

# **Concluding Philosophical Reflections**

**Dr. Dissmeyer, May 15, 2007**

**Since a significant amount of time has been spent by me, by you as students and by the class together, it would be helpful to reflect on the underlying assumptions in my opinion and through my efforts that have been at work within our discussions and studies of the world's great religious traditions.**

**1. Life is truly deeper than we usually think, much deeper than a casual or shallow reading, much more colorful and diverse than we sometimes imagine. Thus truth, wisdom and beauty can indeed be found in other cultures, other traditions, other religious world views, and not only where we are born or raised or how we traditionally believe or symbol systems with which we are traditionally familiar.**

**2. Other people and other traditions are "thicker" or more worthy of our respect, not "thinner" or less significant than we imagine.**

**3. Almost everyone can do something, can do more, to create a more peaceful future for all humankind...and they can do this right where they live and function. The Christopher Society motto states, "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." So each of us can find candles to light. Indeed lighting candles in many diverse ways is incumbent upon us all.**

**3. We are as human beings all interconnected far more than we know or understand. The future of our own existence and that of our children depends greatly upon our proactive and compassionate global partnership between all the religious traditions and their secular colleagues. Such partnership implies a common and active effort to improve human relationships between and among religions...and such effort is urgently required NOW and in all foreseeable present moments of our lifetime.**

**4. Available and alternative next steps for students of world religions include:**

- a. Keep reading and studying something from all of the traditions...  
especially materials from Diana Eck, Huston Smith, Karen Armstrong and Ninian Smart.**
- b. Continue to ask questions and refuse to be satisfied with simplistic, illogical, destructive, shallow or sick answers which obstruct and do not contribute to world peace among all religions and all peoples...**
- c. Stay open to methods of deeper listening and more respectful discussions and dialogue with persons who are unlike ourselves...**
- d. Affirm one's own religious tradition with commitment and faithfulness while expecting from it healthy growth and refusing to allow it to develop sick and destructive relationships with our fellow human beings...**

**e. Review periodically the actual reasons for and the outcomes of:**

**+mysticism**

**+spirituality**

**+syncretism**

**+fundamentalism**

**+relativism**

**+legalism**

**+sectarianism**

**+sick religion**

**+healthy ethics**

**f. Consider the religious and social damages and opportunities that exist from the impacts of:**

**-technological revolution**

**-medical breakthrough's**

**-women's movement**

**-youth movements**

**-racial equality**

**-increasing Democracy**

**-economic globalization**

**-ecological crisis today**

**-Third World disruption**

**-militarism and violence**

**g. Remember that every religious tradition offers both gifts (contributions) and what could be called "ungifts" (or ideas and negative tendencies that would definitely not contribute to a better world for all of us). There are in human history both exceptional heroes like Gandhi and Elie Wiesel and human criminals like Hitler, Idi Amin and Pol Pot. REMEMBER THAT ALL OF THESE ARE INCREASINGLY AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE IN THE GLOBAL SUPERMARKET TO CHOOSE OR TO AVOID DEPENDING UPON OUR BASIC VALUE SYSTEM AND RELIGIOUS AFFINITY AND COMMITMENT TO A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL.**

**h. Remember that among different traditions there will be BOTH similarities and differences. So there will be powerful ways to discuss what they share in common and to build bridges of understanding and cooperation.**

**i. Remember that traditions cross-fertilize, i.e. they borrow from each other, they compete with each other and they influence each other in myriad and often undocumented ways.**

**j. All worldviews develop some sort of cosmology or picture of where everything came from and where in the distant future everything is headed. Within such cosmologies there arises a sense of what is true and valuable.**

**k. All religious traditions develop sicknesses, imbalances or distortions that obstruct their genuine growth and survival.**

**l. Remember that all religious traditions evolve or develop over time in response to the circumstances and pressures of each era and situation. This transformation may be slow or fast, but it does happen and it happens to allow each tradition to survive in the face of opposition and extinction.**

**m. From within each tradition there often arises key exemplary spokespersons who become powerful reflections of the essence of their tradition to all who will listen and observe what they do and say.**

**n. Some traditions become very evangelistic and outgoing to win or force conversions into their tradition. Others become very ingrown and isolated, perhaps even ethnically focused and separated from outsiders.**

**o. From the variety of larger worldviews there are a great variety of spiritual disciplines which are borrowable and useable from both insiders and outsiders and fence-sitters. Such mixing and matching of spiritual "parts" of different traditions creates a very eclectic and diversified patchwork of religions and worldviews that make up our global culture today.**

**5. My basic goal in teaching this course is to offer each participant the philosophical opportunity to become better questioners and “dialoguers”, more responsible researchers, more informed consumers of religious ideas and finally more conscious ethical decision-makers. What are your goals for taking this course and how would you evaluate your achievement of them today?**

**A few impressive insights into the task before us....**

***6. The world stands out on either side,  
No wider than the heart is wide;  
Above the world is stretched the sky,-  
No higher than the soul is high.  
The heart can push the sea and land  
Farther away on either hand;***

***The soul can split the sky in two,  
And let the face of God shine through.  
But East and West will pinch the heart  
That cannot keep them pushed apart;  
And he whose soul is flat - the sky  
Will cave in on him by and by.  
-Edna St. Vincent Millay***

**7. During the past thirty years, people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me...Among all my patients in the second half of life – that is to say, over thirty-five – there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.**  
**-Carl Jung**

**8. Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness. It runs through three stages, if it evolves to its final satisfaction. It is the transition from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion. Thus religion is solitariness; and if you are never solitary, you are never religious.**  
**-Alfred North Whitehead**