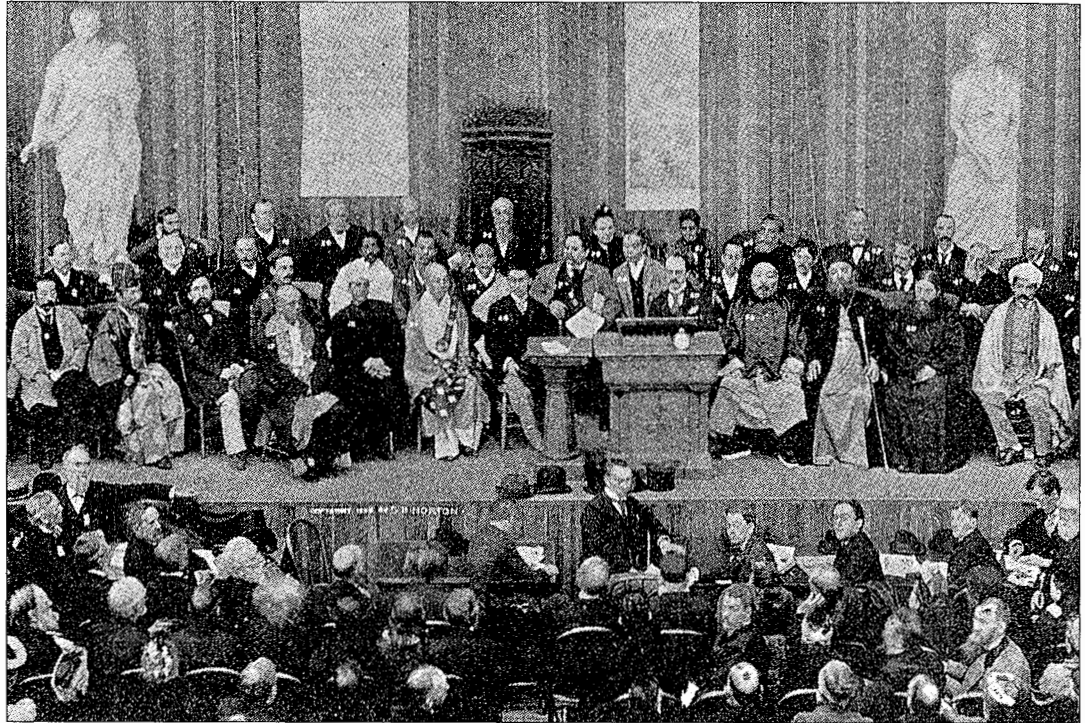

IN THE NAME OF RELIGIONS



The World's Parliament of Religions, 1893

The World's Parliament of Religions convened in Chicago exactly 100 years ago, its members boldly proclaiming the "end of national religions" and resolving that their traditions would henceforth make war "not on each other, but on the giant evils that afflict mankind." Since then, Diana Eck shows, vast global transformations and major new understandings derived from the comparative study of religions have challenged—but not destroyed—that earlier spirit of conciliation and cooperation.

BY DIANA L. ECK

Several worldwide interfaith organizations, including the World Conference on Religion and Peace, have named 1993 the "Year of Interreligious Understanding and Cooperation." The occasion is the centennial of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, a landmark event that took place in Chicago in connection with the World's Columbian Exhibition. There, for the first time in modern history, some would say for the first time ever, Hindus, Buddhist, Jains, Jews, Protestants, Catholics, adherents of the Shinto and Zoroastrian traditions—all met together to speak of their faith. The gathering was planned and hosted by Protestant Christians. As the chairman of the Parliament, Presbyterian minister John Henry Barrows, observed, "It was felt to be wise and advantageous that the religions of the world, which are competing at so many points in all the continents, should be brought together not for contention but for loving conference, in one room."

The Parliament convened for 17 days of meetings and more than 200 presentations. Thousands packed into the Art Institute of Chicago, hearing for the first time the voices of Hindus, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians. India's eloquent Swami Vivekananda spoke of Hinduism as the religion that has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance and described the diversity of religions as "the same light coming through different colors." Together, the assembly recited the Lord's Prayer as a universal prayer, and Rabbi Emil Hirsch of Chicago proclaimed, "The day of national religions is past. The God of the universe speaks to all mankind!" At the closing session, Chicago lawyer Charles Bonney, one of the Parliament's chief visionaries, declared, "Henceforth the religions of the world will make war, not on each other, but on the giant evils that afflict mankind."

