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FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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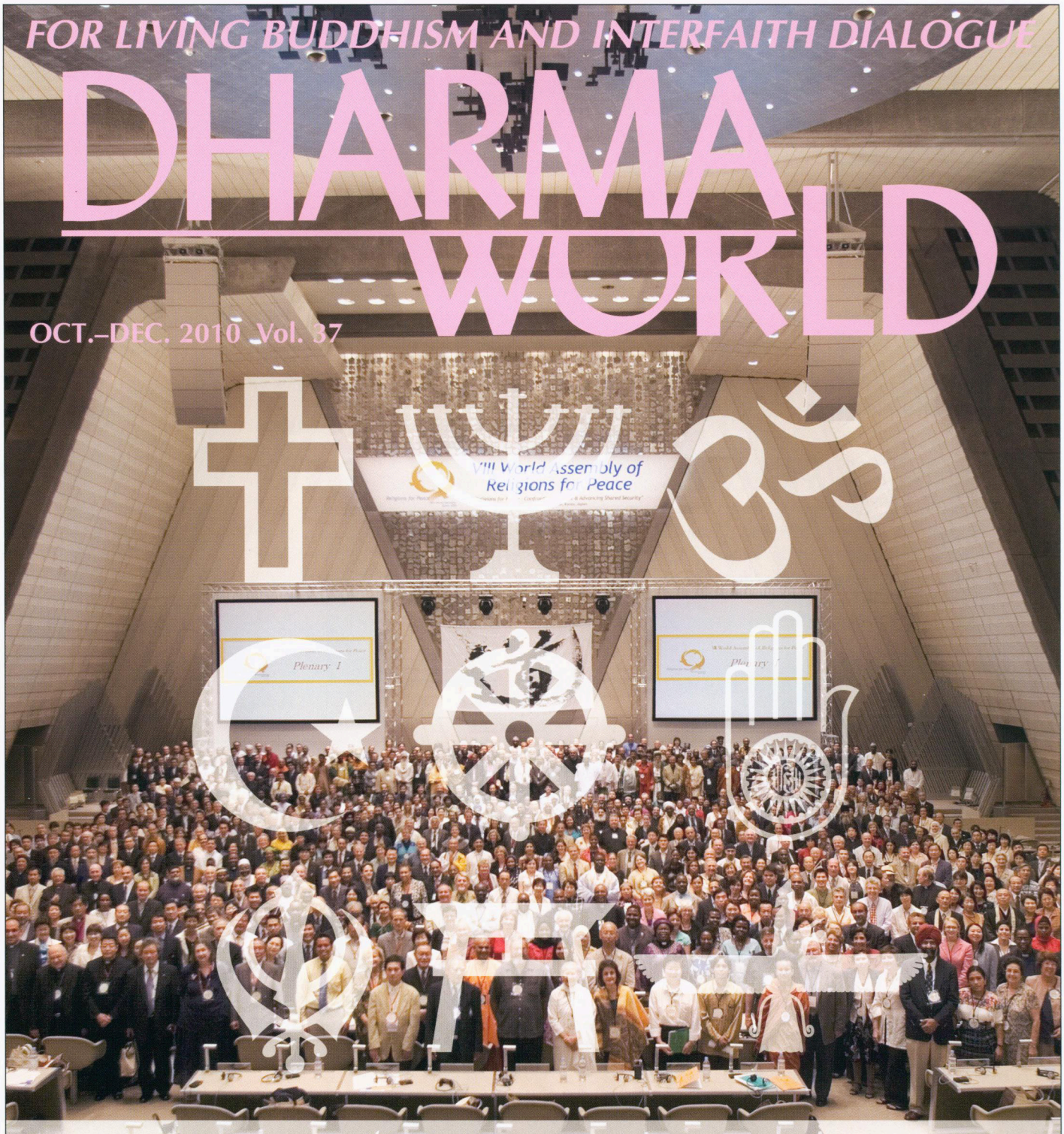

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DHARMA WORLD

For Living Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue

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"The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Commentary" by Nikkyo Niwano is not included in this issue. The next installment will appear in the January–March 2011 issue.

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DHARMA WORLD presents Buddhism as a practical living religion and promotes interreligious dialogue for world peace. It espouses views that emphasize the dignity of life, seeks to rediscover our inner nature and bring our lives more in accord with it, and investigates causes of human suffering. It tries to show how religious principles help solve problems in daily life and how the least application of such principles has wholesome effects on the world around us. It seeks to demonstrate truths that are fundamental to all religions, truths on which all people can act.

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The Significance and Direction of Interreligious Dialogue

by Keiichi Akagawa

Not surprisingly, all religions and sects are fundamentally based on an exclusionary absolutism that holds that their own doctrines and practices are the best. Consequently, it would stand to reason that most religions and sects are at times exclusive and dogmatic. In fact, if viewed from the perspective of world history, one could say that the history of religion is a history of disputes concerning each religion's exclusionary absolutism.

In our present twenty-first century, however, dialogues between religions with differing doctrines and practices are taking place at the worldwide level and, moreover, taking place in peace as if they were a natural occurrence. What are the origins of this change?

One reason would obviously have to be globalization. This is because we are not in an era in which a single religion or sect can save people or achieve its doctrinal ideals on a global level.

Most people involved in religion now acknowledge that it was the Second Vatican Council, convened in 1962–65, that quickly sensed this actual state of the world and opened the path to dialogue between different religions.

Pope Paul VI, the Roman Catholic pontiff at that time, tried to find the role that religion should originally play in the promotion of dialogue and cooperation with other religions, such as with non-Catholic Christian denominations as well as with Buddhism, by putting an end to the Catholic Church's history of exclusionary self-righteousness.

Since then it has become possible for interreligious dialogue to be actively carried out by numerous organizations such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace, and dialogue is continuing today. As a member of the secretariat of the Japanese Committee of Religions for Peace, I myself have long been involved in interreligious dialogue. Even today, as a member of Rissho Kosei-kai, I am engaged in promoting interreligious dialogue. Through this experience, I have come to believe that the significance of interreligious dialogue is not simply learning about other religions and cultures, but also rediscovering our own religion.

Obviously, we persons of religion, like many other people, have a terribly limited knowledge of other religions and sects. The truth is, we know practically nothing of the history and traditions of other religions and sects, or of the political or economic circumstances of their background.

The first step of interreligious dialogue is, of course, for the various religions and sects to learn, through dialogue, about each other's points of agreement and similarity, and also to know their points of difference. But knowing each other's points of agreement and difference is not the sole aim of interreligious dialogue. In the latter half of the twentieth century, great significance was attached to discovering mutual points of agreement and difference through meetings of people of different religions. The interreligious dialogue of today, however, seeks to build a more intimate relationship of mutual trust, and more active involvement and cooperation regarding pressing issues in all parts of the world.

