Religion for another possible world.

I. The present world

First of all what is the present world we are in and what do we mean by another possible world? Is it a world that is desirable in itself, is it be feasible, or not such as a utopia would be?
Secondly is it a feasible world towards which human groups could strive towards in a given period of time.
Third is it the world that is likely to be if the present processes of development and relationships of people are continued in the next 25 years, half century or during the 21st century?
And finally what is likely to be the change if some of the more active agents of transformation both for good and for bad evolve without much interaction of forward looking human groups?
There are also the imponderables such as the advancement of sciences and technology and the impact of deadly diseases like HIV/ AIDS, both of which can radically transform human relationships in the world even in the next 25 years.

In the present world there is a great imbalance in the division of resources among peoples beginning with the land and capital and in the resources of technological advancement and scientific education. From this perspective we could refer to the likely changes that will take place in the distribution of population in the world in the coming 25 and 50 years and even the whole century according to present possibilities of population projection. The population changes are challenges to world justice.

A. Population: some data on growth, movements and prospects.
Most of Europe was sparsely populated in 1820, inhabitants being mainly in the villages.
By 1900 European population more than doubled.
European migrants to Americas, Australasia, Southern Africa and Siberia
Population of these areas increased from 5.7 million to over 200 million between 1810 and 1910.
Between 1810 and 1840 only 1.5 million left Europe mainly to the USA
Between 1841 and 1886 the figure leapt to 8.15 millions
Between 1880 and 1910 to 25 millions
"Between 1800 and 1930 the White proportion of the world's population expanded from 22 to 35 % " *[p 209 Times History of the World]*

European Population Growth 1800 – 1910   - excluding Russia

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1800    123 million
1801    140
1830    156
1840    170
1850    184
1860    194
1870    210
1880    225
1890    244
1900    267
1910    294
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[Source :Times History of the World , Harper Collins, 1999 p 208]

Migration data
Percentage of population increase that has permanently emigrated./a

Period	Europe	Asia /b	Africa	Latin America/b
1851-80	11,7	0,4	0,01	0,3
1881-1910	19,5	0,3	0,04	0,9
1911-40	14,4	0,1	0,03	1,8
1940-60	2,7/c	0,1	0,01	1,0
1960-70	5,2	0,2	0,10	1,9
1970-80	4,0	0,5	0,30	2,5

a. Numbers are calculated from data on gross immigration in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.
b. the periods from 1950 to 1960 pertain to emigration only to the United States.
c. emigration only to the United States. (source The World Bank, 1984, Reference 18, p.69.)

Overseas Migration from Europe between 1846 and 1924

Great Britain and Ireland	18, 030,000
Norway	804,000
Sweden	1, 145,000
Denmark	349,000
Netherlands	207,000
Germany	4, 533,000
Belgium	172,000
Switzerland	307,000
France	497,000
Spain	4, 314,000
Portugal	1, 633,000
Finland	342,000
Russia	8, 000,000
Austria \Hungary	4, 878,000
Italy	9,474,000

55million people migrated from Europe between 1846 and 1924.
In this period Chinese, Indians and Japanese also moved, much less and often as laborers. (Time`s History of the World Atlas, p.209, 225, 245.)

Between 1960 and 2000 there have been very substantial changes in the world population distribution. The population projections are [1]

	1960	**2000**
developed market economies	633	857 million
Eastern Europe and USSR	313	429
Developing countries	1367	3558
China and Asian planned economies	704	1400
World Total	3019	6251

These projections which have been more or less realized indicate that out of an increase of world population by 3,232 million, the developing world has to provide for about 2,930 million, whereas the developed countries have to provide for 224 million and the Eastern European block including Siberia for 116 million. This is the biggest gap in the world structure.

World population prospects in millions

	World	Asia	Europe	N.America	L.America	Aus/NZ
2000	6 057	3672	727	314	519	23
2050	9 322	5428	603	437	805	31

The change from 2000 to 2050:

	World	Asia	Europe	N.America	L.America	Aus/NZ
	+3265	+1756	-124	+123	+306	+8

Total world population

	2000	2050
World	6 091.3	9 366.7
More developed	1 1 71.4	1 151.7
Less developed	4 515.7	8 204.9

The world system of land distribution is consolidated more or less as in 1945 after five centuries of the colonial expansion and the end of World War II. Thus countries such as China and India have limited land despite a very high population in relation to land.

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[1] UN : Global Outlook 2000 p 227

Without a just and peaceful remedy for this imbalance there will not be a guarantee of life and security for the billions who are poor, nor will the rich countries be able to prevent an overflow of population from the South to their under-cultivated areas. Capitalistic globalization not only does not provide solutions for this problem, it makes the situation worse by the policies of structural adjustment and the WTO. Neither is the UNO, as it is presently conceived and structured, capable of finding meaningful solutions for this imbalance

It would be good for present peoples of European origin to reflect on how they were able to migrate in the 19th century when their population was increasing, and they had problems like the Irish potato famine.

Having gone to those lands, marginalizing or even exterminating the previous indigenous inhabitants, now they are sealing off these lands and their own lands in Europe to the rest of humanity, except mainly when it benefits them. What is the ethical justification for this? How does international law regard this situation? How would international law, in so far as it exists, have to be reformed in terms of a global ethic that is rational and humane, not to say civilized?

The situation is more intriguing and challenging when we reflect that most of the peoples of European origin are considered to be of Christian civilization and peoples of the poor countries who cannot now move to the free land spaces of the world are of other religions. The issue becomes more complex when thought of in the background of the Islamic/Christian conflicts of the late middle Ages, and early modern period and the so called clash of civilizations today.

