

The study of religions and the dialogue of religions (Shûkyôgaku to shûkyôtaiwa)

Michael Pye

University of Marburg, Germany

Email: pye@mailers.uni-marburg.de

Distinguishing between science of religions and dialogue of religions

The purpose of this paper is to consider some of the ways in which the scientific study of religions¹ might have implications for the continuing process of dialogue between religions. While the study of religions itself is a non-religious activity, the dialogue between religions, on the other hand, certainly is in some sense a religious activity. It involves the presentation and exchange of religious experiences and religious positions. It is possible for such dialogues to take place without reference to the study of religions. However it is possible that those involved in such dialogues might benefit from the perspectives opened up in the scientific study of religions. The present paper, based on a lecture given at Ôtani University in Kyôto, makes some suggestions in this direction.²

Since the study of religions is in principle a *non*-religious, scientific undertaking, it does not, as a secular enterprise, promote or take part in religious programmes. This may seem to suggest that there is not and should not be any relationship between the study of religions and dialogue between religions. From one point of view this is correct. How can "the study of religions" have anything to do with any dialogues between religions at all, apart from simply observing them? It would be easy for specialists in the study of religions simply to withdraw from the arena of public discussion. This would have a certain legitimacy, and some specialists may prefer to adopt that course. However, if we are not oblivious to the human situation as a whole, and if we take the totality of society and culture seriously, perhaps something more should be expected, even from specialists.

If we take a strict view of the "science of religions" we might adopt the statement of the eighteenth century Japanese thinker Tominaga Nakamoto at the end of chapter 24 of *Shutsujôkôgo*, where he says "I am not a follower of Confucianism, nor of Taoism, nor Buddhism. I watch their words and deeds from the side and then privately debate them." (*Emerging from Meditation*, p.168) In principle I agree with this view. Only a science of religion which is independent of particular religious viewpoints can be expected to carry out steady, systematic observation and provide a worthwhile analysis of religious systems (c.f. for example, Pye 1994, 1999, 2000(a), 2000(b)).

"Observation" here does not merely mean "looking". Rather it implies looking with a view to

1 In German there is the more compact term *Religionswissenschaft*, which is what meant here, and this is usually rendered in Japanese as *shûkyôgaku*.

2 The lecture was first delivered in Japanese on the basis of bilingual notes on 30th October 2000. The present text was finalised in English and subsequently translated into Japanese, a labour for which the author is very grateful. Thanks are also due to the organisers of the lecture and seminar programme, in which Gerhard Marcel Martin from Marburg also participated. The programme was conceived as a continuation of the 3rd Rudolf Otto Symposium held in Marburg 1999, which is mentioned again in the discussion below.

understanding, analysing and explaining. In other words it implies the full range of "scientific" reflection in relation to the particular field of religious systems. While this is not the place to provide a general introduction to the methods and theory of the study of religions, it may be helpful to indicate the four main steps in such research. They can be set out as follows.

- (preliminary theory)
- (1) elucidation
 - (2) characterisation
 - (3) analysis
 - (4) correlation

(subsequent theory) Of these the first two steps are "recognitional", that is to say, they are concerned with perceiving and understanding religious phenomena. The second two are "explanatory", that is, they *explain* both by means of an analysis of internal structures (step 3) and by establishing correlations with other social and cultural factors (step 4). While moving through these four steps both the relevance of comparison and the possibility of tension with the believers increases. This is referred to as the "tension with believers factor" (TWB factor, see Pye 1999). It is important for those who study religions to be aware of the increasing level of this "tension with believers factor". If it is high during the recognitional steps, there is something wrong with the method of enquiry. If it is untypically low during the explanatory steps, this may suggest that the explanations are weak or it may suggest something interesting about the nature of the religion under study.

It is important therefore clearly to distinguish between the activity of carrying out religious dialogues and the activity of studying religions as systems. Religious dialogues may be part of the field of study. Because of the complexity of the field of study, which is not only a historical field but also a living, active part of contemporary culture, it is natural for the specialist to be drawn close to the events of the day, in a sense to participate in them. This is an opportunity for participant observation, and sometimes even of observant participation. However it is also possible, and indeed probable, that some of the theoretical perspectives of the study of religions could be relevant to the future progress of dialogues between religions. In the next section therefore a few reasons will be adduced for encouraging a close proximity between the study of religions and the various activities of religious dialogue.

Why is the study of religions relevant to the dialogue of religions?

