than moving into the century of predicted atheism, science and scientism, and human homogeneity, the coming 21st century is clearly going to be one of religious and cultural diversity, a pluralism of identities and values, and (unfortunately) some continued justifications of religious and cultural wars. One of the most popular novels which has been widely read by intellectuals in the latter half of the 20th century, Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, projects a future of five castes of test-tube bred "humanoids" who are chemically controlled in a sterilized, dehumanized world scientism. No one I know believes any longer that there is even a remote chance for such a depersonalized nightmare to come true in actuality. Human beings are diverse; and the religious and cultural systems they construct, symbol and communicate are not unitary. If they were single-faceted and predictable, great thinkers like August Comte, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Sigmund Freud would not have been proven so utterly wrong in their shared conviction that religion would be dead and churches would be museums by now.

But neither can the prediction be trusted--no matter how right-hearted or well-

intended--that piously promises: all we have to do to attain world brotherhood is to become religious and live out our religious convictions; or, we will have world peace if we all believe in God; or, America will be a righteous and religious nation if we just put prayer back into the public schools and school classrooms. Simplistic as these sound, my wife and I do read such sentiments regularly in the Letters to the Editor section of our local midwestern town newspaper. Such sentiments do sound "nice" and are well-meaning, but are proven utterly unrealistic when placed beside the welter of documented scholarship on religious and cultural pluralism and diversity. Not all religious objectives or actions promote peace. Not all religions are pacificistic like Quakers or Moravians.

WAR MYTHOLOGY

Our U.S. and European nations' "just war" criteria were first pulled together and explicated for us by none other than a Christian bishop from North Africa writing in a classical Western work entitled The City of God. This was of course the great St. Augustine justifying the soldiers of the Christian commonwealth in defending the Christian nation from invading neighbors and non-Christian ("pagan") nations. Mythologist Joseph Campbell incurred, and possibly earned, the wrath of more than a few Jews, Christians and classical humanists by pointing out that many of our religious and cultural classics deal with or are even centered on military conflict. In a chapter entitled "Mythologies of War and Peace" he reminds us that the "two greatest works of war mythology in the West are, accordingly, the Iliad and the Old Testament."[7] But he doesn't stop there. He proceeds to point out violent sentiments, descriptions of conflict and justifications of war in the Greek tragedies, Psalms and Deuteronomy, the Albigensian Crusade and the Koran ("jihad"), the Mahabharata and

Bhagavad-Gita, and of course Sun Tzu's The Art of War. He comes to a rather grimly

realistic summary near the end of this chapter as follows:

> There has been from earliest times the idea that war (of one kind or another) is
> not only inevitable and good but also the normal and most exhilarating mode
> of social action of civilized mankind, the waging of war being the normal
> delight, as well as duty, of kings. A monarch neither engaged in nor
> preparing to be engaged in war would be, according to this way of thinking, a
> fool: a "paper tiger."[8]

I would simply add to this last sobering quote from Campbell that if there is usually a

monarch or political leader around preparing for war or actually waging war, there are

usually going to be some religious figures around ready and willing to religiously ratify and

support that war effort. I am not arguing that this religious justification is determined and

inevitable: but I am suggesting that it has been common in the past and not to be

unanticipated.

But if I have interests in promoting peace, which is the central issue and interest of

this conference, why do I remind us that we have often been engaged not only in the

preparations and making of war, but in religiously and morally justifying it as well in our

classical and scriptural documents? I do so to remind us of the sources of war and war

mythologies. They are the same sources for our religion and our cultures, our religious

pluralisms and our cultural diversity. Those sources are human beings and human societies.

If we can create the mythologies and instruments for waging war, we can (and do) create the

mythologies and conditions for promoting peace.

So, then, why do we go to such lengths to justify war? Ruth Benedict in her now-

classic text in sociology, Patterns of Culture, recognized quite casually that "war, is, we

have been forced to admit even in the face of its huge place in our own civilization, an

asocial trait."[9] That is, sooner or later war produces its own chaos which is disruptive of social order and productive human civility. No matter how it is justified and how much it is restrained, it often ends up destroying as much, or more, of the good it was devised to protect than the original aggressor, enemy or invader. Why then justify such an "asocial" trait and chaotic institution, according to Ruth Benedict?