B. Foundational injustice of world system.
This imbalance of population to land is in a sense the foundational injustice of the whole world system today, coming down from the colonial period. It was consolidated after World War II with the setting up of the UNO and the Security Council basically to preserve this distribution as what is considered the just world order. Its preservation is thought of as the maintenance of peace and law in the world. This may be called global apartheid and is one of the biggest structural evils that continue from generation to generation. A reflection on it would give some of its characteristics:
a. it is a result of violence, consolidated by the victors in terms of territorial frontiers and carried on from generation to generation. It is based on ' might is right' /
b. it is racist of an extreme form, leads to the fear of the disadvantaged races by the possessors of land and hence to defensive militarism.
c. it is the most basic form of inequality and deprivation from which others such as of incomes, wealth and resources flow.
d. it deprives people in need of the opportunities of work, food and livelihood.
e. it causes economic depression by decreasing production of food.
f. it leads to waste of resources by neglect, by non cultivation, and perhaps overfertilisation.
g. it is maintained by unjust immigration laws, leads to illegal immigration and conflicts. It is a basic cause of social conflicts in the countries, and contributes to the expenditure on arms.
h. it helps increase land, water and air pollution. It is against the principle of ' the free market' and of liberal values that would exalt freedom of movement. It is the result of

western land grab of the past 500 years. It makes people insensitive to the needs of others and to the evils of the past. It is a centennial form of injustice for which no adequate solution is in sight, for it influences the mind sets of the dominant.
i. it goes against the core values of the religions which advocate the whole earth to be available to all humankind and teaches sharing to be a principle virtue.
j. it is a basic problem for the liberation of the elite, challenging them to respond to the advantages that are from birth.

This problem is neglected by most economists, political scientists, politicians, planners, international lawyers and theologians. It is not generally studied by universities and international foundations. It is not within the scope of the religions either, especially Christianity. Since the demographic data indicate a worsening situation in the course of the 20th century it is a challenge for the youth of today to participate in making the world more just by bringing about changes in mindsets as well as global structure of the world system. Most solutions presently discussed for development, justice and peace are piecemeal and reformist, keeping the foundational system intact. It may be called the original sin of the modern world.

C. Some current global trends.
Another type of development would be in the way in which the world economy will proceed in the coming decades. The present **world economy** is motivated by the desire to maximise private profit. It leads to the accumulation of capital by the already wealthy. If the concentration of capital and the control of production and distribution by the international corporations and the world's wealthy takes place then there will be a continuing growth in the overall production with an increase in the gap between the rich and the poor within nations and among the peoples of the world. Much would depend on whether the desire for a simplicity of life style, and the present efforts towards a more just world economy would be successful and the extent to which other forms of production and exchange would control the present trends of large scale globalization.

A third area would be in the field of **power politics**. Would the present tendency towards the domination of the world by a uni-polar authority with its allies continue? The big transnational corporations dominate the economy and even influence the political life of countries. Money is the goal and power depends on finance. Would the economy be brought under a more democratic and egalitarian distribution of power in the world? In this connection the control over oil which is a major means of production and communication would be very significant and the present trust of the USA and UK moving militarily and politically to control the oil resources of the Middle East even from the areas such as Eastern Europe or central Asia would be immensely significant for the power balance in the world in different aspects such as the economy and the impact on the environment.

In this relationship the **development of technology** concerning **military power** would also be very significant. Will military power be capable of being exercised by long term control missiles operating from the air or would nuclear power be developed by several other countries and be a great treat to world peace, or else would an agency like the United Nations Organisations be able to regulate peace and war and the use of such sophisticated military technology in the hands particularly of the financially powerful and land and resource rich nations.
On the other hand would humanity be able to develop means of impact over the **military and political powers** by the development of an alternative basis of power

and human relationships such as through the acceptance of ethical codes of behaviour among nations and the development of the potential of non violence, networked among the more peace and justice loving peoples of the world.

Within nations and among the nations how would the **social relationships** be organised? Would there be a greater tendency towards justice and equality and acceptance of the democratic processes for problem resolving among them, or would the present imbalances continue and increase such as in gender relations, in class distinctions, caste discrimination. In the relationship of the working class with the rest of society, how important would be the strength of the working peoples who have to contribute their manual and physical resources to the productive process or would there be a tendency for the decrease of the power of the working class due to an increase in the use of machinery and the mechanisation of much of the production processes? In reaction to this would there be a transfer from the society in which personal human skills such as manual workers or small scale enterprises would be replaced by large scale enterprises and technologies capable of being directed by computers and indirect planning and supervision from a distance? This can be connected also to the transfer of employment from the countries where the payment for labour is high to countries in which the labour is cheap. This can be the result of a transfer of the platforms of production from a country such as Germany to Vietnam or a breaking up of the sections of a production process and assembling the product in another country. This is also related to **outsourcing** as when it takes place in accounting, transferred from New York to Bangalore so that work continues throughout the day and benefits from cheaper labour. The type of changes are comparable to what took place in Europe in the industrial revolution when the system of production was changed by what is called the development of the assembly line in motorcar production. Part of the process included making the working class capable of buying motorcars and thus increasing productivity and standard of way of living of the peoples.

With these types of changes enormous transformations seem possible such as if India and China were transformed by entering the global productive process along with the multinationals and the use of computers and cell phones. In the next 25 years enormous changes in the relations among peoples could take place without necessarily being in the line of justice, but benefiting the rich and marginalising the poor. In this connection we may also reflect on what is called the feminisation of labour alongside the development of technology which does not require physical power as of males. What could be the impact on the gender relationships and of the rich and poor nations as may take place in the textile industry with the growth of free trade zones in poorer countries for the utilisation of cheap female labour.

Another type of issues is what would happen to the **family** in the process of the changing world. The demographic data show tendencies such as the decrease in the number of children almost everywhere in the world.

Culture what is likely to be the impact of the vast expansion of mass media and their control by a few multinational agencies based on finance and the transmission of a dominant culture. There is a commercialisation of moral issues such as health care, education, social relations and even the treatment of the environment. This can be seen particularly in the emphasis on violence and sexuality that may be productive of a great deal of harm while also having its potentialities for human liberation. This would be another important area of the transformation of the world in the coming decades due to the entry of television into most homes.

Another trend that may be observed is the **revival of cultures and religions** among the peoples leading to a certain amount of backlash of ethno-cultural considerations. The migration of peoples is leading to a greater cultural contact than before and to some extent a conflict of cultures. There is a fear by a group that is majoritarian that a minority is taking its place or diluting its culture. This can take place also at the level of the races. So we can find in the last 25 years while the class conflict that was very significant in the 60 and 70's of the last century in terms of a clash between capitalist and socialist ideologies and powers, is been reduced and replaced by a mono capitalist power dominance. There is a tendency for the racist ethnicism of religious divisions among peoples to be emphasised at present this is manifesting itself in terms of different **fundamentalisms** that are now even speaking of a clash of civilisations and a conflict of democracy against terrorism. How these would develop in the coming decades could be of great importance alongside scientific technological and economic changes.