The representatives of various religious organisations who engage in dialogues with each other are usually most sincere and respectful in their approach. However, even with the best of intentions it is possible for misunderstandings to occur. How can a real dialogue between religions come about unless accurate information and instructive analysis is available? It may be helpful therefore if specialists in the study of religions are permitted in some way to share in dialogue events when they take place. Even though they do not *represent* a particular religion, they may nevertheless be able to assist in the work of elucidation and analysis. Thus their participation may help to stabilise and facilitate the process of dialogue in particular situations.

What sometimes happens is that the sensitive participants in a dialogue between religions, after making their first contact, in effect leave their committed positions to one side and begin to take up the study of religions for themselves. They realise and understand that accurate and reliable knowledge is required, not only about their own religion, but about the other religion also. They may also press forward to a comparative analysis. Dietrich Korsch, for example, a systematic theologian participating in the 1999 Symposium in Marburg between Shin Buddhism and Protestant Theology, noticed that it would be interesting to analyse comparatively the formal structures of different religions (Barth/Minoura/Pye 2000, 163-164). Since such an analysis would be independent of the specific details of the belief contents of any particular religion, it amounts to a reinvention of the science of religion, or at least of part of it. It would be similar to what I have called "comparative hermeneutics" (Morgan and Pye 1973), and more generally it would be related to the analysis of the dynamics of religious tradition, on which see further below.

Of course, this process of analysis does not *always* take place. In some cases, after an initial exploration, a concluding solution is found by dialogue partners which simply favours the "home" religion. In that case no further information is really perceived to be necessary. In other words the *religious* position becomes dominant again, and the "study of religions" is left to one side. If a person has faith in the name of Jesus, for example, why should he or she be interested in studying various religions and analysing their similarities? It will probably seem to such a person to be more valuable to emphasise difference. The same thought may occur to a person who has faith in Amida's fundamental vow (*hongan*). However, while such simple faith may be necessary, and even sufficient, for living and dying, the questions of reason remain, even if they are secondary questions. Thus, as soon as we begin to *think* about it all, the study of religions in a comparative perspective arises inevitably once again.

Finally, and not least, important social and political discussions about the legal position of various religions are being carried out today as never before, although these discussions also have a considerable history. Should historically strong religions like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Shinto have a privileged position in society or not? If so, what about newer, smaller religious groups and movements, of which there are very many. Should these even be permitted to exist? Religions which have come under criticism recently from this point of view are Aum Shinrikyô (in Japan), Scientology (in Germany) and Falungong (in China). These have all been regarded, with greater or less evidence being adduced, as threatening to undermine established society. At the time of their

origins the same was said with regard to Buddhism and Christianity. Of course, all of these religions are not just the same as each other. Moreover some cause more social disruption and suffering than others. But how will social commentators, journalists and politicians be able to discuss these matters properly unless they have clear and reliable information about the various religions in question? For this, the study of religions is necessary.

With all this in mind, it appears that it would be valuable for those engaged in religious dialogues to take the study of religions seriously and to assist in its development. This is not because specialists in the study of religions necessarily have more knowledge at their disposal. In fact, when a specialised dialogue is taking place the representatives on each side are almost certain to have more specialised knowledge, at least about their own side. In wider discussions, however, the study of religions may be able to provide a theoretical reference point which can be shared by those who otherwise have different religious or other convictions.