In 1993 one reads these words with considerable skepticism. On the surface at least, most people see little evidence of a cooperative religious alliance against the ills of the world. Indeed, the past 100 years have provided ample evidence that religions are still

powerful producers of symbolic weaponry for the strife of humankind. In the late 20th century, religious rhetoric and the communal power of religious identity have been employed in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and Sri Lanka, in the Sikh separatist movement in the Punjab, and in the competition between Muslims and Christians in sub-Saharan Africa. As 1993 began, communal violence returned to India, sparked by the controversy over a 16th-century mosque said to stand on the ruins of an ancient Hindu temple honoring Lord Rama. "Ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia, the flaring of anti-Semitism in Europe, the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York—all were replete with religious overtones and undertones. The fear of losing ground to the "other" or to "secularism" seems to lodge equally in the hearts of majorities and minorities, and fanning that fear is the strategy of religious communalists the world over, from India's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party to America's Christian Coalition. In the 1990s the politics of identity is reshaping the globe, with religion forming an important part of ever more narrowly construed ethnic and national identities.

So what about this Year of Interreligious Understanding and Cooperation? Is it the pipe dream of those who never read the newspapers, or is there also another, more hopeful story to be told? After all, extremism captures public attention in a way that cooperation and understanding do not. When a mosque is destroyed in Ayodhya or a Hindu temple is toppled in Lahore, the news reports do not mention the Friendship Circles of Hindus and Muslims who work tirelessly for interreligious harmony in Kanpur or the peace brigades of Bombay. When fearful citizens of Milton, Massachusetts protest plans for a new mosque, we are more likely to hear about it than when a spirit of cooperation prevails, as it did in Sharon, Massachusetts, where Muslims, Christians, and Jews from all over New England gathered to break ground for a new

Islamic Center. Extremism and contention constitute news; cooperation seldom does.

Yet a careful observer of the religious world today would have to conclude that if religious extremism and religious chauvinism has had an upswing in the late 20th century, so has interreligious dialogue and cooperation. The last two decades have seen the genesis of countless interfaith activities. There are local efforts—interfaith councils in Hong Kong and Los Angeles, in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Syracuse, New York. There are Christian-Buddhist dialogues on nonviolence, on humanity's relation to nature, and on the meaning of Christian "God" language and Buddhist "Emptiness" language. There are interfaith forums on AIDS, refugees, and the environment. And today, 100 years after the Chicago Parliament, there are five major international interreligious organizations—the International Association for Religious Freedom, the Temple of Understanding, the World Congress of Faiths, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the Global Forum.

Are we then at the beginning of a new era of religious extremism, chauvinism, and fundamentalism, or one of religious pluralism based on the recognition of interdependence and the necessity of interreligious cooperation? While the georeligious world today is too complex to assert that either of these two powerful currents predominates, one can safely say that fundamentalism and pluralism pose the two challenges that people of all religious traditions face.

Both fundamentalism and pluralism are responses to modernity, with its religious diversity and competing values. Fundamentalists reaffirm the exclusive certainties of their own traditions, with a heightened sense of the boundaries of belonging that separate "us" from "them." Pluralists, without giving up the distinctiveness of their own tradition, engage the other in the mutual education and, poten-

tially, the mutual transformation of dialogue. To the fundamentalist, the borders of religious certainty are tightly guarded; to the pluralist, the borders are the good fences where one meets the neighbor. To many fundamentalists, secularism, seen as the denial of religious claims, is the enemy; to pluralists, secularism, seen as the separation of government from the domination of a single religion, is the essential concomitant of religious diversity and the protection of religious freedom.

Both movements are compelling reminders to those of us in universities that the history of religions, as the comparative study of religions is sometimes called, is not over but is happening before our very eyes. We who make it our business to study religion cannot imagine a more interesting or demanding time to be about our work. The Fundamentalism Project, launched at the University of Chicago's Divinity School with the cooperation of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, has spent three years organizing scholars to assess the movements that might be termed fundamentalisms—those Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, and even Hindu movements that are characterized by certain family resemblances: a hostility toward modernity and secularism, an insistence upon the exclusivity of truth claims, and a clear sense of the boundaries that set the community apart. More recently and more modestly, the Pluralism Project, an undertaking of Harvard University's Committee on the Study of Religion, has engaged student researchers throughout the United States to map the virtually unknown terrain of America's new religious landscape with its immigrant and indigenous Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh communities. It is also studying the emerging mediating institutions, such as interfaith councils, and asking how religious diversity is reshaping the meaning of

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American pluralism.