This is not unconnected with the fact that, with the collapse of the East-West Cold War structure at the end of the twentieth century, regional conflicts have broken out frequently all over the world since the turn of the century. Whereas, in the latter half of the twentieth century, encounters and dialogue between differing religions and sects were meaningful in and of themselves, today in the twenty-first century it is the results and effectiveness achieved through dialogue that have come to matter.

In that sense, future interreligious dialogue will probably tend to focus on specific themes. In other words, I have a feeling that we will seek separate coalitions for interreligious dialogue that will involve collaborating with a given religion or sect on a given theme in one region, and then collaborating with a different religion or sect on a different theme in another region.

Interreligious dialogue has existed for less than a half century, a very short time compared with religion's long history. Yet, I feel that interreligious dialogue has certainly made strides even in that short time. ❑

Keiichi Akagawa is head of the External Affairs Group (Interfaith) of Rissho Kosei-kai. He has also served as general affairs director of the Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

Recent Developments in Christian-Muslim Relations

by Michael L. Fitzgerald

In many parts of the world the social climate is not conducive to closer ties, but religious leaders have an important part to play in improving this situation.

In the year 2000 Pope John Paul II paid a visit to Egypt, the country in which I am now serving as the pope's representative. Although the main purpose of the journey was a pilgrimage in the footsteps of Moses, taking the pope to the foot of Mount Sinai, a meeting was arranged with Sheikh al-Azhar and his immediate colleagues at the sheikh's headquarters in Cairo. The cordial nature of this meeting underlined the esteem in which John Paul II was held by Muslims generally.

When Pope Benedict XVI was elected to succeed John Paul II, it was noted that in the sermon he preached at the inauguration of his pontificate, he mentioned explicitly the Jewish people, while referring to other believers in general terms only. The conclusion was drawn that for Benedict dialogue with Muslims was not important. It was hardly noticed that on the following day, receiving in audience the representatives of other Christian churches and other religions who had been present at the ceremony, Benedict XVI said: "I am particularly grateful for the presence in our midst of members of the Muslim community, and I express my appreciation for the growth of dialogue between Muslims and Christians, both at the local and international level. I assure you that the Church wants to continue building bridges of friendship with the followers of all religions, in order to seek the true good of every person and of society as a whole" (April 25, 2005). Meeting members of the Muslim community in Germany, in August of that same year, Benedict declared that dialogue with Muslims was not a passing fad but a vital necessity.

In September of the following year Benedict XVI delivered a speech at the University of Regensburg. In introducing his theme, "Faith, Reason and the University," he quoted from the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaeologos some very harsh words about Muhammad. This provoked uproar in the Muslim world. It also occasioned a letter from thirty-eight Muslim intellectuals who begged to disagree with the pope's interpretation of Islam. This was followed a year later by the Common Word document, signed initially by 138 Muslim scholars, inviting Christians of all denominations to a theological dialogue. In the meantime Pope Benedict had been doing his best to smooth things over, asserting that he had not made the emperor's words his own, and pledging to continue the dialogue between Christians and Muslims encouraged by the Second Vatican Council and by his predecessor, John Paul II. Of particular importance in improving the climate of relations was Benedict's visit to Turkey, including a moment of silent prayer side by side with the imam of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul.

The Common Word Initiative has introduced a more theological dimension into Christian-Muslim dialogue. As has been said, the invitation to dialogue was sent to the heads of all Christian churches and communities. Accordingly, meetings have been held in Cambridge, England, with the archbishop of Canterbury and the grand mufti of Egypt as co-presidents, at Yale University in the United States, with the presence of Protestant leaders, and at the Vatican.

The meeting at the Vatican established the Catholic-Muslim Forum, which is designed to promote theological dialogue. The theme addressed at this first meeting, in November 2008, was "Love of God, Love of Neighbour. The Dignity of the Human Person and Mutual Respect." By all accounts, the discussions on this occasion were both frank

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Roman Catholic Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald was secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue from 1987 to 2002, and its president from 2002 to 2006. He is currently the apostolic nuncio in Egypt and the Holy See's delegate to the League of Arab States. He was also the director of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome from 1972 to 1978.

The World Conference on Dialogue is held in July 2008 at the Royal Palace of El Pardo, in Madrid. The conference was organized by the Muslim World League, an Islamic NGO, and sponsored by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah and King Juan Carlos of Spain co-chaired the opening ceremony.

and fruitful. Receiving in audience the participants in the dialogue, Pope Benedict expressed his satisfaction with a dialogue on a theme that highlighted "the theological and spiritual foundations of a central teaching of our respective religions." He went on to say: "I am well aware that Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and must be worshipers of the one God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. Together we must show, by our mutual respect and solidarity, that we consider ourselves members of one family: the family that God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history" (November 6, 2008). It is expected that further meetings of the forum, and other dialogue sessions resulting from the Common Word Initiative, will take place in the near future.

Another important Muslim initiative has been taken by King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. After a surprising and historic visit to the Vatican to meet Pope Benedict XVI, on November 6, 2007, the king convened a Muslim consultation on dialogue in Mecca, June 4–6, 2008, which produced "The Mecca Appeal for Interfaith Dialogue." This was followed by a dialogue meeting in Madrid in July 2008, remarkable for the fact that alongside Christians and Muslims, invitations were extended to Jews, Buddhists and Hindus. A further meeting held in Geneva, September 30 to October 1, 2009, envisaged the creation of an International Dialogue Centre which would pursue the king's initiative.

Throughout this period the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has been pursuing its meetings with different Islamic organizations: with the World Islamic Call Society (Tripoli); with the Permanent Committee for Dialogue with Monotheistic Religions of Al-Azhar (Cairo); with the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Tehran); and also the Islamic-Catholic Liaison Committee, a joint committee set up in 1995 between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and representatives of different Islamic international organizations. The following are some of the topics that have been discussed: respect for human dignity in the light of bioethics; faith and reason in Christianity and Islam; Christians and Muslims as witnesses of the God of justice, of peace, and of compassion in a world suffering from violence; faith in God and love of neighbor as the foundations for interreligious dialogue; responsibilities of religious leaders especially in times of crisis; the promotion of a pedagogy and culture of peace with particular reference to the role of religions. As can be seen, there is quite a variety in the subjects treated, but often the question of dialogue is connected with the promotion of harmony and peace.