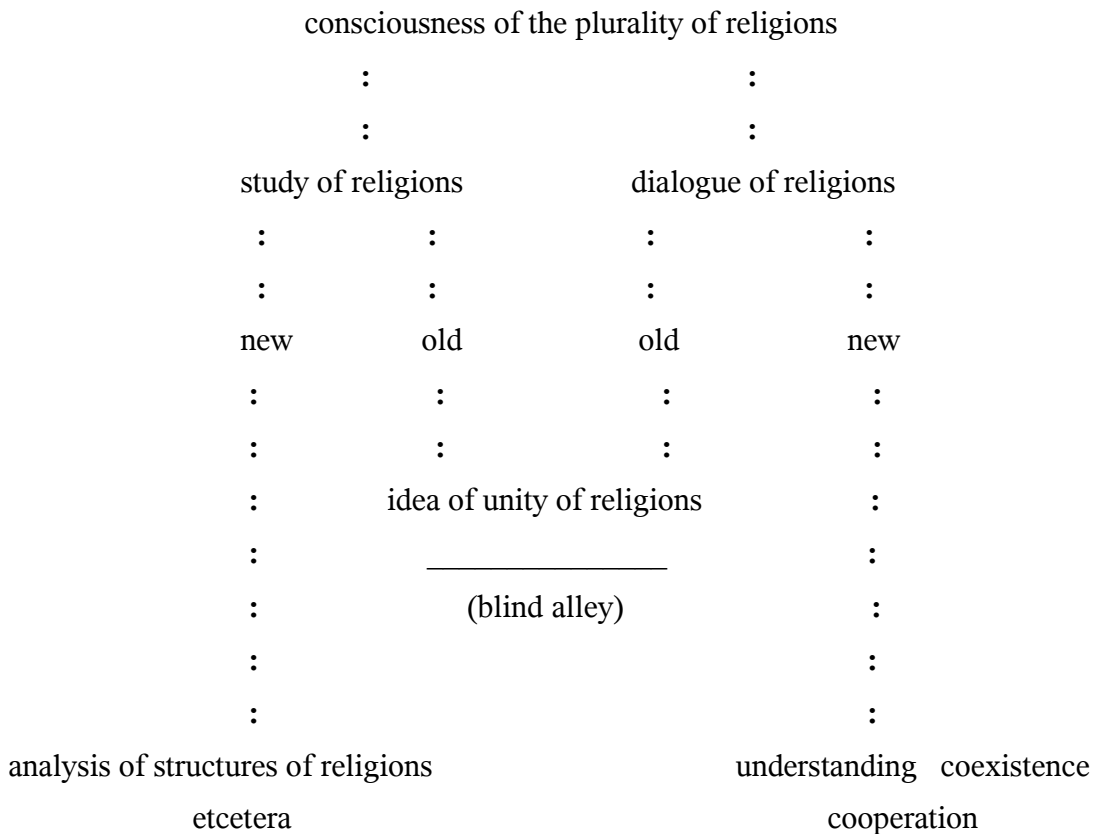
A shared presupposition

A most important underlying presupposition which is shared by the scientific study of religions and all forms of religious dialogue, different though these are, is the perception of the plurality of religions. Significantly, it was one of the starting points for the European Enlightenment's reflection about religion, and at the same time for the eighteenth century Japanese thinker Tominaga Nakamoto, mentioned above. It is significant that the quotation given earlier is drawn from his chapter on the "three teachings", an expression which symbolises the *plurality* of religions. In the study of religions itself, therefore, the perception of the plurality of religions is not problematic. It is a natural state of affairs.

This presupposition can be seen in a discussion paper by sociologist of religion Peter Berger, published in the first issue of *Buddhist-Christian Studies* under the title "The pluralistic situation and the coming dialogue between the world religions" (1981, 31-41). His concluding question was how two religions, such as Buddhism and Christianity, can be "true *together*"? This question replaces the older western question about *which* religion is true and why. However we should not get carried away here by the idea that there might be an easy solution. Even if some Buddhists and some Christians agree on a selected "something", there are so many religions in the world as a whole that it is difficult to see how they can all be true "together" unless the statements which they make, or which arise by implication, are relatively meaningless. So there remains an open philosophical question about the nature of truth claims in religion and the criteria by which it might be meaningful to assess them. While the scientific study of religions is not directly concerned with the philosophical assessment of truth claims advanced by religions, it may be able to assist in their identification and clarification.

Although the same presupposition underlies many well-meaning approaches to religious dialogue or "inter-faith" programmes, the perception of the plurality of religions *may* seem to be problematic from the point of view of religious conviction or commitment. This is because the existence of diverse religious orientations may seem to relativise the truth or value of the "home" religion, thereby creating danger. In other religious understandings, however, the plurality of religions is not regarded as a problem because the final truth is simply regarded as going beyond them all. Thus

historically, the emergence of the comparative study of religions (in their plurality) has often been associated with the view that there is a common principle or essence underlying them all. Nowadays however this idea is widely regarded as a blind alley. As a result, thinking about the plurality of religions separates into two directions. In connection with the scientific study of religions, the unity of religions is not even necessarily regarded as a reality, and certainly not as an objective. The study of religions concentrates on the analysis of religions, while dialogue between religions concentrates on mutual understanding, coexistence and cooperation. These relations can be shown by means of a simple flow-chart, as follows.