To understand the unfolding history of religions, scholars have to study the new forms of religious exclusivism and pluralism. At present, the greatest religious tensions are not those between any one religion and another; they are the tensions between the fundamentalist and the pluralist in each and every religious tradition. Novelist Salman Rushdie recently observed that the "great struggle for the soul of the Muslim world" is underway. He called for a corrective to the media fascination with the fundamentalist agenda, pointing to the Muslim thinkers, artists, and theorists whose courageous resistance to extremism is unmarked and unstudied. As Rushdie made clear, part of the strategy of religious extremism has been to magnify the perception of its power and to silence not only the voices of pluralism and secularism within the faith but the moderate voices as well. Moderate Sikhs who resisted the call for a Sikh state of Khalistan were murdered in the Punjab; the head of the Belgian Muslim community was killed a few days after he challenged Khomeini's death sentence on Salman Rushdie. Hindus in India who espouse old-fashioned Vivekananda-style tolerance scarcely dare speak of themselves as Hindus in India today, so identified has the term become with religious extremism. And many American Christians have been disappointed by the failure of liberal or even mainstream churches to compete successfully with right-wing fundamentalists for the public's attention.

At the Parliament of 1893, neither fundamentalism nor pluralism in their modern forms were much in the air. But there were hints of the kind of exclusivism that would rise again in so many religious traditions in the late 20th century. The Sultan of Turkey, Abdul Hamid II, refused an invitation to attend; whether from active disapproval or sheer lack of interest is unclear. The Archbishop of Canterbury declined to attend because, as he put it, "the Christian religion is the only true religion." The Reverend E. J. Eitel, a Hong Kong missionary, wrote accusing the organizers of

"playing fast and loose with the truth and coquetting with false religions." The headline in the *Chicago Tribune* on September 16, 1893, would have confirmed his suspicions: "Wells of Truth Outside." It underlined the realization, to some a blasphemy, that there was indeed religious truth outside the Christian tradition.

Despite these rebuffs, the prevailing spirit of the Parliament was a kind of welcoming universalism or inclusivism on the part of the Western and largely Christian hosts. The spirit of universalism was very popular in the late 19th century. As Oxford University professor Max Müller put it, "The living kernel of religion can be found, I believe, in almost every creed, however much the husk may vary. And think what that means! It means that above and beneath and behind all religions there is one eternal, one universal religion." Some version of this affirmation was integral to the world view of the Unitarian movement, the Theosophists, the Swedenborgians, and the reformed Hindu movements of the 19th century such as the Brahma Samaj. One of the goals of the Parliament was to "unite all religions against irreligion."

For many of those at the Parliament, however, the universal gathering in of the religions was nothing more than an extension of the vision of a united Christendom. Chairman Barrows addressed the assembly as children of One God and asked, "Why should not Christians be glad to learn what God has wrought through Buddha and Zoroaster—through the sages of China, and the prophets of India and the prophet of Islam?" The God of whom all were children and who spoke through the Buddha, however, was clearly understood to be the God most of the Christian audience already knew and whom was addressed in the Lord's Prayer. While Barrows truly believed that all were there as members of a Parliament of Religions over which flies no sectarian flag, it is clear that his very conception of the universal was but a larger and more expansive Christianity.

General knowledge of the world's reli-

gious traditions was scant 100 years ago. One of the planners of the 1893 Parliament called it "the first school of comparative religions wherein devout men of all faiths may speak for themselves without hindrance, without criticism, and without compromise and tell what they believe and why they believe it." And they did. When the Sri Lankan Buddhist reformer Dharmapala asked the assembly, "How many of you have read the life of the Buddha?" only five raised a hand. "Five only!" he scolded. "Four hundred and seventy-five millions of people accept our religion of love and hope. You call yourselves a nation—a great nation—and yet you do not know the history of this great teacher. How dare you judge us!"

The comparative study of religion was relatively new as an academic subject in the late 19th century. Studying one's own religious tradition was one thing, but the attempt to enter into the disciplined study of another faith, to understand a world view and transcendent vision one does not share, was something new in the academic world. And beyond the study of another particular tradition was the attempt to discern what religion is as a human phenomenon. At the time of the Parliament, only a handful of American universities attempted such study at all. Today there are nearly 1,000 four-year colleges and universities, public and private, with departments of religious studies. To some extent the genesis of academic interest in the religions of the world, especially in the United States, can be traced to the Parliament.