> If we justify war, it is because all peoples always justify the traits of which
> they find themselves possessed, not because war will bear an examination of
> its merits.[10]

But to proceed beyond Benedict's anthropological analysis and to pull it into our present discussion, why do men and women use religious symbols, values and institutions to justify war and conflict--or at least those persons who do use religion to endorse conflict? It is because religion is and does what our best interpreters have said it is and does: religion is employed to provide ultimacy, sacrality, sanctity to those pursuits and causes which religious folk find to pre-occupy them to the point of paramount, ubiquitous, pre-eminent, absorbing concern. That is, we engage our gods and goddesses, our angels and demons, our saviours and our tormentors in our explanations, rationalizations and our justifications of human conflict. To the person who seeks a religious endorsement, the person who pursues conflict as a solution, the religious ratification of that conflict would seem to be a natural result. And we had witnessed it over and over again.

PURSUIT OF PEACEFUL RELATIONSHIPS

As we attempt to both pull together and to project what we have been suggesting, let us compare and contrast Sigmund Freud and Paul Tillich on the future of religion(s). For Freud, religion was an elementary (even juvenile or immature) system of illusory symbols

and wish-fulfillments to satisfy the psychic needs of a primitive people without intellectual maturity. As the 20th Century unfolded, Freud presumed, science would replace these magical superstitions, and religious "illusions" with empirically verifiable facts solidly supported by experiential sense data. Religion was unable to admit its own weaknesses or to correct its own mistakes. It had to be corrected from without, unlike science which could admit to its human fallibility and affirm a methodology of perpetual calling old answers into question and proposing new and better hypotheses, theories and formulas in their place. But he end of the 20th Century (the point where we now sit), science would provide our cultural leadership and our religious institutions and authority systems would be mere museums if anything more than historical memory.

The prospect put forward for us by Paul Tillich is a quite different scenario, and a far more applicable one in the actual situation in which we find ourselves. In sharp contrast to Freud and others, Tillich rejected the "end of the religious age altogether." Tillich also dismissed the possibility of a thorough-going ecumenical syncretism of religions which would be a "mixture of religions" that would destroy the particularity, identity and power of any given individual religion. Nor did he wish to see the victory--whether, evangelical, political, or military--"of one religion over all other religions which would wipe them out in destructive competition and ruthless displacement." In fact, the religiously justified attempt of one religion to convert, dominant and/or displace another religion is one of the many conditions which fuels human conflict, competition and rivalry. We do not need more of that religious rivalry and competition if what we are seeking is peaceful cohabitation and mutual understanding. What we need for peace, civility and humanity is not for religions to

erase or spar with each other; we need for each of them to do better jobs at ultimately civilizing and humanizing themselves. Particular religious institutions may wither; and all enduring religious systems will change--in fact they are constantly changing to some degree. But, religion per se, will not end as long as human beings are human beings. But, says Tillich, "a particular religion will be lasting (only) to that degree in which it negates itself as a religion." Thus any specific religion will be the "bearer of the religious answer as long as it breaks through its own particularity" in the admission and recognition that it itself is not the ultimate or the sacred---it is the pointer to and bearer of the ultimate and the sacred. If it holds ultimacy or sacrality to itself, that is the sin of idolatry. Its own idolatry and self-seeking prevent it from being the bearer or pointer to the ultimate religious answer. Such is not a simple accomplishment. How is it to be achieved?

> The way to achieve this is not to relinquish one's religious tradition for the
> sake of a universal concept which would be nothing but a concept. The way is
> to penetrate into the depth of one's religion, in devotion, thought and action.
> In the depth of every living religion there is a point at which the religion loses
> its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity,
> elevating it to spiritual freedom and with it to a vision of the spiritual presence
> in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence.[11]

In my judgment, what I hear Tillich suggesting to me is that I not try to impose my human and religious values on others but to spend my energies in being more thoroughly and deeply spiritually fulfilled so that I have the capacity to recognize that depth of spirituality in other human beings, cultures and religions. Not that those other persons, cultures and religions won't have differences from me and mine. They most certainly will. But those differences will not be obstacles, because I and they will pursue the depth-dimension of the sacred beneath the surface of all of the temporal, local and the ephemeral expressions of the other.