Many other Christian-Muslim meetings are taking place all around the world. Just a few will be mentioned here. In Turkey, for instance, colloquia are being held annually at the Capuchin convent in Istanbul. At the fifth edition, in 2007, the topic was "Believers face to face with modernity," whereas the sixth edition, in 2008, tackled the question of "The relationship between reason and faith in Christianity and Islam." At this latter meeting a close analysis was made of the Common Word document mentioned above. In another region of Turkey, in Iskandarun, a colloquium was held on "The Sacred Books." In Qatar, the conferences organized by the Doha International Center for Dialogue had reached their sixth edition by 2008. The meeting held that year addressed the theme "Religious Values: Perspectives on Peace and Respect for Life." In Tunisia the Ezzitouna University has been organizing Christian-Muslim meetings for several years now. In 2008 the subject under discussion was "Translation as enrichment for cultures and the dialogue of civilisations." The Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chrétien (GRIC), a private group composed mainly of university professors from different countries around the Mediterranean, celebrated in Rabat, Morocco, in April 2008, the thirtieth anniversary of its foundation. After having published the

fruit of joint research in a series of books (on revelation, on faith and justice, on sin and ethical responsibility, etc.), the GRIC is now making its results available through the Internet (www.gric.asso.fr). This group provides an outstanding example of persevering theological dialogue.

In the United States, Catholic-Muslim dialogue has been conducted at the regional level for many years. Each dialogue is headed by a Catholic bishop and a leading member of an American Islamic organization. In 2008 the Mid-Atlantic dialogue decided to take up the theme of religious education. The Midwest group has opted to discuss "In the public square: Muslims and Catholics on religious freedom." Finally, the West Coast Muslim-Catholic dialogue is exploring stories of Abraham. A feature of these dialogues is that they usually take place over weekends at a retreat house, and thus allow time for prayer and fellowship, as well as for intellectual exchanges. In the southern Philippines, the Silsilah Center for dialogue, based in Zamboanga, has already celebrated its silver jubilee. In an area that has seen many conflicts, Silsilah concentrates on promoting mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims, and also on training people to be agents of reconciliation and peace. Finally in Bangladesh, a country that has seen the growth of Islamic militancy, Muslim imams and Christian pastors met together in April 2009 to discuss "Unity in Diversity."

Photo: AP/AFLO

U.S. president Barack Obama speaks on June 4, 2009, at Cairo University. In his speech he aimed to set a new tone in America's often-strained dealings with the world's Muslims.

It is true that in many parts of the world the social climate is not conducive to good relations between Christians and Muslims. The effects of 9/11 are still being felt, producing an attitude of suspicion toward Muslims in general. On the other hand, the invasion of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, and the lack of resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continue to stoke the fires of resentment by Muslims, particularly in the Arab world, toward the West. Christians, for their part, point to the harsh treatment their fellow believers are receiving in Pakistan, for instance, or increasingly recently in Indonesia, as also in Iraq. There are frequent clashes between Christians and Muslims in northern Nigeria, not always on religious grounds, but nevertheless colored by religious differences. Catholics have been shocked by the killing of a bishop in Iraq, and the murder of the Catholic bishop living in Iskandarun, Turkey. Many question whether there is any future for Christian-Muslim dialogue.

On June 4, 2009 President Barack Obama delivered a speech at Cairo University in which he pledged a new beginning in U.S. relations with the Muslim world. His words generated great enthusiasm and hope, as Muslims generally felt that they were at last being taken seriously as partners, and not being dictated to. A year later the Bibliotheca Alexandrina organized a conference to assess the impact of this speech. While the official participants from the United States enumerated all the steps that had been taken to improve relations between Christians and Muslims, the official spokespersons for ISESCO (the Islamic equivalent of UNESCO) and for the Arab League painted a very somber picture. They felt that no progress had been made. It was interesting to note that it was the interventions from the Arab side that received the most applause. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina was in fact criticized for neglecting the political dimension of Christian-Muslim relations. The decision had been taken to concentrate on three areas of possible cooperation: science, education (with particular reference to information technology), and the role of women in society. The frustration of many Muslims, particularly with the nonresolution of the Israeli-Palestinian question, is readily understandable. Nevertheless, to overcome suspicion and antagonism, it is necessary to build up good relations, and one way of doing this is through cooperation.

Religious leaders have their part to play in promoting these good relations. In this respect it is only right to hail the work of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the international organization of which Rissho Kosei-kai's first president, Nikkyo Niwano, was one of the cofounders. Religions for Peace, as it is still widely known, has set up four regional Inter-Religious Councils, in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. There are also nationwide Inter-Religious Councils, particularly in areas that have known conflict, such as Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Sri Lanka, among others. In these councils Christian and Muslim leaders are meeting together in the company of Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and people of other religions. This, in my opinion, is one way of defusing tensions that can exist between the adherents of two religions such as Christianity and Islam. It is very praiseworthy that, faithful to the tradition left by its founder, Nikkyo Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai continues to give its generous support to Religions for Peace. This is one of the ways in which Rissho Kosei-kai contributes to promoting better relations between Christians and Muslims throughout the world. ❑

Critical Challenges in Interreligious Dialogue

by A. Rashied Omar

An Islamic authority warns that religious pluralism, unlike religious plurality, is not a given fact in any society. It constitutes an ongoing process in which different religious traditions learn to interact positively with each other.

For those interreligious activists who have long campaigned that interreligious dialogue should be accorded a more prominent place in the programs of religious institutions, the irony of the post–September 11, 2001 reality is both painful and joyful. Interreligious activities have indeed ascended to near the top of the agenda of a number of religious institutions all over the world, but this was triggered by the abominable attacks on the United States that have only served to reinforce the widespread public perception that religion, and in particular Islam, is linked to violence in some special way. The critical challenge facing interreligious advocates is how to sustain and transform this renewed interreligious energy and solidarity into a global grassroots interreligious movement for peace and justice. Having been intimately connected with the interreligious movement in my home country, South Africa, I will attempt to draw out four key challenges for deepening interreligious dialogue and solidarity from my experience in that context.[1]

The Challenge of Religious Pluralism

One of the most important challenges facing the interreligious movement is to nurture a culture of religious pluralism. But what do we understand by the ubiquitous term "religious pluralism"?

There is an important distinction between religious plurality and religious pluralism. Religious plurality refers to religious diversity, which is an inescapable reality of our globalized world. This, however, does not automatically imply religious pluralism. Facts and figures about different religions in a country refer to religious plurality, and should not be confused with the concept of religious pluralism, which relates to the quality of religious coexistence between the diverse religions within a specific context. In other words, religious plurality informs us about cold census statistics and religious demography, while religious pluralism presents us with a story of human interactions. Donald Shockley succinctly captures the nuance between these two concepts in the following quote:

"Religious pluralism must be distinguished from religious diversity, the reality and presence of a variety of types and forms of religious expressions. This is minimal religious pluralism. The essence of religious pluralism is not regalia but relationships. What is the relation of the content of the various faiths in a community? What is their common history, if any? What are their status and power relations? How do they relate to each other? What are some common humanity efforts that can be planned and worked on jointly?"[2]

Religious pluralism, unlike religious plurality, is not a given fact in any society. It constitutes an ongoing process in which different religious traditions learn to interact positively with each other. Without relating to each other in a cordial and harmonious manner, different religions will not be able to engender an ethos of religious pluralism.