Another area of great importance for the future is the impact of modern development on the **environment** and on **ecological factors**. During the last century and particularly in the second half of last century there has been an increasing pollution of the seas, the land and the air and a great deal of an exhaustion of the un-renewable resources of the earth. Corresponding to this there is the impact of the warming of the earth and the rising of the water level and even the fear of a water shortage leading to the submergence of some of the low line areas as in Bangladesh and the thawing of the ice on the Polar Regions. These environmental and ecological changes are connected also with the social organisation particularly of the capitalist mode of production and life that lead to the exhaustion of resources such as oil and even the extinction of species, the reduction of the fish in the world, the poisoning of the agricultural land so that even the food eaten is harmful for animals and humans. Efforts at solving these issues have been brought to the fore globally and in the United Nations conferences and in the Kyoto protocol on the safeguarding of nature. But here too, some of the powerful nations like the US who are the main polluters of the world do not come to an agreement. The entire civilisation built on the use of oil, including the private motorcar is related to the environmental crisis that is affecting the coming generation and particularly the poor peoples in our nations.

Another significant area of change is **concerning the religions themselves** and the process of **secularisation** going on in the world. One line of change has been the de-religionalisation taking place, first in the West in relation to many no longer participating in the Christian religious services and also not even in appurtenance to a church. We can speak of different phases of this process such as de-religionalisation, de-Christianisation, de-clericalisation and also the deconstruction of the belief systems, including issues of morality. There is a great reduction in the numbers of the clergy particularly in the West, they are ageing so that it is becoming clear that in the future Western Christianity will mainly be a lay organisation.

One could also see a de-religionalisation process in some of the other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The numbers of Hindus and Buddhist who participate in religious ceremonies are decreasing and the Buddhists also find that the number of the monks is decreasing and their average age increasing. This is partly due to the process of secularisation that is taking place throughout the world.

On the other hand there is a process of **revival of the traditional religions** in the countries that have been independent of colonial rulers with emphasis on their own identity and dignity and the claims for a redressing of imbalance that have may been brought about by the colonial powers in the treatment of the religions. There is a

special phenomenon namely the growth of consciousness of Islam as a religion that is worldwide and has its own doctrines and codes of morality and a sense of affirming themselves as a world religion, spread through all the continents of the earth. The increasing wealth of the Islamic peoples, especially due to the income of the oil resources allows them to use much more money for the spread of Islam than in previous periods and hence the growth and establishment of mosques in many parts of the world. This goes side by side with the **migration of peoples** from the southern countries and the Middle East to the more developed countries which are majority Christian and were the churches are falling into disuse. Islamic mosques are been set up and are places of worship and gathering for their followers. Buddhism as a religion is also missionary in another way of spreading their message of human fulfilment through meditation. This is also a religious influence that is spreading in many parts of the world.

The phenomenon of **religion** is also noteworthy in so far it has **survived** several decades of opposition and suppression under communist regimes, Soviet Union, China, and North Korea and to some extent Cuba. But after the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and the opening of China to the rest of the world and a greater acceptance of Christianity in Cuba, the religions are beginning to come back to the surface in these countries and become motivating forces for people's lives, having learned much of the experience of suppression and persecution.

As mentioned earlier the religions are experiencing another trend of a backlash of conservative tendencies affirming their different identities and expressing themselves often in a ethno nationalistic sense. Then the religions become sources of division among peoples, especially when they are important even for the setting up of new nations such as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

II. Some characteristics of a possible/desirable world order

1. All human beings have freedom and dignity irrespective of gender, sex, race, creed, caste, mental capacity. It flows that every human being or community is responsible to ensure that one's actions do not impair /undermine /damage the integrity of any other human being or community.
2. Every human being is entitled to the satisfaction of one's basic needs which include food, housing, health services, income /work/employment/education/leisure.
3. Communities have the right to develop their own identities, provided they do so with proper regard for the dignity and integrity of the other individuals and communities.
4. The environment in all its forms, diversity and interdependence, has its own being which must be protected and respected by humanity. The environment which sustains human life is held in trust by each generation for its successors. Intergenerational justice and obligations, concerning resources that are not removable: preservation of biodiversity and climate of the earth.
5. People without land have the right to land without people. Migration rights should be given and recognised.
6. The continuing effects of injustice must be investigated, redressed, remedied and compensated for where possible. The global distribution of land must be reviewed periodically to allocate land in a planned and feasible manner, according to human needs, given the changes in population and in technology. The concept of mono ethnic nation states inside fixed boundaries is a principal root of our present problems.

7. The global structures which produce inequalities and inequity must be investigated and reconstructed to promote human life and dignity. It follows that the concept and claims of national sovereignty must be subject to the right of all human beings to a life of freedom and dignity.

8. All power, even of global authorities, must be exercised in a way that is accountable to those affected by it and therefore no more remote from people affected by its exercise than is absolutely necessary - the principle of subsidiarity.

The values expressed in some of these issues are also the core values of the faiths and cultures of the peoples of the world and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948.

Property is a trust.
The basic needs of all must be met before the luxuries of some. To each according to need and from each according to ability.

Global governance
Need of a global law making authority. A global executive with effective power to ensure and enforce justice
A global judiciary, international tribunals concerning major events of the past which have contemporary and future impact , e.g. land ownership in the world, reform of UNO and UN agencies such as the Security Council to be more democratic, accountable and effective.
IMF, WB, WTO to be under a democratic authority and accountable to a world democratic body. Need of global planning in a globalised situation.
Arms production and sales must be controlled for the common good of humanity.

Global economy.
The present globalisation of the economy is based on the hegemony of capital in an exclusive, racist and even genocidal way. It contradicts the fundamental basic rights expressed above. Therefore these globalised structures should be changed and strategies central to a global ethic which should include making transnational corporations subject to the control of elected bodies responsible to those affected by the corporations activities. Technology needs to be developed to benefit humanity, and not for the profit of capital. Technology transfer should be made easier. Those nations, communities and corporations which process advanced technology which could benefit other human communities and individuals have a duty to share their knowledge, claiming only a modest fee for their own work in developing the technology, e.g. for meeting the tragedy of HIV/Aids.