CONCLUSION

Absent the above discussion and context, my suggestion and affirmation of creating/re-creating "a new heaven and a new earth" might seem any one or all of the following: unrealistic naivete; undisciplined idealism of the highest sort; a return to supernaturalism and apocalyticism; or even a return to the optimism of 19th century liberalism. Nothing of the sort, in my judgment. On the contrary, who is responsible for our former views of "heaven and earth?" We are. Who is responsible for former mythologies of way and mythologies of peace? Human beings are. Who spelled out our former views of heaven and hell, damnation and salvation? We and our predecessor fellow and sister humans have. Who has been responsible for our wars and conflicts, our competitions and displacements, our enmities and our rejections of others? We human mortals have. That being the case, and our having the ability, energy and imagination to do all that, why can't we turn the same abilities, energies and vision to the creation of peaceable kingdoms and relationships? I actually think we can. If we had the capability of waging all those former wars and destructions, I am certain we have all the talents and resources we need to wage peace. The question to me is <u>will</u>. Do we really and actually want, and want to WILL, peace? That's the question. It is not CAN we, in my judgment. It is, do we truly WILL the peaceable relationships of a "new heaven and a new earth" we have every resource for imagining and re-imagining. We and our kinspeople created and sustained the mythologies of war, and the old vision of heaven and earth. We also have the equal freedom and possibilities--we and of kinspeople--creating comparably powerful and attractive mythologies of peace, and "a new heaven and a new earth." But WILL we WILL those realities? That is for us to address and answer.

But I do not wish to conclude on a strictly academic note. I discern
that given the thematic concerns of this conference, the conference success
is not fulfilled or assured by the production of academic papers. It certainly
leads to that with a very relevant and rich topic. But, in my judgment, the
conference _telos_ projects beyond academic to personal spirituality, family
morality, and the transformation of the full range of global relationships.
It is a wholistic vision, as any truly religious vision is, according to Tillich
and Eliade. Without speaking for anyone else, the following constitute a few
of the spontaneous implications of the conference theme and my comments relative
to the nature of relationship between religion and the multiple dimensions of
peace.

1) Peace must be pursued, experienced and become pervasive with the
selfhood of the individual first--prior to its projection, edification
and multiplication into the world around us. Peace includes the
integrity, health, and unity of being of the entire human selfhood.
This is the closest and most intimate spiritual microcosm that we
experience and we must come to a sense of the harmony of self before
we will be able to hear the sacred syllable of the larger cosmos without
and around us. We must be reconciled to a wholeness within our selves.

2) We must come into a peaceful, healthy restorative relation with the
earth--the natural universe, Earth Mother, Mother Gaia. We cannot have
clean and nourishing fluid within ourselves if we continue polluting her
streams and currents, soils and air.

3) No one of us has the solution or resources for creating peace among all
religions and societies of humankind. It requires the whole of the family
of man and woman. Major world conflicts and problems are caused

not just isolated individuals or the few. The ills and the causes
are legion and collective. Reconciliation, atonement and tranquility
on a global scale requires nothing short of global resources.

4) The divisiveness and fragmentation of all localized allegiences must
be transcended for the good of **larger** spiritual unity. Each and all
of us will be local persons with particular identities and allegiences,
but rather than being committed to one exclusive sub-race, committed
to one exclusive denomination, surrendered to one exclusive nationality,
we will be spiritually enlisted to universal humanity, spiritually
grafted into a brotherhood-sisterhood of the human race, and spiritually
patriotized into the nationhood of earth.

5) Every nation, society and region needs to views its young people, its
children, as its most important resource--not its forests or minerals,
its oil or its jewels, its military or its technology. Its YOUTH. And
the majority of social programs need to begin and end with maximizing
the resources for raising, educating, civilizing and humanizing those
young people under the healthiest and most advantageous circumstances
possible.

6) Family identity, stability, unity and continuity must be held paramount
and sacrosanct. The family unit needs to be re-viewed and reaffirmed
as the basic social unit and state of human existance. It must not be
viewed as an alternative or optional state or condition. There are in-
alienable rights to individual personhood, at least within our national
democracies in the world; but these should not been seen to diminish or
nullify the ontological role and responsibilities of the human family.
There may be and are different ways different sorts of human families
are organized and constituted; but for the health of the youthful human

are organized and constituted; but for the health of the youthful human organism, the family unit and network of nurturing relationships cannot be displaced, supplanted or transcended. Family well-being is essential for human well-being—individual or social, religious or cultural, local or global.

7) Economic systems and structures must be much more severely critiqued in relation to their abilities to fulfill human needs and to maximize wholistic human development. Economic systems and structures do not exist for their own sake replication or profit. They exist to con-tribute to the mush larger, multi-dimensional nature of the human being and the human society. Economic systems which exist for their own goods and replication alone are as idolatrous and short-sighted as the religion which requires itself to be the end of all worship—not God, not the ulti-mate, not the spiritual energy of the whole of life. Economic structures in the contemporary world are tempted in multiple ways to be totally self-absorbed and self-serving rather than the human beings, the human commun-ities and the entire ecosphere of all life that is sacred.