Religious solutions to the perception of plurality

At this point, looking at it from an observer's point of view, it will be helpful to note that there are various ways in which dialogue between religions has been approached by religiously oriented people. Some of these are highly organised and some are rather informal. While in general the sincerity of the participants need not be questioned there may be a multiple motivation. Sometimes, for example, an important function is to achieve a public relations effect within their own religious community.

First, well established religious organisations discover, on the margins of their institutions, that there is a problem of correlation with so-called "other" religions. This problem is sometimes addressed negatively and polemically, and sometimes constructively and cooperatively. As a result there is a tradition of writing, especially in Christian theology, about the relationship between Christianity and "other faiths". Often, the question of how to think about the "other" religions is left to a secondary, relatively unimportant position in the theological system. This habit of thinking has occasionally been criticised by those who study the general history of religions (Smart 1962, Pye 1976, 1979). Usually there is a clear conception of the religion which forms the starting point, and a less clear understanding of the "other" religions which have to be taken into account. This holds good both for those with a negative view of the religions (e.g. Karl Barth) and in some cases for those who take a more positive view (e.g. Hans Küng). In any case the attempt is made, perhaps understandably enough, somehow to fit the various "other" religions into the worldview of the starting point.

It is of course not only the Christian tradition which has produced reflection upon its own procedures in this regard. Consider for example the instructive title *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation. The Historical Development of the Honji Suijaku Theory* (Matsunaga 1969), in which the thought processes leading up to that particular solution are studied in detail. Various attempts have been made to chart systematically the options which are available in the correlation of an "own" tradition with an "other" tradition, a recent substantial study being that by Andreas Grünschloss in *Der eigene und der fremde Glaube* (1999). While this work addresses a theological audience in some parts (and indeed the author describes himself as a *Grenzgänger*, that is, a frontier-crosser) the main intention is to analyse possible positions and procedures on the basis of the observation of several religions.

Second, there are more recently founded religions which, from their very inception, have a point of view about the integration or mutual harmony of existing religions. The Japanese religion Ananaikyô may be mentioned as an example. Other examples which are globally active are the Unification Church which originated in Korea and the Baha'i religion, which originated in Iran. Such religions start out with a view about the relationship between various religions for the simple reason that at the time of their conception it is evident that there already are other well organised religions in existence. It is therefore a natural, almost a necessary requirement to say what part these play in the new message. Interestingly, although there are quite a lot of religions which somehow assert "the unity" of all religions, they do not usually cooperate with each other. On the contrary they continue to offer a distinctive, superior message.

Third, there are several interreligious or "interfaith" organisations which operate independently of the institutionalised religions, e.g. the World Congress of Faiths, the World's Parliament of Religions, and the recently founded United Religions. In general these organisations are supported by individuals who themselves have an extremely positive attitude towards the various religions of the world. In fact there is quite a long history of such "interfaith organisations". Indeed, in view of the rapid development of global consciousness in the twentieth century it is perhaps surprising that these organisations are not even stronger than they are. There are various possible reasons for this. For one thing, the activists who support them either come from small religious groups themselves, like the Brahma Kumaris active in the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford, England, or they are *non-typical* members of larger religions, e.g. Anglican or Catholic priests acting with at best very tenuous hierarchical legitimation for their interfaith work. Moreover the various interfaith movements to some extent compete with each other as organisations, each with their own leaders and characteristic interests.

Fourth, there have been a small number of clearly organised dialogues between truly representative groups from established religions. Such dialogues are very demanding, for the simple reason that there is a very strong sense of responsibility to the specific religious traditions concerned, together with a real need for new knowledge and new awareness of the partner tradition. This pattern may turn out to be more significant, in the long run, than has usually been recognised. Let two such dialogues be briefly noted here as examples.

The first example is a well-structured meeting between Tenrikyô and Catholicism, held at the Gregorian University in Rome 1998. This was accompanied by an informative exhibition about the Tenrikyô religion. The proceedings were published shortly afterwards (Tenrikyô). While the contents of the discussions were serious, it cannot be disputed that the relative organisational strength of the two religions is very different. The dialogue itself did not seem to be one-sided at the time. However, as the participants themselves were certainly aware, there is a considerable imbalance of size between these two dialogue partners. Because of this, the significance of the dialogue for the Tenrikyô side was considerably greater than it was for the Catholic side. The vast majority of Catholics, even of clergy and teachers, will probably never hear that this dialogue took place, whereas on the Tenrikyô side it is much better known. As an additional feature, it may be noted that the joint organisers of this dialogue conference consciously sought the participation of four specialists in the study of religions, who not only produced their own papers but also moderated some of the discussions.³