III. Religion
In this section we shall discuss some of the constituent elements or ingredients of religions and how they can contribute to the development of another world, while they have often been allies of the powers that built up the contemporary world. In religions we can distinguish several **ingredients or constituent elements:**
   a. **Primordial intuition** concerning human life and its destiny. Religions claim to give an explanation for the origins of life and what happens after this life. They indicate a path that would lead to happiness and fulfilment in this life and give a meaning to human relationships. We may say that the primary vision of religions is valuable and attractive and that is why they have had

millennial influence over peoples and communities. Religions also claim to have some link with the transcendent divine sometimes also considered as immanent in all human beings and in the universe.

b. At the origin of religions there is a **founder and or seers** that are reputedly holy and wise persons who expound the primal vision and the path of fulfilment, liberation and salvation **eventually interpreted as** in and through the religion. The founders of the religions are persons who often had a primordial spiritual experience. It is a key insight into what human nature is, what are liberating and fulfilling human relationships in society and how human beings can relate meaningfully and caringly to nature. Such an approach is generally fostered by meditation and union with the divine or on the transcendent values in life.

c. The religions have **sacred writings**, coming down from the foundation and traditions that give the teachings both as doctrines concerning life before birth and after death and as well as codes of moral conduct for this life.

d. Relating to each religion there is generally a **community of believers** formed in relation to the prevailing culture and social relations and interests of its members. Often the interests of the dominant sections of the community tend to interpret the text and doctrines of a religion, to certain extent even diluting the primordial intuition and even introducing discriminatory doctrines and practices.

e. Religions have methods of **worship and rituals** for celebration of the festivities of a religion. Here too there is a combination of the basic liberative messages with external manifestations of community and celebrations that may be expressed in a particular culture and may also reinforce the social differences within the religions.

f. The religions also tend to be organised as **an institution** with the membership of its believers and a power structure with an authority that claims to interpret its message and leads its members to their goal of fulfilment here on earth and thereafter. Generally such a religious authority has tended to be hierarchical and patriarchal. None of the world religions has given an important place to women either in the evolution and teaching of the doctrines or in the government of the institutions and the leadership in the worship.

g. Some of the religions claim to have a **meta-natural means of salvation**. That is that they teach/claim a relationship to a divine source through which salvation takes place due to divine grace or favour. Some other religions such as Buddhism would insist that liberation is due to a personal effort and enlightenment that result from meditation and a life of self restraint and loving kindness.

Thus in the religions there are some elements which are enabling and **liberating** there are others that are **oppressive and enslaving** of their own rank and file members and of other religions. **No religion is totally pure or totally impure**. Human beings will not accept a religion for long if it does not have good inspirations. Like every human effort every religion also needs appreciation of its good and correction of its evil aspects. Hence it is necessary to discern in each religion its positive and negative elements. The history of each religion has instances of such abuses even over a long period of time. Religious reformers have emerged at different times to purify the religions of such accretions.

Negative aspects of religion work against the positive values of human fulfilment and liberation such as justice, equality, freedom and loving kindness. These negative aspects can contribute towards the oppression of the poor and the weak by legitimising the position of the dominant oppressors. It would be necessary to study how in the different religions the basic liberating aspects can get interpreted and articulated so as to legitimise the powers of the dominant group or community. Thus the concept of karma and rebirth deeply rooted in the Indian religious consciousness can favour a social order of caste discrimination. It may also be possible to argue that the liberating impact of the exodus on the Jewish people could also be linked to their claim of the lands of Canaan as if given to them by God. Religions connected to this biblical history such as Christianity and Islam have also a position of considering themselves being liberated by a divine power from oppression and suffering, but they may at later stages become also intolerant of others as the history of Christianity shows.

With reference to our reflection on the contemporary world in part I it may be asked how far have the different religions been involved in the setting up of this world structure and the relationships of peoples and secondly how far these changes themselves impact on religion. Thirdly if we have to move towards another possible world how can a religion or the religions contribute to such a desirable goal or reduce the undesirable elements in an evolving future world.

The **path of liberation** can be expressed in terms of core values that the religions propose as good and desirable. Though these values are expressed in the language and idiom of different cultures they have a similarity in content when thought of in relation to practical life in given situations. A possible way of trying to identify the core values of the world religions can be found in **the five main precepts of the Buddha.** Each of them teaches giving up of a basic evil and promotes goodness in an important sphere of life and action. The five precepts can be expressed briefly in relation to modern times.

The **first** is **respect for all life**, non-violence, and the cultivation of compassion. It teaches the ability to remove suffering and transform it by protecting and promoting lives of people, animals, plants and minerals. It is against killing and hence the production of armaments. It includes also the care for nature that nurtures human life.

The **second** precept is **generosity, loving kindness** at a personal level and in structures of society. It is the intention and capacity to bring joy and happiness to another person or living being and to communities. The practice of loving kindness requires that we see the situations of exploitation, social injustice and oppression. It is against the stealing of what belongs to others. Individuals and groups are invited to share their time, energy and resources with those in need to make one another happy and have the basic essentials for living. This precept motivates us to resist injustice and prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on earth. This promotes the giving of one's time and resources for others, especially for those suffering and in need.

The **third precept** teaches **sexual responsibility** to protect and promote the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and society. Sexual relations are to be based on love and a long-term commitment. The welfare of children is also to be safeguarded and children preserved from sexual abuse. Children should not be made to suffer due to sexual misconduct. Sexual relations with love and long term

commitment can heal persons, families and society. Such a behaviour promotes the capacity to bring joy and happiness and transform pain and suffering. It is good for all and brings about understanding, stability and peace in society on the basis of equality in dignity and rights of persons.

The **fourth precept** is **respect for truth**. It promotes deep listening and loving speech. Negatively this precept is against the speaking of untruth and the promotion of suffering and conflict by lies. Positively it encourages speech that is truthful, and brings joy and happiness to others and relieves others of their suffering. This requires mindfulness in speech, the effort at understanding others and helping resolve conflicts by reconciliation. The truth has to be found by each one without assuming that it has already been discovered and is possessed exclusively by someone. Encouraging the truth is very important in relation to the mass media which have a vast influence nowadays due to rapid and widespread global communications.