Six European scholars of religion, including F. Max Müller, C. P. Thiele, and J. Estlin Carpenter, sent messages to the Parliament. Müller even sent a second letter, regretting deeply that he had been unable to come and referring to the Parliament as "one of the most memorable events in the history of the world." Müller (1823–1900) is often seen as a father of comparative religion, which he referred to as the "science of religion." He set an early standard for this study when he said, "He who knows one, knows none." Müller used lan-

guage as an analogy, arguing that it is only by becoming fluent in another language that one is able to gain some perspective on the peculiarities and distinctiveness of one's own and thus gain a more general sense of the structure and workings of language.

In the 19th century, it was common in the West to speak of Judaism and Christianity as revealed religion and the others as natural religion. However, emerging philological scholarship challenged this distinction. Müller, a scholar of the religions of India and translator of the Rig Veda, was the major force behind the publication of the series called "The Sacred Books of the East," which brought major sacred texts of the "Eastern" religious traditions into English translation. Müller's colleague at Oxford, J. Estlin Carpenter, wrote to the Parliament of the significance of this for the future of religion:

Philology has put the key of language into our hands. Shrine after shrine in the world's great temple has been entered; the songs of praise, the commands of law, the litanies of penitence, have been fetched from the tombs of the Nile, or the mounds of Mesopotamia, or the sanctuaries of the Ganges. The Bible of humanity has been recorded. What will it teach us? I desire to suggest to this Congress that it bring home the need of a conception of revelation unconfined to any particular religion, but capable of application in diverse modes to all.

The "key of language" did indeed make available to Western readers sources that could roughly be called scripture—the Avesta of the Zoroastrian tradition, the Vedas, Brahmanas, and Upanishads of the Hindu tradition. It also made possible the historical and critical study of the Bible. Both would eventually provoke the antagonism of 20th-century Protestant fundamentalism.

Just as the spirit of universalism dominated the Parliament and the religious outlook of the late 19th century, so did it dominate the emerging study of religion. Müller's sense that "above and beneath and behind all religions

there is one eternal, one universal religion" generated a spirit of reification—something called *religion* and various bounded entities called *the religions*. The other side of the visionary hope for an emerging universal religion was the strong impulse in the wake of Darwin to discover the origins of religion—in the primordial response to nature, as Müller contended, or in what E. B. Tylor called animism, or in Emile Durkheim's description of totemism as the germ of that "eminently collective thing" called religion, or in Freud's primordial struggle of the sons against the fathers, or in Jung's "myth-forming structural elements" of the unconscious psyche he called archetypes.

Naming the religions gave Müller pause. Confucianism seemed to be known in Chinese as "the teaching," Taoism as "the Way." None seemed to have a name for itself or a word for religion. Nonetheless, describing these teachings and ways as the great religions became commonplace. For example, in his *Ten Great Religions* (1871), Harvard professor James Freeman Clarke discusses 10 religious "systems" such as Brahmanism, Buddhism, and the religion of ancient Rome, all described as ethnic religions, and compares each with Christianity, which, by contrast, is not ethnic but catholic or universal in nature, and therefore holding promise of becoming the "religion of all races."

The power of definition and representation, so much a part of the Orientalist enterprise lately criticized by Edward Said, was wielded by early scholars of comparative religion in both Europe and America. During the 19th century the names emerged for the first time with "isms" tagging the reifications—Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism. The idea that a Chinese merchant might "belong" to three of these "religions" at once did not seem to discourage this way of thinking, which was, in fact, in need of considerable amendment. Long before the deconstructionist phase of recent intellectual history, the Buddha's revolution in thinking in the sixth century B.C. pointed to the ways in which human beings

continually ascribe solidity and fixity to what is inherently dynamic by affixing nouns or names. Yet the comparative study of religion has produced countless books dedicating a chapter to each of the world religions, each a species of a common genus called religion.