A recent dialogue with a similar structure was that conducted between representatives of Jôdo Shinshû, mainly but not exclusively from Ôtani University, Kyôto, and representatives of the Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Marburg. This took place in Marburg in the spring of 1999. The special feature of this dialogue is that it was already well known, in the background, that there are most interesting structural similarities in the structures of faith, belief and practice between these two religions. It must be said that the intellectual level of the contributions from both sides was very demanding. This meant that great efforts had to be made as far as

³ The four were: Martin Kraatz (Marburg), Johannes Laube (München), Michael Pye (Marburg) and Ninian Smart (Santa Barbara).

linguistic translation and interpretation are concerned. It also meant that a serious process of getting to know the other tradition was set in motion, which would not otherwise have occurred for most of the participants. The event was accompanied not only by an exhibition of books and scrolls pertaining to Shin Buddhism, but also by a *gongyō* service carried out by representatives of the Higashi Honganji in the festive lecture hall (the "Alte Aula") of the university. Needless to say, this dialogue is part of a long and complex interaction between Buddhism and Christianity which has been documented and discussed in some detail by writers such as John D'Arcy May (1984), Michael von Brück and Whalen-Lai (1997) and Perry Schmidt-Leukel (1992). However a special feature of this particular case is that the dialogue took place between representative *groups*, probably for the first time between these two well balanced dialogue partners. It may also be noted that in this case, too, a mediatory function was carried out by specialists in the study of religions. The documentation of this Marburg dialogue has been published both in German and in Japanese (Barth/Minoura/Pye 2000).

We can see from these examples that it is possible, and indeed desirable, for "the study of religions" to maintain its independent character, even while specialists take part in the complex situation of dialogues.

Dominant models of religion dependent on cultural difference

There are various ways in which the leading features of religions, as studied independently, should be taken into account in the context of dialogues between religions. Some of these features are a function of cultural difference. Others arise unavoidably out of the systematic and comparative analysis of religions. It is the very purpose of the scientific study of religion to develop such models which should be relevant in various different cultures. These features are therefore regular, rather than culturally diverse. First, however, let it be recognised that, in the various cultural regions of the world, dominant models of religion are current which are *not* the same. These models, though sub-scientific, are very influential.

A more detailed account of such models has been attempted elsewhere, and only a few summary details will be given here.⁴ In Latin America, for example, we have an evident juxtaposition of Catholicism on the one hand and pre-conquest religious systems and elements thereof on the other hand. The interaction between these two has provided a classic model for studies of religion in Latin America, whether they have been approached from a religious (Catholic) point of view or an "anthropological" point of view. Now consider the main parameters in western Europe. They are different. Catholicism and anti-catholic secularism on the one hand and Protestantism and post-protestant secularism on the other hand provide the basic map. Recent phenomena such as New Age religiosity are always considered against this background. Turning now to Africa, the time when it was presumed that "Africans" were simply without religion altogether has now long passed. Nowadays a four-fold pattern is widely presupposed consisting of indigenous religions, commonly referred to as "African traditional religions", secondly Christianity in its Roman Catholic and World Council of Churches forms, thirdly Islam, and fourthly African independent religions which have

4 The two following paragraphs are abbreviated from a more detailed treatment of this subject under the title "Difference and coherence in the worldwide study of religions", a lecture delivered at Boston University and due for publication elsewhere.

arisen in response to the colonial and missionary period. These are the ever-recurring elements among the subjects chosen for study not only by Africanists in general, but more importantly by specialists on religion working within Africa, by Africans and non-Africans alike. This already gives three different models of religion which are deeply rooted in the cultures concerned.

In Asia it is notable that the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty in China decided to develop a policy on religion and therefore set about defining its contours with the help of a short treatise on the subject, the *Sanjiaolun*. Beginning with the already well established idea of the "three teachings" (that is, Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism) he also took account of three other elements in the total pattern. These were the rites of the state, the general belief in a network of gods and spirits providing support for the teachings of Buddhism and Daoism, and lastly teachings which lead people astray and which are therefore to be forbidden. To this model we may add the veneration of ancestors, which provides the main subject matter for de Groot's famous treatment of what he called *The Religious System of China* (1892). In various forms this model has persisted in the various East Asian states influenced by the Chinese literary, intellectual and political tradition. One of the main features of this model is that political registration and in some cases control of religions have an established history. By contrast, for example, this is not the case in Brazil. The political importance of the East Asian model definitely has an effect on what many scholars in those countries think they are studying. In Japan, for example, specialists in religion are always familiar with the yearbook of statistics (*Shūkyō Nenkan*) and other registration material published by the Ministry of Education (Monbushō). It contributes, as an underlying assumption, to the determination of their field of study.