Even more important, however, there is a need for interreligious activists not only to positively embrace the plurality of religious traditions that pervade our globalized world (what we may call extrinsic pluralism) but to incorporate pluralism into the very notion of a religious tradition (what we refer to as intrinsic pluralism).

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No religious tradition likes to acknowledge diversity within its own ranks, more especially if it has to take place in the context of interreligious dialogue. Applying this to the Islamic context, we need to understand that there is no (one) monolithic Islam in the world but a number of diverse articulations or understandings of Islam, frequently locked in fierce rivalry in their claims to be the privileged, orthodox, and authentic voice of Islam. There are many alternative theological, jurisprudential, and cultural expressions of Islam. All of this polyphony of voices needs to be heard and engaged with if we are indeed serious about religious pluralism.

Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Motivations

A second important challenge confronting the interreligious movement is the lack of its ability to transcend the extrinsic motivations on which interreligious solidarity is sought. It is frequently external factors, for example, the need to fight crime and deadly conflict, or to do damage control after provocative attacks on members of another faith community by one or other radical factions, that provide the impetus for interreligious cooperation. There are numerous examples the world over of interreligious cooperation developing in response to situations of conflict. The upsurge and proliferation of interreligious activities in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks on America falls squarely within this category.

Now, these extrinsic motivations may be helpful in getting an interreligious dialogue started, but they are insufficient to sustain the movement in the longer term. In order for the interreligious movement to become self-propelling and sustainable, it needs to find intrinsic reasons from within faith commitments for promoting good relations with people of other religions.

It is my considered view that intrinsic reasons need to precede external reasons for authentic religious pluralism to be procured. Why do we always need to wait for conflict and violence to overwhelm us before we feel the need to develop healthy interreligious and cross-cultural relationships? If intrinsic reasons were to precede external ones, we would not only be contributing to the resolution of existing conflict situations but also be going a long way toward preventing their occurring in the first place. In fact, a far more genuine and permanent religio-pluralistic culture and ethos could emerge. Interreligious activists need more than ever before to recover intrinsic motivations for living in harmony and cooperation with each other. There is, moreover, a critical need for a religio-pluralistic ethos to transform itself into a culture with a long-term relevance to our conflict-ridden world.

Intrinsic motivations lie at the heart of genuine and sustainable interreligious solidarity. Intrinsic motivations, however, continue to be the most elusive goal for interreligious movements all over the world. But what exactly are intrinsic motivations all about?

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World religious leaders meet at the Islamic Center of New York on October 23, 2001, to pray and exchange religious greetings. The meeting was a part of an event hosted by Religions for Peace to promote dialogue among the world's religions and cultures in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks and ensuing military action in Afghanistan.

Intrinsic motivation deals with challenging questions of intentionality. Why and for what purpose are you motivated for the encounter with the "other"? Is the purpose merely instrumental? For example, is there a need for interreligious dialogue if there is no conflict or external problem to be dealt with collaboratively? Intrinsic motivations for interreligious solidarity, moreover, deal with the difficult and challenging questions of evangelism. Does one engage in interreligious solidarity in order to convert the other to one's faith? Can one get involved in interreligious solidarity with a clear conscience? Is the interreligious encounter legitimated by or compromising our deep-seated beliefs and theologies? These difficult questions cannot simply be swept under the carpet. They are of primary importance because, unless they are clearly and unequivocally answered, we run the risk of having an outwardly agreeable dialogue that does not dispose of the mistrust and suspicion and in the end is superficial and does not lead us to the goal of peace building. Building interreligious trust should be one of the most important goals of interreligious movements.

Interreligious Language and Terminology

A third challenge facing the interreligious movement is the question of language in both its *literal* and *symbolic* forms. The interreligious encounter is not only *biased* by the language within which it occurs but also *conditioned* by a powerful symbolic language, namely the predominant categories of thought within which it occurs.

The persistence of interreligious interlocutors in employing categories of thought that are rooted in Western Christian paradigms does not help in interpreting present-day developments within non-Christian religious traditions.

In fact it obscures reality even further and remains as yet another obstacle in what has been correctly defined as the critical task in the aftermath of September 11, namely, that of "building bridges of understanding" between religious communities.

I would like to provide a provocative example of this. Muslim scholars have long objected to the inanity of confusing the two terms *jihad* and *holy war.* They have pointed out that etymologically they are not the same, since holy war translates as *al-harb al-muqaddasah* in Arabic. Both classical as well as contemporary Muslim scholars have chosen to appropriate and interpret the multivalent Islamic concept of jihad in diverse ways. For some it simply means striving to lead a good Muslim life. Another might identify jihad as working hard to spread the message of Islam. For a third, it might be supporting the struggle of oppressed Muslims, and for many it means refining one's character.

Recently, one of America's most vocal Islamic legal scholars, Khaled Abou El Fadl, emphatically stated the case when he argued that holy war "is not an expression used by the Qur'anic text or Muslim theologians interpreting the Qur'an. In Islamic theology, war is never *holy;* either it is justified or not."[3] Moreover, jihad is not directed at other faiths. In mystical (sufi) traditions of Islam the greatest form of jihad, personal jihad, is to purify the soul and refine the disposition. This is regarded as the far more urgent and momentous struggle, and it is based on a prophetic tradition from Muhammad (hadith).

Sufis have traditionally understood this greater form of jihad to be the spiritual struggle to discipline the lower impulses and base instincts in human nature. The renowned thirteenth-century Sufi scholar Jalal al-Din Rumi articulated such an understanding of jihad when he wrote: "The prophets and saints do not avoid spiritual struggle. The first spiritual struggle they undertake is the killing of the ego and the abandonment of personal wishes and sensual desires. This is the greater jihad."[4]

What I am essentially arguing is that a deep sensitivity to and appreciation of the differences in our religious languages may assist us in building bridges of understanding between interfaith communities. In other words, to fairly interpret what sacred concepts and rituals symbolize and mean, we have to hear them in the context of their religious paradigms in a process of mutual illumination.

Top-Down versus Bottom-Up Approaches

Last but not least, one of the more pressing challenges facing the interreligious movement is how to bring other members of the clergy, and more important, the rank and file, along in the interreligious ethos. Often, interreligious dialogue takes place at the level of the top leadership. The challenge for interreligious activists continues to be how to bring the proverbial grassroots along in this interreligious culture. There is a real risk that the wonderful benefits that accrue from interreligious dialogue may not filter down to the rank and file.