The **fifth precept** promotes the **healthy diet** for body and mind and discourages **intoxicating drinks** and excess in food and drink. It promotes mindfulness and consciousness that leads to good thoughts and good actions, unlike liquors and drugs that reduce mindfulness and lead to waste, anger, and violence. Hence the importance of cultivating good health, both physical and mental for oneself, one's family and for society, including the global society.

(cf. Thich Nhat Hanh : "For a Future to be Possible"; Parallax Press, Berkeley, California; 1993 pp 1-83.

The practice of the five precepts is helped by **meditation**, the growth in awareness or mindfulness. Their practice is interconnected. Practising one of them helps the following of the others. On the contrary going against any one of them leads to the others: violence, greed, selfishness, untruth, and lack of self-control. The basic vision of the Buddha is that existence involves suffering or dukka. The cause of dukka is thanha or attachment to things which are illusory. The path to liberation from dukka is detachment from thanha or undue attachments. The path to liberation is the following of the eightfold path of right thought and right action. In this humans have to rely on their own enlightenment which is realised by meditation and mindfulness.

IV. Another way of being religions/ religion is possible
There are certain aspects of religions concerning which their togetherness or **agreement may not be possible**:

a) religions may not agree with reference to what they teach about **the origins of human life on earth**, or about **what happens to humans after death** (in so far as there is an after life). These are issues concerning which each religion has a teaching and position. But humans cannot have apodictic evidence about them as no one comes back after death to inform others of the situation thereafter. These are part of the still unexplored mystery of life. There may be evidence that contests certain positions held by some religions: e.g. whether all humans are from one pair of first parents. Or some past views may now be no longer held, such as the existence of a limbo, formerly held by some Christians

b) Religions may not agree with reference to the interpretations of the *nature and functions of the divine* – the ultimate transcendent reality. There may be doctrines, called dogmas in Christianity, for which certitude is claimed on the basis of a divine revelation received or made by founders, seers, or leaders. Thus there may be no agreement, or understanding of the Christian teaching that God is a Trinity with different functions for the three divine persons. Even attribution of **philosophical** concepts such as that of "person" or "substance" to the divine may be limited to a

certain language and cultural framework.

c) There may also be no agreement concerning the **stories, myths, symbols,** stereotypes, prejudices that one religious group proposes or entertains about itself or others. These are the causes of much of the lack of understanding among the members of different religions. The cultures of the communities often carry these differences from generation to generation. The ethno-religious fundamentalisms maybe engendered by such stories taken as truths and justifying privileges of particular religions or ethno-cultural communities. These may need clarification for good inter-religious relations. The cultural filters often condition the understanding of terms used by the different religions in different cultural environments.

d) An exclusivity claimed by a religion concerning its **interpretation of life**, **the paths to salvation** and special privileged position in relation to the Divine is also a source of division and mutual incompatibility of religions. There should be no competition among religions concerning the salvation of persons, especially after life.

e) There would be differences concerning the **institutional** arrangements within religions, the structures for their management, the patterns of authority, the legal systems for administration of the communities.

f) The forms of **worship, the rituals** of a religion depend very much on their languages, cultures and art forms and would not necessarily be understood by other religions.

These differences can be also occasions for the members of religions in dialogue to seek to understand their different languages, systems of logic, metaphors, presuppositions and assumptions used in expressing their beliefs. The religions have to be recognized as communities that emerge from a distinct cultural milieu and have advantages and limitations due to such a context. This is true not only among religions but also within each religion from different cultural contexts. Thus the variations in the interpretation of Christianity in the Roman and Greek traditions, and of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Japan. The differences of religions can be a challenge to the openness of participants in an inter-religious dialogue. They can help also to develop the humility of such partners on dialogue. Since the discussions are about the ultimate mystery of human life and the Transcendent such divergences must be expected, critically evaluated and duly respected. Criteria would have to be evolved as to what is essential for genuine human relationships among religions. Here our perception is that the acceptable core values held by all of them regarding the human common good may be a valuable criterion.

For "another religion" to be possible we must know what religion has been: **what the essential identity of a religion** is, and what it should not be in the future. We have to be conscious of the merits and limits of our religions, and try to live their basic message while correcting their wrongs. Can we maintain the identity of our religions in what is good in them and find a way of cooperating in the common good of all. There are positive approaches which though interpreted differently by the religions may have a similarity and could be helpful in inter-religious understanding:

i) we can appreciate the **commonality of teachings** and practices that advocate the avoidance of evils that harm persons and communities. Thus all world religions disapprove of evil forces such as greed, untruth, lust and lack of temperance in food and drink, hatred, violence and the destruction of life and nature. Unfortunately none of the world religions still condemns and corrects adequately the discrimination against women especially within the religions themselves. None of them sees women as equal in the mediation of the transcendent/divine.

ii) On the other hand they **encourage the positive values of love**, sharing, truth, justice, respect for life and the dignity of all persons and communities. These may be understood as loving service, karuna metta, universal love, a core value, proposed by all religions. This is expressed in the statement "do unto others as you would like others to do unto you" – the golden rule common to all religions.

A. Core teachings of the religions

While the particular presuppositions and some conclusions of religions and claims of revelation may tend to divide the followers of the religions, the **core message of the religions** concerning human life and fulfilment can help bring peoples together in mutual understanding and respect and in common action for the good of all.

This can be a better deeper and most **lasting basis for inter-religious understanding** and **cooperation** at all levels, including global social justice and human liberation. Such a dialogue can also help disengage the core message of Jesus from its encrustation in a particular cultural interpretation of revelation or even theological school. The faith in and the discipleship of Jesus can then be seen in clearer perspective. It can be harmonised with the core message of the other world religions –if these too can be understood in their essence beyond their particular religio-cultural and ethno-nationalistic expressions.

It would be significant to refer to the core values of the different religions as we can see much similarity among them, and each one as if it were confirming the other. Since the core values refer to human behaviour in real life situations they can be verified as to whether they lead to personal happiness, joy, peace and to similar development in communities. Therefore the core values must be capable of being verified in real life, unlike the dogmatic teachings of religions concerning life before birth of after death.