As the 20th century moved toward middle age, scholars began to challenge this way of thinking about religion. Wilfred Cantwell Smith deserves credit for insisting on a dynamic understanding of religion, a word which he suggests might well be abandoned as a noun in favor of the cumulative "religious tradition" (*The Meaning and End of Religion*, 1962). Religious traditions are historical, constantly changing in relation to one another and in response to each era. They are not fixed systems or circumscribed entities but dynamic, cumulative historical traditions, more like rivers than monuments; they are not best understood by uncovering their origins. As Smith puts it, "time's arrow is pointed the other way." What has emerged in the course of the history of religious traditions—from Bach to Barth, from the Delhi Sultanate to the Dalai Lama—is certainly as significant as what can be discerned of their beginnings. And the ways in which they have diverged are as significant as their similarities.

The language employed to speak of religious life posed another problem. A century ago, scholars would commonly write of the creeds, scriptures, revelation, worship, and ways of salvation of various religious traditions without stopping to investigate the adequacy of such categories of thought, all derived primarily from Christian experience. For example, the idea that a religion should have a creed, a concise set of beliefs, was so taken for granted that one could speak of people of many races, languages, and creeds as if creed were simply another locution for religion. Having delimited Hinduism, British missionaries and civil servants were concerned to find out what Hindus believe. It simply did not occur to most observers 100 years ago that the

very notion of creed as a significant religious category was distinctly Christian. Of course, one could compare the Jewish *shema* or the Islamic *shahada* as formulas of central affirmations, but what a Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain believes is not a direct or even very fruitful entry into the understanding of these traditions, which are orthopraxies—correct practices—more than orthodoxies.

During the 20th century, the school loosely called the phenomenology of religion, following the Dutch scholars W. B. Kristenson and Gerardus van der Leeuw, focused attention not on historical religious traditions but on religious phenomena as they appear across traditions and times. They proposed typologies and categories of understanding that, in their view, did not give special place to the language of a single religious tradition. The phenomenologists moved away from the tacitly Christian theological presuppositions of earlier scholars to observe what was termed *epoché*, a bracketing of one's own judgment and presuppositions in order to examine groups of phenomena—types, patterns, and morphologies—of human religious life. Rather than speak of "God" or the "gods," van der Leeuw used the category of "power," Rudolph Otto spoke of "the holy," and Mircea Eliade spoke of "the sacred."

Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade did much to shape this stream of religious studies in North America, breaking in his own way from a concern with origins and the world religions to a concern with *homo religiosus* and the encounter with the sacred, which Eliade saw as a "universal dimension" of human experience. He called his approach a "new humanism," aiming to "decipher and explicate every kind of encounter of man with the sacred, from prehistory to our day." The sacred "shows itself" in hierophanies, or appearances, which bear striking resemblance to one another across cultures and history. The study of myths, symbols, and rituals reveals deep forms and patterns of religiousness—the yearning for

the center, the *axis mundi*; the nostalgia for the time-of-beginnings, *illud tempus*.

But with the ongoing contributions of scholars steeped in the study of the traditions of Japan or India, for example, the problem of such an enterprise became clear: This interpretive language—whether scripture, prayer, and sacrifice, or myth, symbol, and ritual—also comes out of particular Western traditions of experience. The very terms bear the categories and codes of the West and cannot be used as if their semantic resonances were germane to the whole of human experience. What exactly is the sacred in India? Is this universal dimension to be discovered in the concern with what is pure (*pavitra*) or in the concern with what is auspicious (*mangala*)? Is *ritual* a useful term? Perhaps, but not without the scholar's conscious reflection on terms with similar and yet very different semantic range—the Chinese *li* with its dimensions of propriety and order, the Sanskrit *dharma* with its resonances of cosmic order and ethics, or the Sanskrit *kriya* coming from the word family that signifies action. Is mysticism a valid way of thinking about a particular stream of religious experience? Perhaps, but not without pointed reflection upon *which* stream. From the standpoint of Indian religious traditions, is *bhakti*, the devotional tradition of love, mysticism? Or is *yoga*, the tradition of what one might call spiritual discipline, mysticism? And again, is worship a good way to describe the purpose of a Hindu's visit to a temple, when the Hindu would use the term *darshan*, "seeing," to speak of that experience?