An unfortunate example of this top-down approach comes from my own country, South Africa. Interreligious dialogue and solidarity has been one of the major beneficiaries of the post-apartheid dispensation. The new nonracial and democratic government under the moral leadership of first president Nelson Mandela has worked hard to sustain and further develop the legacy of interreligious solidarity forged in the struggle against apartheid. In response to a call by Mandela, religious leaders have set up an interreligious Forum of Religious Leaders to liaise between government and religious communities. Ironically, however, the post-apartheid South African state's overt policy of religious pluralism and interreligious harmony has not been sufficiently buttressed by religious leaders at the civil-society level, and consequently it has not sufficiently filtered down to the grassroots. This is an anomaly that interreligious activists in South Africa are aware of and are working hard to correct.

Global Grassroots Movement Needed

Without a doubt interreligious dialogue has become an important feature of our post–September 11, 2001, world. This is evidenced by the flourishing programs of global interreligious bodies, such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the Parliament of the World's Religions. The critical challenge facing the interreligious movement is how to transform this renewed interreligious energy into a global grassroots interreligious movement for peace and justice. In order for the interreligious movement to rise to this challenge, there is an urgent need for interreligious dialogue to get past what I have called cucumber sandwiches and samosas to the real business of truly loving and embracing "the other" as an extension of ourselves. I have tried to identify four critical challenges that need to be responded to if we are to move to a higher level of interreligious engagement and solidarity. The extent to which the interreligious movement is able to meet these challenges will have positive effects on its future trajectory and on world peace.

In conclusion, for me, the litmus test of "good" and "bad" religion is the extent to which we are willing to embrace the "other," whoever that other may be. We need to recognize our common humanity and see others as a reflection of ourselves. If we do not try to "know" the other, how can we ever "know" the divine? ❑

Notes

1. A. Rashied Omar, "From Resistance to Reconstruction: Challenges Facing Muslim-Christian Relations in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa,* ed. Benjamin F. Soares (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

2. Donald Shockley, *Campus Ministry: The Church beyond Itself* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989).

3. Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Place of Tolerance in Islam: On Reading the Qur'an—and Misreading It" (*Boston Review,* February 25, 2002).

4. William Chittick and Sachiko Murata, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: I. B. Taurus, 1996).

Peace with Justice—an Interfaith Perspective

by Olav Fykse Tveit

When we are mutually accountable to one another, engage both firmly and openly, speak clearly, and listen carefully, our dialogue becomes robust. It challenges, stretches, tests, and renews.

If you want peace, work for justice!" This saying by Pope Paul VI has had enormous power and influence. While rooted in Christian scripture and affirmed by centuries of theological tradition, it is a phrase that has also been taken up by many beyond the churches. It encapsulates a holistic vision of peace with justice.

Christian churches worldwide will have a new opportunity to recommit themselves to a just peace when they gather for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011. This will also be an opportunity for the churches and the ecumenical community to explore future directions in peace work, to continue to build peace rooted in justice together. The event will bring to an end the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–10) during which many activities and educational projects came into being in different parts of the world, seeking to break down unjust structures that yield to violence and to build up bridges of justice, reconciliation, and peace. To underline the churches' commitment to interreligious dialogue and cooperation, several Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and indigenous religious leaders will attend the convocation, bringing unique perspectives from their traditions to the discussions and celebration.

The WCC has for many decades been at the forefront of interreligious dialogue and cooperative action. Firmly rooted in our faith in the Triune God, whom we know as Creator, Redeemer (Jesus Christ), and the Sustainer of life (Holy Spirit), we engage with partners in many religious traditions who are as firmly committed to the basic tenets of their faith traditions. In this there is no attempt to convert one another to the other's faith, yet all participants come away from the dialogue with a renewed understanding not only of the other but of his or her own faith. Indeed, we engage in dialogue because we have something of conviction to say. When we are mutually accountable to one another, engage both firmly and openly, speak clearly, and listen carefully, our dialogue becomes robust. It challenges, stretches, tests, and renews. The miracle is that it is precisely through these tough negotiations that harmonious relationships can often emerge, creating new opportunities for mutually enriching cooperative action.

In the Norwegian Christian-Muslim dialogues in which I engaged for many years, the question of how religious leaders address violence in family life was a serious topic of conversation. As the dialogue developed, we realized that we had to challenge not only the culture of the other but also our own at the same time. Deepening dialogue creates a trusting environment in which partners can feel free both to be critical of the other and also to be self-critical in the presence of the other. Justice requires such transparency, which in turn produces a harmony in which we can let our voices sound together.

It is this kind of dialogue that can lead to peace. One interreligious platform that specializes in such dialogue is the World Conference of Religions for Peace, in which the WCC is a partner. I want to commend this organization as it celebrated its fortieth anniversary in Japan this September. I want also to express my gratitude to Rissho Kosei-kai, one of its founding partners. It is no surprise that Rissho Kosei-kai can be seen as representing Japan's commitment to peace, arising from the deep pain Japan experienced in the nuclear

WCC Photo/Peter Williams

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devastation sixty-five years ago. On August 6, many churches throughout the world stood with other religious partners in local communities to say "Never again!"

The churches of the WCC echo that sentiment. The protracted conflict on the Korean peninsula and its potential for nuclear conflagration was one of several reasons the WCC chose Busan, South Korea, for its next assembly, in 2013. The division of Korea into North and South embodies one of the continuing and painful remnants of the political and ideological dislocations of the Cold War era. Fifty-six years have now passed since the truce was established between North Korea and the United Nations Command. The thirty-eighth parallel, originally designated as a border by the United States and the Soviet Union as a temporary arrangement for disarming Japanese troops on the peninsula, became a permanent division between South and North Korea. Despite the desire of people on both sides of the demilitarized zone (especially separated families) to end the division of the peninsula, all efforts to reunify the country have foundered. Tensions continue and have worsened in recent months.

The WCC, through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), has accompanied the churches on the Korean peninsula during the past decades. The CCIA organized its first international consultation, "Peace and Justice in North-East Asia," in Tozanso, Japan, in October 1984. This consultation was the first attempt by the WCC to bring together Christians from a wide spectrum of member churches with Christians from Korea to look at issues related to the division of Korea and to promote peace, justice, and reconciliation. More recently, the WCC has expressed its concern that the North Korean nuclear issue remains the most serious obstacle to peace in the region. It is of the opinion that "Just Peace" on the Korean peninsula needs to be achieved peacefully through the six-party process.

Addressing the issues of denuclearization of the peninsula and wider security concerns in the East Asia region has been on the agenda of the ecumenical movement for many years. The two WCC general secretaries who preceded me, Dr. Konrad Raiser and Dr. Samuel Kobia, visited North and South Korea and addressed these issues. These visits included meeting with both North Korean and South Korean government officials as well as religious leaders. These efforts were made within the context of the WCC's efforts to mobilize support from all quarters, including religious groups and civil organizations. Both Dr. Raiser and Dr. Kobia strongly conveyed the WCC's position on denuclearization to North Korean government officials. In October 2009, when a WCC delegation led by Dr. Kobia visited Pyongyang, the president of the Supreme People's Assembly, Kim Yong-Nam, told the delegation that a significant impetus to solving the nuclear weapons standoff in the region would be for North Korea and the United States to meet "face-to-face with each other," and he requested the WCC's support for this proposal.