We give below a **summary** of the values of the four world religions.
The core teachings of the four main religions in South East Asia are similar in their emphasis on care and concern for the other. Thus :
Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you - Hinduism
Hurt not others in ways that you would yourself find hurtful - Buddhism
Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you - Christianity
Be kind to all living beings so that God may be kind to you. - Islam
The religions teach a **moral code** that includes:
Truth, justice, freedom, equality, non-violence and respect for life;
The moral dimension of Hindu Dharma is embodied in *eight yamas* restraints and *eight niyamas* observances: the yamas are non-violence; not stealing; disciplining desire; abjuring lust and greed; curbing arrogance and anger; not lying; avoiding injustice; shunning wrong doing and evil company. The niyamas are be pure in mind, body and speech; love humankind (karuna maitriya), seek contentment; cultivate devotion; develop forbearance; give charitably; study the scriptures; perform penance and sacrifice.
Buddhism is opposed to thanha, lobha, moha, dosa, against selfishness, deceit, immorality, theft, violence, as do the other religions.

All four religions teach similar norms for righteous living and finding meaning in life, and include the respect for all humanity. A person genuinely faithful to one's

religion would respect other religions and be a loving and lovable human person. Religions advocate the care of nature and simplicity of life,

B. Need of the Religions
The persons and communities of the modern world also generally need the religions for resolving many of the issues faced globally. This is partly due to the inner message of the religions, and also because the religions still have a widespread influence on peoples' lives and on countries. Thus Islam and Christianity are the religions of well over half of humanity. The religions are the largest and oldest peoples' movements in the modern world. They have an influence on persons and powers, unparalleled by any other mass agencies. They have networks of communication that make them a most influential mass medium even with, or because of, the modern communications revolution. If the religions concern themselves with the human common good their liturgies, and other gatherings could be a very great influence on the communities. While regretting the past conflicts due to religions we must recognize and have recourse to their immense possibilities for good in the present and future. The relationship of the religions should by built on open dialogue with genuine respect for each other, without any hidden agenda and with preparedness to work together for the good of all humanity.
The great spiritual and even political leaders of the 20th century were persons who were influenced by the religions and appealed to the spirit and core values of the religions. Thus Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. They were prepared to suffer for a cause and forgive their opponents who oppressed them.

C. Another relationship of religions is possible
Leaving behind the sad history of inter-religious animosities of the past, it would be possible to forge another relationship among persons of different religions, among the religious institutions and among the religions as whole bodies or movements.
i) For this each religion must return to an emphasis on an effort to **live its primary intuitions,** core values, and basic teachings. This would require an internal reform, self-purification and renewal within each religion. For this within each religion its core values would be a criterion for its self correction. For instance any teaching or practise going against the primary and unique commandment of Jesus to love God and neighbor would not be admissible as Christian. Likewise for the other religions in terms of their core teachings. Externally a criterion common to all religions would be the common core values and considerations of the common good of humanity, if such an agreement is possible. It would also require a soft-pedaling, or acknowledging the relativity, of the philosophical and cultural expressions that often make for differences in interpretations of the core values, even to the extent of leading to misunderstandings, antagonisms and conflict. It would generate more reflective persons both young and old.
ii) Religions **cooperating for the common human good** could evolve studies, reflection, mediation, empowerment and participation in common action that would be fulfilling for all. Common meditation can be a powerful means of building togetherness in thought and action.
iii) The religions can together be linked in **networks** among themselves and with other agencies for realizing the core values of the religions and the common good of humanity. This would require an understanding of the events, issues, trends, values and needs of persons, of a community and of the larger world to which they belong.
iv) In the modern world of **global inter-relatedness,** the religions can come together

to uphold the common cause of humanity with agreed moral guidelines against the trends towards inequality, injustice and conflict and violation of human rights.

v) The religions, (through religious leaders, as believers, and as institutions) together can participate in **building a new international order of justice to all**, overcoming the evils of greed, untruth, violence, hatred, exploitation of peoples and destruction of nature.

vi) These would not be without suffering for those who stand courageously for truth and justice in the presently unequal and divided world. This would imply a great responsibility for the **leaderships** of the religions to actively participate in this common human endeavour.

vii) **Asia** can be a significant learning ground in the search for this approach to religion, due to the history of past tolerance, the lessons of past and present conflicts and the evolution of contemporary thinking and practice among the religions and our rather peaceful co-existence in many Asian countries.

All these would perhaps be best expressed as the pursuit of a **spirituality** that is more truly human and divine; this would be the finest in the religions without their deficiencies. Modern persons respond better to the spiritual inspirations even without the externals of the religions. This may be one of the messages of contemporary secularization prevalent in many developed countries. Religions deals with the mystery of life and of ultimate meaning in life. Each one can be open to mystery, no one has a monopoly of it, as the mystery is infinite. **Mystical intuitions** of the transcendent mystery are not open to rational definition and debate or perhaps even comparison, as these would deal with intensely personal experiences with an element of the incommunicable in them. The **dialogue of religions** hence would not be a mere dialogue of concepts, but of life in humility and respect for the other, not merely of specialists but also of ordinary persons and of cultures.

Our further searches in inter-religious dialogue could have a more positive agenda also concerning the cooperation among religions. Relating thus, they would not be competitive for expansion at the expense of others. There would be no social conflicts among the religions. Religions would be a healing influence among social and ethnic groups. All these would be a way in which religions could be related to each other in as different way – in this sense another way of being religion/s is possible. While maintaining the identities of our religions we must go to the basic core message of each of them and relate to issues of love, truth, justice and equality in the actual circumstances of our lives.

" The bells of the temple and the church are different, they may ring at different times, calling their faithful to different services, led by different priests. But the tune, the music are the same, the liberating song of he Divine, reminding us of the eternal truth, all of us are the children of God…**The need of the hour is a shift from religion to spirituality. Religion divides, spirituality unites**. **Spirituality** is the outbreak of truth, the sunrise of justice". This "could pave the way to a state of spiritual solidarity. It could provide the key to open our respective prison doors. But it is up to us to walk out and forge a new spiritual solidarity that would impact and transform our society and set the agenda for a brave, new world." (Swami Agnivesh in Foreword to Albert Nambiaparambil: Pilgrims on the seashore of endless world, Asian Trading Corporation, India, 2002, p.iii.)