The question of whose language and forms of representation are to be employed as categories is much discussed today. The scholarly world is global, and the task of hermeneutics is increasingly a task of mutual interpretation. The point, however, is not to decide that the language of either the insider or the outsider has priority but to recognize that it is the very task of the comparative study of religion to bring these into dialogue so that they may inform each other.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith has been at the

forefront of those rethinking the categories of interpretation. He uses the term *faith*, for example, to refer to the personal affective quality of engagement through which a person appropriates a particular religious tradition, but he does so only after a careful study of the historical and contemporary meanings of both faith and belief in the West and after a rigorous study of the Hindu term *sraddha*, with its sense of setting one's heart, and the Muslim understanding of *iman*, self-commitment. In both traditions, as in early Christianity, faith is something one does rather than something one has (*Faith and Belief*, 1979). Smith does not propose giving up the use of generic concepts or of Western scholarly vocabulary, but rather insists that the interpretive language of the study of religion come in for more rigorous analysis, that it not be unthinkingly used but self-consciously developed out of the overlapping and diverging semantic terrain of comparative studies.

Miriam Levering and the other authors of a recent work, *Rethinking Scripture* (1989), for example, begin not by analyzing the term *scripture* but by considering the meanings of *canon*, *classic*, *sacred text*, and *word* from the perspectives of many religious traditions. The act of comparison is essentially dialogical, and so is the development of the language of comparative study. If universals are to be found, they cannot be propounded or assumed but must be won from the dialogue of the particulars.

The Parliament of 1893 obviously lacked the benefits of the current rethinking of the language of comparison. But the spirit of the Parliament did anticipate another kind of dialogical dimension in the comparative study of religion. As the Parliament's chairman put it, those for whom the various traditions are vibrant and meaningful should speak for themselves. The view implicit here, while not spelled out, was that one could not understand a religious tradition from textual study alone. Worshippers' voices are also important to disciplined understanding. In the course of the past century both the philological tools of the

textual scholars and the anthropological tools of the fieldworker have become indispensable. Scriptures take on meaning in relation to a community of people, and scholars of living religious traditions cannot work as if those adherents have no voices and do not read what scholars say about them. Religious traditions are not fixed in amber and passed intact from generation to generation but are changing historical movements, constantly appropriated and reformulated by the people for whom they are meaningful and who speak for themselves.

One fascinating irony of the ongoing history of religions is the emergence among some Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and others of explicitly more rigidified formulations of their own traditions. For example, the fluid and polyphonic Hindu tradition has developed forms that are more creedal and systematized, such as the World Hindu Organization's formulation of *Hindutva*, "Hinduness," or the Northern California Hindu Businessman's Association's publication of "Ten Commandments of Hinduism." No longer is Hinduism simply the representation of Orientalists and their 19th-century Indian respondents; it is also the articulation of communalist Hindus in India and of Hindus in diaspora seeking a simplified form of explaining who they are and what they believe. For Western scholars now to call Hinduism a false construction is a kind of neo-Orientalism, denying the legitimacy of the continuing development of the Hindu tradition that has, in this century, begun to produce a reification called Hinduism. The new systems of 20th-century religious chauvinism are as much a part of the history of religions as new forms of 20th-century pluralism.

Teaching comparative religion in 20th-century North America poses the challenge of dialogical study pointedly. Today the world of scholars and interpreters of religion is multi-religious and international. In addition, because of new immigration in the United States, the classroom is multireligious, with a wide range of observance and nonobservance, of

religious literacy and illiteracy. The habit of speaking about the other as exotic must perforce be broken, for the "other" is among us. We are other to one another.

The religious demography of the West has changed radically during the past century, and especially the past quarter century, making the questions of the World's Parliament of 1893 increasingly the questions of every city council in 1993. When the delegates from Asia came to the Parliament, they traveled halfway around the world by boat. Vivekananda, coming from Calcutta, arrived in Chicago too early for the Parliament, ran out of money after 10 days, and by chance met a woman from Boston who put up the young Hindu at her farm in the Boston area for several weeks. He quickly became the toast of the North Shore, where scarcely anyone had met a Hindu before. In 1893, one could have counted the number of Hindus in this country on the fingers of one hand. One hundred years ago, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains lived in Asia; Muslims, in the wide stretch of the Islamic world from Indonesia to Morocco.

Today, however, the religious landscape of the United States alone displays the diversity of traditions that were present at the World's Parliament. Had Vivekananda come to this year's centennial celebration of the Parliament, he would have been welcomed by a Hindu host committee in the Chicago area (a group that organized a fund-raising dinner that netted \$45,000 for the centennial gathering). Had he traveled to Boston he would have found tens of thousands of Indian immigrants—engineers, doctors, and businesspeople—and he would have been greeted at Bengali picnics, Tamil festivals, and Hindu summer family camps. He would have visited the Sri Lakshmi temple in Boston, consecrated in 1991 with the waters of the Ganges mingled with the waters of the Mississippi and the Missouri.