Regional powers such as Japan and China also have an important mediating role in working toward a Just Peace in a region that has long memories of past wounds. Religious communities in the region with strong religious convictions about reconciliation and healing can play a very important role in creating an environment conducive to these political leaders' coming together. Japan in particular, with its adherence to Article 9 of its constitution on not engaging in the use of force for settling international disputes, can play a decisive role in promoting Just Peace. Aware that this provision in the constitution is under constant threat from various groups, I urge Japan's religious communities to stand united in protecting that provision and in working together to give it greater impact in the region. Our goal must be to encourage and support Japan as an important player in building peace with justice. Our cooperative action now as religious communities working together will boost the churches' impact as we gather in Busan in three years.

Photo: AFLO

The World Council of Churches' delegation, including its general secretary, Dr. Samuel Kobia (second from left), poses with Kim Yong-Nam (center), president of the Presidium of North Korea's Supreme People's Assembly, in the Mansudae Assembly Hall in Pyongyang on October 19, 2009.

The churches' concern for Just Peace comes from deep reading and understanding of scripture and tradition. "Justice and peace shall embrace," say the Psalms (85:10), "The effects of justice will be peace," says the prophet Isaiah (32:17), "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9) is one of Jesus' most famous sayings. He also offered us his peace: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). Similarly, God's particular concern for those who are poor, dispossessed, oppressed, or captive in any way runs through the Bible. Just Peace, therefore, is not something that Christians can choose to engage in just if they feel like it. It is not an issue at the margins of our faith. Just Peace is a gift of God and an inherent part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For Christians, it is an imperative.

But, of course, many Christians do not live by this principle. In fact, it is true that some Christians may by their

lifestyle or by their deliberate engagement work against Just Peace. Sin is a reality also in the church. As some have done throughout history, and others do today as well, some Christians misuse texts for unjust or violent purposes.

I also have to admit that the Bible includes some texts that are ambiguous as well as other texts that condone violence and injustice, which can only be understood in the sociopolitical contexts in which they were written. Christians, like other people of faith, must learn to live within this ambiguity and dare to take up the question of context so as to appreciate the importance of self-critical examination of our own links to violence today.

I want to argue that such honest, self-critical reflection is essential for effective interreligious dialogue. I can be critical about my own community, scripture, and tradition, and of course I leave my colleagues in other religious traditions to be self-critical about their own traditions. This is an issue not just for Christians but for all religious people.

The WCC is a truly global institution. It brings together at one ecumenical table 349 churches from 110 countries across the globe. We estimate that this represents more than 550 million Christians. Based on the principle that churches should "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately" (Lund Principle, 1952), Christians of many hues, from countries that sent missionaries and those that were missionized, former colonialists and those formerly colonized, sit at the same table in one *koinonia* (the Greek word meaning a fellowship of equals) to seek Christian unity. It is a table at which each person and church is encouraged to be authentically themselves, not losing their cultural or confessional distinctiveness, but in mutual accountability with one another to somehow find the space to act together in cooperation.

Among the lessons learned in that process is the conviction that context is critical to our theological reflection and action. We look at the text primarily from the context in which we are rooted. Biblical scholarship has also made us aware that when we read the text we need to be aware of the contexts both of the writer and of the audience to whom the text is addressed. It is in the interaction between these contexts that we can draw meaningful principles for our life and work. Attention to different contexts, however, means that there are alternative readings and perspectives. The hermeneutical work at developing interpretations is necessarily done at the dialogue table.

This learning and experience is something we bring to interreligious dialogue as well. Buddhism in Sri Lanka, for example, is very different from Buddhism in Japan. But even within Sri Lanka and within Japan there are a variety of alternative interpretations and expressions. We must see these differences arising from local contexts as having significant value. However, just as the Christian ecumenical table seeks to bring our diversities to the same table to struggle together at finding a way forward, it is also important that Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews create opportunities for such mutually accountable exchanges. I value the fact that such encounters are already taking place in many religious communities. May the practice be taken up more widely and more urgently. In the eyes of the world and in the mirror of conscience, world religions that profess concern for others are, and must be, mutually accountable to one another for peace. ❑

Photo: AP/AFLO

During the World Council of Churches' ninth assembly, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006, Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva speaks on February 17 to 691 delegates from the WCC's 348 member churches and other participants. They gathered under the theme "God, in Your Grace, Transform the World."

Some Reflections on Interreligious Dialogue

by Andrea Bellandi

Dialogue does not involve only theoretical thinking, necessary as it may be. It must be . . . a meeting at the level of spiritual life and religious experience, which are at the heart of all religions.

The first thought that comes to my mind while writing this short essay is that we all belong to one human family. The Introduction of the Second Vatican Council Declaration on the relations of the Catholic Church with believers of other religions merits being quoted: "One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, his manifestations of goodness, his saving design extend to all men."[1] The unity of the human family constitutes the ultimate foundation of a global solidarity and the basis for the search for common ethical values, which fortunately arouse a growing interest in our days.

Meaning and Importance of Interreligious Dialogue

Often a question is asked: "Do objective moral values exist capable of uniting men and procuring for them peace and happiness?" How do believers answer such a question? Believers are convinced that ethics cannot just produce norms of behavior but must shape the human conscience and help to discover the demands of natural law as well: we have to do good and avoid evil. This is a fundamental principle that imposes itself on everybody and allows dialogue with persons of different religions and cultures. So as believers, we must be able to indicate to our fellow men and women that our values are fundamental for our fellow men and women in order to foster mutual comprehension, recognition, and cooperation among all the members of the human family.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 constitutes one of the highest expressions of conscience in modern history. No doubt it has contributed to making men and women of our time aware of the patrimony of values inherent to the human person and to a person's dignity. Believers nevertheless are in a position of giving a new light by teaching that man has been created in the image of God. Human beings have been created equal. They have received from the Creator inalienable rights, among which are the right to live, to be free, and to look for happiness. So consequently we have to measure the progress of science and of technology not only according to their results but also according to their capacity to defend the specificity of the human person and to check if the fundamental spiritual values are prevailing over our instinctive reactions.

We are in a world in which—because of material and human precariousness, the dangers of war, and the hazards of the environment, in the face of the failure of the great political systems of the past century—men and women of this generation are once again asking themselves the essential questions about the meaning of life and death, about the meaning of history, and about the consequences that amazing scientific discoveries might bring in their wake. It had been forgotten that the human being is the only creature who asks questions and questions himself. It is remarkable that *Nostra Aetate,* the declaration mentioned above, should underline this aspect of things in its introduction: "Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in past ages. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what

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end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found?"[2] All religions, each one in its own way, strive to respond to the enigmas of the human condition. Each religion has its own identity, but this identity enables me to take the religion of another into consideration. It is from this that dialogue is born. Identity, otherness, and dialogue go together.