D. Some basic considerations for a pluralistic theology of revelations.

A relevant issue in this connection is the interpretation of the claims of divine revelation, especially by the three monotheistic religions/ Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Historically Christianity has had three paradigms or models for salvation,

a. an exclusivist paradigm according to which only Christianity is salvific,

b. inclusivist: persons from other religions can be saved through Christ and the church as anonymous Christians

c. pluralist: salvation is open to all,- through other religions – according to good life. We offer some basic reflections on these positions.

The divine is unfathomable by humans. No one has a control over knowledge concerning God and the impact of divine action.

The claims of revelation or divine communications are always externally expressed analogically, metaphorically and in a given social cultural context.

The power elites in any community tend to interpret such claims of revelation in a manner favourable to them e.g. male domination.

The historically given interpretations of revelation by Christian churches have generally led to the view of the exclusion of the vast majority of humanity from divine grace and eternal salvation.

They have had a bad impact on power holders in the church. Their interpretations have led to long term arrogance and intolerance by powerful Christian churches and to consequent conflicts. They have been invoked to legitimise the Inquisition colonial invasions and centennial colonisation.

The exclusive and inclusive Christian theologies claim God to be on their side to the disadvantage of other revelations.

Both the inclusivist and exclusivist interpretations imply the necessity of the church as a mediator for salvation.

Their Christology generally interpreted salvation as by Jesus, a God man paying a price to an angry God the Father. This would seem to be contrary to the central theme of God is love and love of neighbour and of God which is the criterion of salvation attributed to Jesus in the gospels. The exclusivist and even inclusivist theories are a distortion of the core message of Jesus and an impediment to a correct understanding of discipleship of Jesus.

The clash of the implicit inner revelation to individuals and communities with the explicit exclusivist and inclusivist theologies of revelation call for their revision.

Only a pluralist understanding of revelations can be acceptable to humanity in a world in which the majority of humans are not Christians. The claims of exclusive or inclusive revelations are no longer supported even by the world's rulers of different people's. They cannot be the basis of global interreligious dialogue and convivance.

The de-christianisation of the Western peoples and the growth of secularism throughout the world no longer tolerate the worldviews and hypotheses on which the earlier dominant Christian theologies of revelation were based.

Due to the exclusivist interpretations of revelation that prevailed in the church up till modern times, the Christian establishment was often incapable or slow to appreciate historical movements such as the development of science, democracy, feminism. Still less would it appreciate the other religions or even non Western cultures.

Given these considerations the Christian churches must investigate as to how and why they were wrong for several centuries on such foundational issues as the human condition, the mission of the church, the nature of the divine and the ultimate destiny of humans.

In a one world situation of rapid global communications a claim of an exclusive rigid revelation is no longer tenable or capable of helping build a peaceful and sustainable world order.

V. How do we move?

In the search for religion for another possible world we can approach the issue either theoretically and/or practically. Theoretically would be to work as scholars and make a synthesis of the different teachings with their similarities and differences and work out a sort of global theology or ways in which religions can work together for another world. While this has its values and merits a more realistic approach would seem to be to start from where we are to where we can go and what steps we have to take towards the feasible objective in the current world situation of the religions.

It is first necessary to see the reality of the world religions as it is today, appreciating their good points and seeing that there are also wide differences among the religions. Further historically we can recognise that religions have also been one of the main sources of conflict and wars within countries and even at a wider international level. This phenomenon of religious conflict has been related to alliances of religions with particular communities and nationalities and also the close links that religions have had with the state power. The differences of religions have had relations to economic factors political power and institutions, cultural forms of expression which have an impact on doctrines and world views. All these often make it difficult for religions to work together.

In this search we can begin trying to bring about **inter religious understanding and action** at different levels such as the local, national, regional and global. This can be done within each religion or in an inter religious approach. In a practical approach we can begin with a particular issue at the level of a locality. In that a start could be to see what are the problems that the people face in that situation and what the attitude of the different religions is. We can then try to understand the causes of the suffering or divisions and seek practical remedies for them both as immediate palliatives and as basic remedies. In this we can see what the role is the given religions can play there concerning these issues. Thereafter there can be action together for resolving the issues such as an ethnic conflict or grave divergences in the social standing of groups.

The first stage in this process is to develop **inter - religious discussion of issues or dialogue.** In initiating such a process, the persons involved from the different religions have to try to overcome any prejudices and stereotypes that may be part of the heritage of the religious communities. They should have a desire to deal with the given issue and have some understanding and agreement on the general goals to be realised and the type of means to be undertaken. Thus in situations of conflict the religions can be helpful if they work for peace with justice to all as the goal and non-violence and democratic approaches are the means.

The **conditions for inter-religious dialogue** are similar to conditions in other situations of dialogue where there are deep differences and conflicts. The religions can bring in a specific dimension of meditation in common which can be a means also of deep listening, maybe in silence and developing openness to each other and trust. Such dialogue has to be among equals, undertaken in humility and honesty with acceptance of the other as the other without seeking to convert the other to one's point of view, especially to one's doctrinal assumptions. An approach of being self-critical

and mutually critical in the search for truth and peace with justice can be helpful for coming towards a better understanding of reality and among the religions themselves.

In the process of actual search for a *religion in another possible world* it may be more **practical to think first of a better world** that could be worked towards in the given circumstances choosing feasible targets and manageable strategies. This can of course be in the background of an ideal possible world or what may be sometimes called utopia. In undertaking such **feasible action** the group would have to think of the possible allies in the process and the obstacles. If we think of the global level we can think of such issues as the reform of the UNO, the Security Council and its membership and decision making process as likely objectives on which the world religions may agree and then seek methods by which the religions together can influence global thinking and the process of the reform of the UNO. In other words, the religions would do well to begin with the type of issues that are practical and would be understood by the rest of society and different levels. We could say the world sets the agenda for inter-religious dialogue and action. In taking up such issues they can try to formulate positive agreements. In this methodology what has been learned in the processes of conflict resolution can be valuable in the inter-religious dialogue itself. E.g 'Getting to yes'.