These models may seem to be very simplified. However the point is precisely that such underlying models indeed are very simple. The persons taking part in dialogues between religions need to be aware of the persistent features of the dominant model of religion in their own cultural area. For example, representatives of Shin Buddhism, or those who enter into dialogue with them, should remember that the veneration or care of ancestors is a permanent feature of the dominant religious model in Japan. It may not be a significant part of Shin Buddhist doctrine. Nevertheless, unlike prayers for this-worldly benefits (*genzeriyaku*), which are rejected on doctrinal grounds, the veneration of ancestors is accepted in the context of Shin Buddhism as a normal part of religious activity.

On taking account of all four main aspects of religion

The scientific study of religions attempts to make field analyses in which many more elements are taken into account, and which are therefore more complex than the dominant cultural models mentioned above, at least at the descriptive level. On the other hand it also seeks to develop unified analytical models which are relevant in the various different cultures. Here, once again, simplicity is sought. But this should be the simplicity of science, not the simplicity of cultural assumptions.

As a starting point let us take the general morphology of religion. It has often been pointed out that religion is not only a matter of the head, or for that matter of the heart, and that there are other aspects which need to be taken into account. Looking at the morphology of religion from the standpoint of the general study of religions, it will prove correct to delineate four main aspects which need to be considered in every case, namely the conceptual or symbolic, the subjective or affective, the behavioural and the social. Each of these stands in some relationship to the others, as I have explained in more detail at various times (Pye 1972, 1994).

Unfortunately, even well known theorists of religion sometimes completely ignore one or other of these aspects. The five dimensions of religion referred to by Stark and Glock (1968) for example, and often quoted by others, completely omit the social aspect. Alternatively, too many aspects or dimensions are differentiated, thus confusing the picture. Thus Glock and Stark in the same work propose both a "belief dimension" and a "knowledge dimension", which both clearly involve conceptual elements. The distinction between "belief" and "knowledge" therefore, admitted by them to be close, should be relegated to a secondary level. It is in any case problematic because it arises out of a particular problem characteristic of the western tradition in the philosophy of religion and has no interculturally convincing base. It would lead to far afield to discuss here the many competing accounts of "dimensions" or aspects of religion. Summarily stated, as far as the general study of religions is concerned, there really does not seem to be any reason for departing from a perception of religious systems which takes each of the four main aspects of religion into account. Any further differentiation should be left to a secondary stage in the analysis.

The point to note here is that these four main aspects, in so far as they provide a stable and comprehensive morphological starting point for specialists in the study of religions, also should be taken seriously by participants in religious dialogues. In other words, dialogue is not only in the head. There is, secondly, an affective aspect also. Thirdly, it is also possible to carry out dialogue "by doing", for example by taking part in joint meditation exercises or social welfare activity. Finally, the dialogue will be carried out by persons who in some ways stand in a social relationship of some kind, whether it is highly official or relatively tenuous. It is not possible to take examples of all these aspects here. Let the point be illustrated, most briefly, with reference to the dialogue between Shin Buddhism and Protestant Christianity.

Most frequently, interest has been shown in the various ways in which the conceptual apparatus of the two traditions can be understood. In particular the idea is current that modes of thinking might be transferred from one tradition to the other in a fruitful way. It has been argued, for example, that the concept of demythologisation can be transferred from debates in Christian theology to the interpretation of the figure of Amida Buddha and the Pure Land. What do "mythological" concepts

mean existentially? In the other direction the suggestion has been discussed that the idea of skilful means might be transferred from Buddhism to Christianity (Pye 1990, 1998, Sharma 1990, Hick 1993). It has also been suggested, during the Marburg symposium, that a "deontologisation" of leading concepts might be undertaken, such as is familiar in Mahayana Buddhism, but which has hitherto been viewed with more caution in Christianity. These are matters for discussion by experts in the two traditions. However it would appear that an active development of ideas in these two directions would lead to a much closer mutual appreciation developing between the intellectual representatives of the two traditions. What should be noticed however is that it would probably also lead to a shift in the *affective* aspect on both sides. That is to say, people would begin to *feel* differently about the symbolic systems with which they are familiar. They would, possibly, develop a different kind of "religiosity", to use the psychologists' term.