The Vatican Council proceeds further. Making its own the vision and the terminology of some early church fathers, it speaks of the presence in these traditions of "a ray of that Truth which enlightens all,"[3] recognizes the presence of "seeds of the word," and points to "the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations."[4] Again, it refers to the good which is "found sown" not only "in minds and hearts," but also "in the rites and customs of peoples."[5] These few references suffice to show that the council has openly acknowledged the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions but also in the religious traditions to which they belong. It attributed these values to the active presence of God through his Word, pointing also to the universal action of the Spirit.

In his address to the Roman Curia after the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, Pope John Paul II stressed once more the universal presence of the Holy Spirit, stating that "every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person,"[6] Christian or otherwise. But again, in the same discourse, the pope, going beyond an individual perspective, articulated the main elements that together can be seen as constituting the theological basis for a positive approach to other religious traditions and the practice of interreligious dialogue. First comes the fact that the whole of humankind forms one family, due to the common origin of all men and women, created by God in his own image. Correspondingly, all are called to a common destiny, the fullness of life in God. Moreover, there is but one plan of salvation for humankind, with its center in Jesus Christ, who in his incarnation "has united himself in a certain manner to every person." Finally, there needs to be mentioned the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of the members of the other religious traditions. From all of this the pope concludes that there is a *mystery of unity* that was manifested clearly at Assisi, "in spite of the differences between religious professions."[7]

As also Benedict XVI pointed out, we have "to examine God's mystery in the light of our respective religious traditions and wisdom so as to discern the values likely to illumine the men and women of all the peoples on earth, whatever their culture and religion. . . . Our respective religious traditions all insist on the sacred character of the life and dignity of the human person. . . . Together with all people of good will, we aspire to peace. That is why I insist once again: interreligious and intercultural research and dialogue are not an option but a vital need for our time."[8] In effect, the great religious wisdoms have to witness the existence of a moral patrimony widely shared, which forms the basis of every dialogue on moral questions; this patrimony expresses a universal ethical message that man can decipher. The form and the extension of these traditions can considerably differ according to cultures and situations, but nevertheless they remind us of the existence of a patrimony of moral values common to all human beings.

On October 27, 1986, before the opening ceremony of the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, Pope John Paul II greets world religious leaders at the entrance of the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels.

Therefore, it is always in the interest of leaders of societies to encourage interreligious dialogue and to draw on the spiritual and moral heritage of religions for a number of values likely to contribute to mental harmony, to encounters between cultures, and to the consolidation of the common good. Moreover all religions, in different ways, urge their followers to collaborate with all those who endeavor to assure respect for the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights; to develop a sense of brotherhood and mutual assistance; to draw inspiration from the "know-how" of communities of believers who, at least once a week, gather together millions of widely differing people in the context of their worship in authentic spiritual communion; and to help the men and women of today to avoid being enslaved by fashion, consumerism, and profit alone.

Forms and Dispositions for Interreligious Dialogue

There exist different forms of interreligious dialogue. It may be useful to recall those mentioned by the 1984 document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.[9] It spoke of four forms, without claiming to establish among them any order of priority:

1. *The dialogue of life,* where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.
2. *The dialogue of action,* in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
3. *The dialogue of theological exchange,* where specialists

During the World Day of Prayer for Peace, religious leaders gather in the square in front of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi to pray together and express their common desire for peace.

seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

4. *The dialogue of religious experience,* where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith, and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

One should not lose sight of this variety of forms of dialogue. Were it to be reduced to theological exchange, dialogue might easily be taken as a domain reserved for specialists. It can be seen, moreover, that the different forms are interconnected. Contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values; they may also eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experience in response to the great questions that the circumstances of life do not fail to arouse in the minds of people. Exchanges at the level of religious experience can give more life to theological discussions. These in turn can enlighten experience and encourage closer contacts.

Dialogue requires, on the part of Christians as well as the followers of other traditions, a balanced attitude. They should be neither ingenuous nor overly critical, but open and receptive. Unselfishness and impartiality, acceptance of differences and of possible contradictions, are indispensable. The will to engage together in commitment to the truth and the readiness to allow oneself to be transformed by the encounter are other dispositions required. Accepting difference, taking it seriously, may not be easy. A basic feeling of fear of the "other" needs to be overcome. We are, in fact, always inclined to reduce the unknown to the known, the unfamiliar to the familiar, distorting in this way, consciously or not, the image of the other. Rooted in all human beings there is a basic "inclusive instinct."[10] This attitude is not infrequent in the theological readings of other faiths: one is always easily tempted to interpret the other in one's own terms. Beyond all good intentions, such attitudes are likely to be perceived by the other as a kind of imperialistic attempt at assimilation. In approaching the other, one has to come to terms first of all with the "other in its otherness," taking differences seriously.[11] Such an attitude helps people to be open to the presence of God in the other. To counter the "inclusivist instinct" one has to become aware that God acts in all religions: "One must at least allow for the *possibility* of God's action outside the known boundaries."[12] Accepted with such an open mind, the other ceases to be a menace to one's own self, becoming, on the contrary, an essential factor of one's own identity. Self-identity is not obliterated but enhanced through the openness to the other. There is a mutual fulfillment in a true interfaith encounter. This is what is hoped for from a sincere interreligious dialogue.

This way of acceptance of the other, in his or her otherness and difference, is often designated as "intrareligious dialogue" and proposed as the premise for a true "interreligious dialogue." The other is no more a foreigner but a partner on our journey of faith: we let the other's belief and life question and test our own belief and life. Dialogue, in fact, is not, in the first place, dealing with abstract systems of thought but with concrete persons in their quest for truth, a quest in which each partner must become a "thou" for the other. In conclusion, a common ground of mutual esteem and understanding, an intrareligious dialogue, should be fostered before meeting in an exterior dialogue. Experience proves that there is no meaningful and fruitful interreligious dialogue if it has not been prepared by an intrareligious one. This does not mean that in entering into dialogue the partners should lay aside their religious convictions. The opposite is true: the sincerity of interreligious dialogue requires that each enters into it with the integrity of his or her own faith. At the same time, while remaining firm in it, everyone must grow first in the conviction that God speaks through the other and must be "allowed" to do so.

A Spirituality of Dialogue

An open, dialogical attitude can be developed only through an actual experience of dialogue. Dialogue, in fact, does not involve only theoretical thinking, necessary as it may be. It must be, in the first place, a meeting at the level of spiritual life and religious experience, which are the heart of all religions. Entering into a dialogical attitude is not an easy task. A radical interior change is required. Accepting the "other," not as an opponent, but as a partner on one's own journey of faith, implies a growth toward a new understanding of one's own faith. This attitude may be summarized as a basic openness to two mysteries: the mystery of God's love working in all creation and human history, and the mystery of the human person in quest of ultimate truth and love. One has to recognize that the other, too, has a truth from God that may complete one's own truth. No religion can claim to possess

the full truth about God or the full comprehension of God's mystery. On the other hand, one must be open to the mystery present in every human being. The human being is defined as essentially self-transcendent, in a perpetual quest of truth and love beyond any particular situation or predicament. In this sense, no paradigm can fully express such a dynamism of self-transcendence, which starts from within a given tradition but reaches out beyond it to the unknown.