More specifically in inter-religious dialogue it would be helpful to **relativise or de emphasize** the **doctrinal differences** of religions and reflect together on the moral issues, the core values and possible common action in a practical situation.

In this connection it will be important to try to **overcome the exclusivist tendencies** of the different **fundamentalisms** that affect the religions. Fundamentalisms often stress some aspects of the teachings of a religion to the exclusion of other religions. But an emphasis on the core values that stress respect for one another and the common human good can help groups to get beyond the divisions of fundamentalisms. In this process the religious groups can think of establishing communal and institutional dimensions for resolving the given issue or in general building a better world. Thus in a locality an **inter-religious council** representing all the partners in the dialogue and with capability of extending to different localities and even networking nationally can be helpful for resolving issues such as an inter-religious conflict. In these there could be an appeal to the high ethical standards of all religions while agreeing to respect the different doctrinal positions of each religion and maintaining its own cultural identity and differences in ways of worship and ritual.

The religions together can be a very valuable and effective means of bringing about a change in the consciousness of individuals and groups concerning what is just and right in a given situation. They can help in promoting cultures of peace and understanding that make for personal fulfilment and social harmony. The understanding of these values and processes can be communicated through the means of education available to each religion and this may influence also the education in the schools as well as the education through the religious prayer sessions, meditations and festivities. The religions can have a very great impact on influencing the younger generation who are often the bearers of new visions and initiators of new orientations.

An inter-religious group in a **given place or region** can also influence other agencies such as the cultural media, the governments and political parties and even business. Therefore the inter-religious group could develop the personal and collective responsibility of defending the human rights of particularly the marginalised and the oppressed groups, as well as create a consciousness of the duties of all concerned groups. In this process they can help develop new partnerships

among the religions in building the desired relationships and institutions to solve human problem such as social injustice.

Coming together in trying to resolve such issues inspired by the core values of the religions and of humanism would be in a sense the **real conversion that the religions should seek** instead of a mission of converting persons to membership of one's own religion.

It would be important to recognise that the **linkage of religions with state power** has been one of the major occasions or reasons for inter-religious conflict. Hence it should be good if inter-religious dialogue would think of ways by which there could be a separation of religions from state power and state control. This would help the religions themselves to return to their deeper values that bring understanding and peace with justice rather than competition and conflict. The history of Indo Pakistan relations in the last 50-60 years can indicate to us how religions linked to state power can be a source of long term conflict and even of wars.

A feasible and necessary issue in the present circumstances would be the need for **religions to come together** to care for nature and check the **ecological devastation** based on the present widespread consumerist lifestyle and the economic exploitation of the natural resources of the earth. On these issues there is now awareness at the global level and even on the level of children who learn at school the need for care for the earth. The religions in diverse places and at different levels of organisation can teach and bring about practices for fairness to humans and nature both at present and inter generationally in the perspective of the future. Through the process of meditation and social dialogue they can think of methods and alliances for saving the environment and realising justice in this field. At the global level the religions could bring influence to bear on the governments of the world to implement the UN proposals for an Earth Charter as decided in the Kyoto protocol regarding the environment and ecology.

All these approaches of inter-religious dialogue working towards the realisation of the ethical values would be in a certain sense **promoting a spirituality** that goes beyond particular religiosities and mere rationalising. They can point towards an approach of listening to the spirit and evoking the spirit acknowledged by all religions for the practical common good.

A practical way of proceeding in this conference would be for inter-religious groups to take up some of the main action plans of the **World Social forum** and reflect on how they can give a value orientation to the objectives of the WSF for another possible world. They can also indicate methodologies for bringing about their realisation and promoting a worldwide educational endeavour concerning those objectives.

In this manner the World Forum on Theologies for Liberation can be helpful in deciding on some lines of **research, meditation and action** that are currently relevant to and even urgently needed. WFTL can globally network both for its own future as a forum and for furthering the activities of the WSF. In this process some of the outlines of a feasible religion or understanding among religions would emerge through relevant inter-religious action together.

The WFTL can undertake activities for diluting and reducing the exclusive tendencies of fundamentalist religious groups and taming their aggressive approaches. They can carry out a mission of helping the fundamentalist groups to return to the basic inspirations and values of their religions. These are generally more tolerant, open to other religions and cultures and pluralist in the interpretation of divine

revelation and human salvation. WFTL can have as an objective and mission the transformation of the members and leaderships of all fundamentalist groups of all religions towards an approach of seeking the common good of all through justice, peace and democracy.

Could the WFTL carry out educational programs that show how fundamentalist groups have been very harmful historically and led to some of the worst conflicts in human history.

The advance of globalisation and rapid communications in the modern world can contribute to better understanding of peoples beyond the frontiers of religions , race, gender, class and caste. The WFTL while recognising the value and contribution of charismatic and Pentecostal churches and groups towards understanding and healing of personal problems, can encourage them to be concerned with the wider socio economic and political and cultural problems of people. They can inspire public consciousness of these problems and support policies for social justice and social security at a wider level as of the nation states, regions and even globally.

Would it be possible and advisable for WFTL to set up the forum on a more systematic basis with a global leadership and national and local units networking among themselves concerning given urgent needs. The WFTL can help bring the religious groups working together for liberation into a more coherent and effective network. They can also inter-relate the religious groups across the continents overcoming barriers of wealth and poverty, race and culture. The meeting of this WFTL in conjunction with the WSF can help bring together persons and groups from movements that are not religious inspired to a working alliance with the WFTL, groups concerned with common overall issues such as human development, peace with justice, democracy and human rights, gender justice, care of the environment and combating AIDS. The organising committee of the WFTL can consider how during this session it is possible to set up working groups interested in such teams and communicate with the participants or relevant groups of the WSF. The WFTL can continue the work for developing a global ethic as taken up by the 1993 World Parliament of Religions, the 1999 The Hague conference on Peace, 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and the work of organisations as the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

It would be desirable that this forum on theology and liberation brings out a statement that would have an impact throughout the world. This could be a great inspiration to local groups of religions to get together to advance the common causes inspired by the core values as well as the example of a forum such as this.

Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, 2005