But what about the other aspects? What about entering into a dialogue of behaviour, or a dialogue of institutional relationships? This of course is not easy, though the history of religious dialogues is full of examples. Some things may seem to be possible, like joint meditation between Zen Buddhists and Catholics, but others not, like joint recitation of the *nenbutsu* or joint participation in a eucharistic service. One of the regular practices carried out at the Higashi Honganji by the believers (*monto*) is a cleaning programme, understood to be a religious activity expressing gratitude. Perhaps it would be conceivable for a group of believers from the Protestant church in Hessen to visit Japan and assist in this activity! That would be an example of dialogue "by doing", representing the the aspect of religious behaviour.

These of course are only illustrations. The main, underlying point is that in so far as the scientific study of religion seeks a balanced view of the phenomena under study by taking account of each of the four main aspects, then the same stable view may be used as a resource and as a corrective in the planning of religious dialogues.

Primal religions and critical religions

Let us now turn to a fundamental distinction in the typology of religions which appears to command a certain assent. This, too, has implications for dialogues between religions. Though the same general distinction may be current under varied terminology, the terms "primal" and "critical" are preferred here. "Critical religions" is a term used to include the sub-categories of soteriological, awareness and guidance religions, avoiding an undue emphasis on only one of these sub-categories. The point is simply that a "critical" religion distances itself in some way from the accepted religious culture of the time, creating a difference. To illustrate with simple examples, Buddhism is a critical form of religion over against Brahmanism (i.e. the "Hinduism" of the period in which Buddhism arose), Christianity is a critical form of religion over against Judaism, Islam is a critical form of religion over against pre-Muslim polytheism, and Konkôkyô or Tenrikyô are critical forms of religion over against Shintô. This does not mean, as far as the study of religions is concerned, that either the critical or the primal forms of religion are to be preferred. They are simply different types of religions which can be noted in the general history of religions. However, it will be evident that it does not make sense to speak loosely of "dialogue between world religions" as if all religions were simply the same kind of thing. There really are different kinds of religions. Following this uncontroversial typology, the question arises whether there is a particular relation between the main types of religions and the kinds of dialogue which take place or which might be expected. There seems to be! Let us look at the possible relations in a simplified way. At this point borderline cases and cases where religions switch from one type to the other will be disregarded. The three standard relations are

- (1) primal-to-primal (parallels and selected contemporary themes)
- (2) primal-to-critical (critical points and selected contemporary themes)
- (3) critical-to-critical (parallels and selected contemporary themes)

First, then, there might be a dialogue between "primal religions". This could involve two or more of, for example, the religion of North American Indians, of the Saami of Lapland, Yakutian shamanism and Japanese Shintô. Of course there are many differences here because Shintô, in particular, has undergone an immensely complicated development in connection with modernisation processes. However there is not really any question of alternative truth claims. Rather, such religious systems are the primal religions of different peoples. So their representatives and even their researchers are able to enjoy having conversations and making comparative studies of, for example, the North American "sweat lodge", the Finnish "sauna" and the Japanese "o-furo" (Jetsonen and Pentikäinen 2000).

The second typical dialogue relation would be between primal religion(s) and critical religion(s). Such relations can be either cooperative or competitive. In the history of religions a sharing of functions can often be seen, the classic case for this being the history of Buddhism. The development of an intellectually reflective process about this, which is the beginning of "dialogue", may be somewhat onesided. For example more thought has been put into these questions from the Buddhist side of things than by those engaging in the worship of local spirits in South East Asia. Moreover the relationship, or dialogue, between critical and primal religions can be quite

competitive, especially if the particularist aspect of primal religions is strongly criticised from the universalist standpoint of a salvationist religion. An example of this is the relationship between Christianity and Shintô in Japan, in which Shintô is usually criticised from the Christian side. However there may be new possibilities for positive dialogue here, especially if thematic subjects such as environmental questions and problems in medical ethics are considered.

The third typical relation would be between two "critical" religions. This can of course be very competitive but it can also lead to a dialogue between similar partners, even if they are not equal in all respects. Examples are the dialogues mentioned above between Tenrikyô and Catholicism and between Shin Buddhism and German Protestant theology, where strong analytical parallels have been noted. There has also been a wide range of common interests and common themes, such as meditation, mysticism and ethical questions. The competitive aspect might be expected to be high when the organisational interest is high (c.f. below on different kinds of organisation), and yet this must not always be the case. A clear organisation can also lead to an effective dialogue, effective at least in the sense that a significant learning process can take place.

