

INTRODUCTION TO THE THREE DISCOURSES AT THE WORLD EXPOSITION EXPO 2000 HANOVER “HUMANKIND, NATURE, TECHNOLOGY”

Why is it meaningful to conduct a Discourse of the World Religions at the 2000 World Exposition in Hanover, Germany? The multiplicity of religions is an outrage for those who are not religious and a problem for those who are. The former see in this multiplicity only a source of never-ending conflicts, which lead to nothing but new conflicts. It appears to non-religious persons, therefore, that the enlightenment of the human race requires destroying the entire nightmare of religions. Religious persons, on the other hand, recognize a problem in the multiplicity of religions, an unnatural, forced situation that calls their own faith into question. How can God permit a state of the world in which there exist groups of people, each including hundreds of millions of members, which understand and invoke him by completely different names? How can the one God be venerated by people in completely different ways, when he is the Lord of the world and the Lord of history? It seems that, as the Lord of history, he should have hindered the development of a situation in which there could be as many different convictions about his name and his nature as the multiplicity and diversity of the world religions has produced.

Within the multiplicity of religions there exists a theodicy problem: How can the situation of the multiplicity of religions in the world be compatible with the conviction that God is omnipotent and morally perfect? Two theodicy questions for the theology of religion arise from the multiplicity of the world religions. Both the radically exclusive conviction that only one of the existing religions is true and the radically inclusive view that all religions represent merely traces of the truth raise the theodicy question of why God permits the multiplicity and diversity of religions in the world.

If one is convinced that there is only one true religion, that poses the question of how the omnipotent God can permit so many people to be ignorant of that fact and to belong to other, heterodox faiths. If, on the contrary, one is convinced that all religions are merely traces of the truth, one must explain why God does not reveal himself to humanity as himself, why he hides himself so much that none of the existing religions is his full revelation. One must then ascribe to him, as Severus of Antioch in antiquity and Hegel in the nineteenth century already have, jealousy and a will not to reveal himself.

Since the multiplicity of religions is outrageous for those who are not reli-

gious and vexing for those who are, both groups would gladly be rid of the multiplicity of religions in the world, the former by the abolition of religion entirely and the latter by superseding all other religions by their own or by separating the world religions according to world regions: Each religion would receive a corner of the world, and there would be as little exchange as possible between them.

A world exposition worthy of its name must by definition be the opposite of this latter solution. In order to represent the world as it is, it must portray the multiplicity of religions on its grounds. And if it is really to bring the people of the world together, it must bring together the world religions, because hardly anything shapes the character of the world's people, their interpretations of existence and the structure of their lives, as much as their religions. A world exposition that truly wishes to address what is on humanity's mind, cannot disregard the problem of the multiplicity of the great religions. It can exclude this question in the face of neither the critics nor the friends of religion. It must make its contribution toward defusing the conflicts among religions for secular people just as much as toward promoting genuine dialogue among religious people of different faiths.

A dialogue of the religions is also unavoidable for another reason. The globalization of our life-world no longer permits the solution that each religion may determine the character of its own region and be the mistress of the religious house there – the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* – according to which the coexistence of the different confessions was regulated in Germany after the Reformation. The present globalization goes beyond the internationalization of previous decades. We no longer live and produce as nations for the international market; we live in nations that are determined by more than a religious and cultural tradition, and we produce intellectually and economically within a global context with contributions from many regions of the world. Our economic and intellectual life is increasingly characterized not only by international, but also by global exchange, which necessarily leads to a global encounter of the religions. Supporting this global conversation of the religions of the world at the 2000 World Exposition in Hanover was the wish and the intention of the three EXPO Discourses at the World Exposition in the year 2000.

To expand this conversation beyond the personal meeting of persons at the World Exposition to a worldwide exchange between authors and readers is the wish and intention of this series A Discourse of the World Religions.

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