At the time of the Parliament, the Statue of Liberty raised her torchbearing arm of refuge in New York harbor, facing the Atlantic.

In San Francisco, however, at least after the railways were built by using cheap Chinese labor, the language of welcome for the tired and the poor was replaced by the language of exclusion. The first Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882 and revised regularly for several decades, gradually dilating to include other Asians. In 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Bhagat Thind, a Sikh who had settled in California and married an American woman, could be stripped of his naturalized U.S. citizenship because he was a Hindu, by which the court meant his race, not his religion. Such was the disposition of America toward Asia. At the Parliament, a Buddhist delegate from Japan called attention to the "No Japanese" signs posted at establishments on the West Coast. "If such be Christian ethics," he declared, "we are perfectly satisfied to remain heathen."

Since the Immigration Act of 1965, however, immigrants from throughout the world have entered the United States in greater numbers than ever before. According to the 1990 census, the "Asian and Pacific Islander" population is by far the fastest growing, having increased more than sevenfold since 1965. This group includes Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and Sikhs from South Asia, Christians and Muslims from the Philippines, and Buddhists and Christians from Southeast and East Asia. From refugees to voluntary immigrants, from unskilled workers to highly trained professionals, these newcomers have changed the cultural and religious landscape of the United States.

A century ago, the monks in the Japanese temple of Engaku-ji tried to dissuade their leader, Soyen Shaku, from attending the Parliament, arguing that it would not be fitting for a Zen monk to set foot in such an uncivilized land as America. He insisted, however. (The young monk who drafted his letter of acceptance in English was D. T. Suzuki, later to become the greatest translator of the Zen tradition to the West.) Were Soyen Shaku to arrive in San Francisco today, he would find headquartered in a multistory office building the

Buddhist Churches of America. He would find not only immigrant Buddhist communities from Japan, China, and Vietnam but a multitude of Euro-American Buddhists, including *roshis*, or teachers, initiated by Asian mentors. He would find American Buddhist newspapers and magazines, feminist Zen sitting groups, and a Zen AIDS Hospice Project.

In 1893, the Sultan of Turkey declined to send delegates from the Muslim world to Chicago. Today, the United States is part of the Muslim world. Even if a conservative estimate of three to five million is used, Muslims outnumber Episcopalians in the United States. Within a short time there will surely be more Muslims than Jews. In June 1991, Imam Siraj Wahaj of Brooklyn opened a session of the U.S. Congress with Islamic prayers, the first imam ever to do so. On Labor Day weekend each year, more than 5,000 American Muslims attend the annual convention of the Islamic Society of North America. There they discuss American public schools and American politics. The youth network organizes summer camps and Islamic leadership workshops. The Islamic Medical Association discusses ethical issues in medical practice.

The symbolic diversity of the 1893 Parliament has today become the reality of its host city. Chicago's yellow pages list dozens of entries under the headings "Churches: Buddhist" and "Churches: Islamic." The Muslims of Chicago say there are more than 70 mosques in the metropolitan area and nearly half a million Muslims. The suburbs of Lemont and Aurora boast two impressive Hindu temples—both built from the ground up by Hindu temple architects cooperating with American engineers and contractors. There are 50 Buddhist temples in the Midwest Buddhist Association. There are Jain temples and Sikh *gurudwaras*, a Zoroastrian temple, and a Bahai temple. The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, the local Chicago planning team for the centennial, is more representative of the diversity and complexity of the world's religions than the Parliament itself was.

The interreligious encounter that was engineered by visionaries in Chicago in 1893 is today an American main street affair. A parliament of sorts could be duplicated in almost every major American city. There are five mosques in Oklahoma City (none, incidentally, with a sign saying it is a mosque) along with four Hindu temples, one Sikh *gurudwara*, two Vietnamese Buddhist temples, and one Thai Buddhist temple. And Oklahoma City is far from unusual. Denver has 11 Buddhist temples serving its immigrant Asian population, including an older Japanese Jodo Shinshu temple, and more recently Thai, Cambodian, Korean, and Laotian temples have been established as well as six Vietnamese Buddhist temples. Denver also has three mosques, two Sikh *gurudwaras*, two Hindu temples, and a Taoist temple. All of this new diversity burgeoned in the years between 1970 and 1990.