Dynamics, innovation - and dialogues

Religious systems, or religious cultures, are not just fixed entities but are subject to change for various reasons. Quite apart from the influence of external factors there is an innovative dimension to religion which takes various forms. This means that reinterpretations are unavoidable, and to some extent it may be part of the process of religious dialogue. It may therefore be important for participants in religious dialogues to be aware of the processes of change, reinterpretation and adaptation. This raises the whole subject of the dynamics of religion, in which there are many sub-problems which cannot detain us here.

In brief, it seems that it might be of interest, even of importance, for participants in religious dialogues to reflect on their own position in the religious dynamics which are current at any one time. Not all religious systems move at the same speed with respect to adaptive changes, and different parties within the same religion also move at different speeds. While it is obvious to the observer that every religious group includes both conservatives and reformers or liberals, it is possible that this is not merely because people tend to disagree about the speed of change, but because the system as a whole requires all of these parties. This needs to be understood in the situation of religious dialogues.

In this connection I would like to draw attention in particular to the feature of innovation in religions, which is part of the wider field of the dynamics of religion mentioned immediately above. In a recent attempt to provide a general theory of religious innovation I have delineated four main modes of innovation in religion, as follows.⁵

- a) innovation within the norms of current organisations
- b) innovative reform leading to organisational separation
- c) innovation with difference, but without clear organisational consequences

⁵ Forthcoming, under the title "Elements of a general theory of innovation in religion".

d) innovation with difference, including new organisational forms

The second mode leads to schismatic religious bodies or sects, in the classical sense of the term, while the fourth mode leads to new religions. This classification is probably not controversial. However, the implication for religious dialogues is that the third mode of religious innovation is, from an institutional point of view, relatively irresponsible. This is because it is precisely *not* institutional. As an example of this third mode we may adduce much of the innovative religious culture which goes under the name of "New Age" or new "spirituality". A significant proportion of the population of industrial or post-industrial societies participates in such activities. This represents a considerable challenge for the understanding of religious dialogues or for the analysis of the various options available.

It seems that in considering the relevance of innovation to religious dialogues a typology of relative institutionalisation is required. At one end might be the Vatican or some other clear-cut ecclesiastical institutions, and at the other end there might be rather unclearly organised contributions to religious culture in the New Age style, as referred to above. More structured dialogue may be expected to be carried out by the representatives of institutions, while less structured dialogue is carried out between individuals as the bearers of non-institutional elements of religious culture. Can religious dialogues be carried on by more or less independent or even isolated individuals? Perhaps in some ways they can. On the other hand, dialogue may seem to be more serious, and more binding, when there is some kind of institutional social structure to the dialogue, as in the organised dialogues at Rome and at Marburg which were mentioned earlier. In short, the question is, who has the right to carry out a dialogue on the part of whom? Unfortunately the answers to this are not simple. Perhaps they are inevitably endless.

A distinction may also be made between "hard" dialogue and "soft" dialogue. It became clear, in the discussion held in Kyôto following this lecture, that in general people are not prepared to be identified with "hard" dialogue. Rather, even while standing firmly in a specific religious tradition, they prefer to think of themselves as taking part in "soft" dialogue. Consequently, even though there really are quite clear and strong institutions in the background, such as the Higashi Honganji for Shin Buddhism, or the German Protestant Church (Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands), it seems best to preserve the terms "hard" and "soft" for *attitudes* rather than for relative institutionalisation. In this usage, therefore, "hard" dialogue would be self-presentational, uncompromising and in the end unproductive. On the other hand, "soft" dialogue might be understood to be gentle, patient, imaginative and creative, leaving many questions open for future consideration. It is quite possible for those representing institutions to be gentle and creative, in other words to engage in "soft" dialogue.

Conclusion

The subject of religious dialogues has been approached above from the perspective of the study of religions, and the opportunity has been taken to make various suggestions. While there is a need to distinguish clearly between the study of religions and the carrying out of religious dialogues, there seem to be many ways in which the former can be of assistance for the latter. Those who represent religious traditions in dialogue situations should therefore take account of the theoretical perspectives and tasks of the study of religions. They may even wish to contribute to its further development. Specialists in the study of religions, for their part, may feel free to participate in contemporary discussions, while maintaining a clear view of their academic discipline.

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