8) And if peace is to be religiously viewed, affirmed, expressed and anchor-ed, there must be a peaceful accord and harmony with the ultimate dimen-sion and inclusivity. We will each and all symbol and name it different-ly, reverence and respect it uniquely, award worship and veneration crea-tively and diversely. But if we plunge ourselves into the spiritual depth of that ultimate, I am confident we will be immersing ourselves in the one self-same ocean or spiritual reservoir of all life and erergy. And in the depth of that kind of ultimacy and spirituality, we will be giving the ultimate welcome to our children to a legacy of life and peace. And in this spirit may we share the welcome of First Person, Mary Clearing-Sky.

A Message for Our Children

Welcome to the world. Thank you for choosing our family. We will take good care of you. We will remember to encourage your efforts to crawl and walk and talk and grow in many ways. We will teach you safe places to play. We will teach you safe ways to hunt and gather food and fuel. We will teach you how to protect yourself from danger. We will teach you how to play. Let us laugh, and play and clown. We will teach you how to pray, how to dance, how to act at ceremonies. We will teach you how to seek wisdom. We will teach you how to treat the earth. We will teach you how to rest and relax and enjoy beauty. We will teach you the herbs and medicines of the earth. We will teach you how to develop your mind and care for yourself spiritually, that you are rich with many feelings, that your health and strength are important. We will teach you to care for your self, other people, other creatures, the Earth, the Sun, the Moon, the Directions. We will teach you how to give thanks. We will teach you how to forgive yourself if you make a mistake. We will teach you how to laugh, and not feel shamed, by error. We will teach you who the wise ones are who can teach you other important lessons. Be confident, my child, we will take care of you.

Mary Clearing-Sky, Ph.D., Grandma
Michigan State University

NOTES

1.   Rf. especially to Sigmund Freud, <u>Civilization</u> <u>and</u> <u>Its</u> <u>Discontents</u>, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1961; Sigmund Freud, <u>The</u> <u>Future</u> <u>of</u> <u>An</u> <u>Illusion</u>, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1961; and, Sigmund Freud, <u>Moses</u> <u>and</u> <u>Monotheism</u>, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage Press, 1967).

2.   Rf. especially to Emile Durkheim, <u>The</u> <u>Elementary</u> <u>Forms</u> <u>of</u> <u>Religious</u> <u>Life</u>, trans. T. W. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965). Also, Robert A. Nisbet, <u>The</u> <u>Sociology</u> <u>of</u> <u>Emile</u> <u>Durkheim</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

3.   Rf. especially to Reinhold Neibuhr, <u>The</u> <u>Nature</u> <u>and</u> <u>Destiny</u> <u>of</u> <u>Man:</u> <u>A</u> <u>Christian</u> <u>Interpretation</u>, Vols. I & II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941); and, Reinhold Niebuhr, <u>Leaves</u> <u>From</u> <u>the</u> <u>Notebook</u> <u>of</u> <u>a</u> <u>Tamed</u> <u>Cynic</u> (New York: World Publishing Company, 1929). Also, Richard Fox, <u>Reinhold</u> <u>Niebuhr:</u> <u>A</u> <u>Biography</u> (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985).

4.   Rf. especially to William James, <u>Varieties</u> <u>of</u> <u>Religious</u> <u>Experience</u> (New York: Random House, Modern Library, 1901-1902). These were James classic Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion delivered in Edinburgh in 1901-1902. James has been receiving renewed interest and attention in recent years, especially in view of his thought possibly being an American forecast of post-modern issues long before the now-popular European "post-modernists."

5.   <u>The</u> <u>New</u> <u>English</u> <u>Bible</u> <u>With</u> <u>the</u> <u>Apocrypha</u> (New York: Oxford University Press & Cambridge University Press, 1970), Revelation 21:1-2.

6.   Rf. note 1 above.

7.   Joseph Campbell, <u>Myths</u> <u>To</u> <u>Live</u> <u>By</u> (New York: Arkana, Viking Penguin, 1972), p. 174. The entire Chap. IX is devoted to a summative assessment of the "Mythologies of Peace and War," pp. 169-200.

8.   Campbell, <u>Myths</u>. . .,p. 198.

9.   Ruth Benedict, <u>Patterns</u> <u>of</u> <u>Culture</u> (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1934), p. 29.

10.   Benedict, <u>Patterns</u> . . ., p. 2.

11.   Paul Tillich, <u>Christianity</u> <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Encounter</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>World</u> <u>Religions</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 96-97.

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