These changes are not unique to the United States. Today's unprecedented economic and political migration of peoples—the United Nations has recently estimated that two percent of the world's population now lives outside its country of origin—has changed the map of the world. Hindus live in Leicester, Buddhists in Boston, and Muslims in Heidelberg. The new immigration has produced a spate of neonativist movements in North America and Europe, but it has also produced a whole range of new religious, cultural, and intellectual encounters. It has brought interfaith relations from the international to the local scene. It has drawn attention to the stereotypes which, for many, constitute the extent of their knowledge of other religious traditions. And it has heightened the significance of religious literacy as a basic component of education.

The interaction of peoples and traditions in the 20th century has produced much that is new—distinctively Balinese or south Indian forms of Christianity, distinctively North American Hindu communities, marriages between Christians and Muslims, Jews for Jesus, neopagan environmentalist movements, and many forms of religious syncretism. The wide

variety of religious life in the 20th century seems, to some, to threaten and blur the boundaries of identity—which is one reason for the resurgence of religious exclusivism and fundamentalism.

The universalism so dominant 100 years ago is now challenged by fundamentalists and pluralists alike, though for different reasons. For the fundamentalist, the very idea that all religions have a common kernel and core undermines the particularity of one's own faith and reduces those well-defended boundaries to mere husks. For the pluralist, universalism poses a more covert problem. As the Parliament so clearly demonstrated, and as the early phases of the comparative study of religion confirmed, the universal is usually somebody's particular writ large. Pluralism, however, is a distinctively different perspective. The pluralist does not expect or desire the emergence of a universal religion, a kind of religious Esperanto. Nor does the pluralist seek a common essence in all religions, though much that is common may be discovered. The commitment of the pluralist is rather to engage the diversity, in the mutually transformative process of understanding, rather than to obliterate it.

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), investigates the ways in which nations envision themselves. Even when citizens do not know one another, "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." The imagined community of religious traditions is even more deeply rooted than that of the nation-state. Religious communalism, both national and international, is a powerful force in today's world, but one might suggest that religious exclusivism or chauvinism that depends for its survival upon the isolation of one people from another is bound, finally, to fail. In the late 20th century, the old imagined communities are in the process of tumultuous change. East and West are no more. We speak of the "former Soviet Union" and the "former

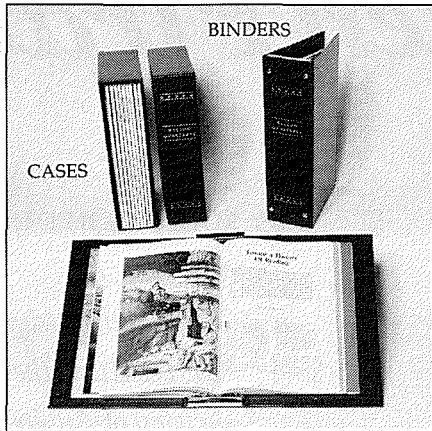
Yugoslavia." "Christendom" and "the Islamic world" have no identifiable geographical borders. There are Sikh mayors in Britain and Muslim mayors in Texas. The Buddha would smile at the collapse of our reifications.

Recently, Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington spoke of the new geopolitical reality of "the West and the rest" and proposed that "civilizational identity" will have a major role in the coming political realignment. He contends that the Confucian, Islamic, and Hindu worlds will be forces to reckon with. But where exactly are these worlds? With mosques in every major Western city and a thriving panoply of Asian-American subcultures, it is difficult to know what he means. It is precisely the interpenetration and proximity of ancient civilizations and cultures that is the hallmark of the late 20th century.

Finding new forms of imagined communities—national and international, religious and interreligious—is one of the more challenging tasks of our time. The worlds of technology, business, and communications have put concerted effort into the imagining of transnational networks of activity and loyalty, for better or for worse. Even the political and military implications of our global situation have received attention. Yet the careful construction of forms of interreligious communication and cooperation that might be considered part of the basic infrastructure of the world of the 20th century lags behind. And in academia, the comparative study of religion, still in its infancy in many parts of the world, is just beginning to develop the dynamic and dialogical models adequate to the interpretive task. The centennial of the World's Parliament of Religions, however, gives evidence of a radically new multireligious social reality—in Chicago and throughout the world. The move in the past century from idealized Protestant universalism to the difficult dialogue of real pluralism is a step in the right direction.



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