Ewert H. Cousins describes dialogue as a spiritual journey, a crossing over to the other and a coming back, enriched by the other's richness. As has been seen, to this purpose a deep, mutual empathy between the partners is required. Interreligious dialogue is becoming, in his view, the distinctive spiritual journey of our time: "Through interreligious dialogue, we may be entering a new age of faith."[13] One may say that spirituality in our present pluralistic context is becoming all the more a spirituality of openness to the others, or a spirituality of and in interreligious dialogue. The spirituality that is to animate and uphold interreligious dialogue is one that is lived out in faith, hope, and charity. There is faith in God, who dwells in light inaccessible and whose mystery the human mind is incapable of penetrating. Hope characterizes a dialogue that does not demand to see instant results but holds on firmly to the belief that "dialogue is a path towards the Kingdom and will certainly bear fruit, even if the time and seasons are known only to the Father."[14] Charity, which comes from God and is communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, urges everyone to share God's love with other believers in a gratuitous way. This spirituality is nourished by prayer and sacrifice. Without God's life-giving action, mere human activity is not able to effect any permanent spiritual good. Sacrifice strengthens prayer and promotes communion with others. The teaching of Christ is that we must love with detachment, that we should be ready to walk the extra mile, that we should not look for revenge if we suffer wrongdoing, but rather seek to overcome evil by good. This is a sign not of weakness but of spiritual strength. ❑

Notes

1. *Nostra Aetate,* 1965, no. 1.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., no. 2.
4. *Ad Gentes,* 1965, no. 11.
5. *Lumen Gentium,* 1964, no. 17.
6. *L'Osservatore Romano,* English edition, January 5, 1987, 7.
7. Ibid.
8. *Address to the members of the Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue,* February 1, 2007.
9. Cf. *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis* 56 (1984/2), no. 13.
10. Michael Barnes, "On Not Including Everything: Christ, the Spirit and the Other," *The Way Supplement* 78 (Autumn 1993), 3–4.
11. Julius J. Lipner, "The 'Inter' in Interfaith Spirituality," *The Way Supplement* 78 (1993), 64–70; *idem,* "Seeking Others in Their Otherness," *New Blackfriars* 74 (March 1983), 152–65.
12. Barnes, "On Not Including," 5.
13. Ewert H. Cousins, "The Nature of Faith in Interreligious Dialogue," *The Way Supplement* 78 (Autumn 1993), 32.
14. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* no. 57.

The author (front, left) confers with Rev. Nichiko Niwano, president of Rissho Kosei-kai, at the organization's headquarters in Tokyo. He visited Rissho Kosei-kai with nine members of the Theological Faculty of Central Italy. The group of theologians visited Japan in September 2009 to deepen their understanding of Japanese religions through exchanges with members of various religious organizations.

From Encounter to Dialogue

by J. P. Mukengeshayi Matata

During the second half of the last century, the manner of thinking of religions changed from one of intolerance and exclusivity to a new pluralistic understanding. This was largely due to the increase in research and knowledge about religions outside of Western Christianity.

The growing awareness of differences and commonalities between the Christian faith and other religious belief systems has encouraged many people to endorse the religious life of humankind as a fundamentally benign background to the Christian quest and to social cohesion and progress. Over the centuries, this shift toward tolerance and mutual acceptance has enhanced the capacity of religions to provide the spiritual dimension of human life with new meanings drawn out of old symbols. The shift from the classical ontological principle of noncontradiction to the viewpoint of historical comparative studies of religion has facilitated the adoption of new religious symbols, perhaps to create new perceptions or to read new meanings out of the old ones. Religious systems differ one from another. But if they are to function as bearers of ultimate truth, they must be appraised in terms of what they mean to particular persons today.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the manner of thinking of religions changed from one of intolerance and exclusivity to a new pluralistic understanding. This was largely due to the increase in research and knowledge about religions outside of Western Christianity, along with the collapse of global structures of colonization. The worldview of the religions themselves, their understanding of humanity and the divine, favored interreligious dialogue, as did the democratic culture born of the independence of African, Asian, South American, and Oceanic countries after the end of the Second World War. But this new awareness of the role religions should play in the world emerged at a time when the foundations of religious faith were shaken by the combination of free market capitalist economics and humanist or materialist ideologies.

At the Second World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, which was held in Leuven, Belgium, in 1974, representatives of all religions around the world advocated a Week of Prayer for World Peace, during which all would offer prayers for peace at the same time. Since then, centered in London and spreading out around the world, prayers for world peace are offered in more than 160 countries during the week of the anniversary of the founding of the United Nations (October 24).

Meanwhile, in Setagaya Ward, Tokyo, a group of representatives of the different religions active in the area has met to pray for peace since 1986 (the International Year of Peace), founding the Prayer Meeting for World Peace of the Setagaya Interreligious Conference in 1992. Since then, a Prayer Meeting for World Peace has been held in Setagaya Ward every September. The first ten assemblies were held in the Hitomi Memorial Hall of Showa Women's University; two assemblies were held in the Komazawa University Memorial Hall; later meetings were held at Matsubara Catholic Church, Kitazawa Hachiman Shrine, the Tokyo Camii and Turkish Culture Center, the Okura Daibutsu, Setagaya Myohoji temple, and the Holy Trinity Church of the Anglican Episcopal Church in Japan. The meetings held at Showa Women's University and Komazawa University were divided into two sessions. The first began with prayers for peace by adherents of each religion—Buddhists, Muslims, Shintoists, and Christians—followed by a declaration of peace by all the participants, and silent prayer. The second session included

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Rissho Kosei-kai members join a prayer service at the Tokyo Camii and Turkish Culture Center, as one of the multireligious events that took place during the annual Week of Prayer for World Peace in October 2006.

lectures and music on themes connected with environmental problems and other themes. From the thirteenth assembly onward we have met at places belonging to the various religious bodies, and have sought to foster participation in each other's rituals, building up mutual understanding.

The purpose of the Setagaya Interreligious Conference is that all the people of the world may go beyond racial and religious differences and join together in realizing a green and peaceful world without war and conflict. During the period of preparation for the annual prayer meeting, contacts are fostered among various people. The first step in the preparation involves people of the same religion preparing materials to be used on the day of the meeting. In formulating common prayers, although their traditions, teachings, and ceremonies are different, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and Shintoists all come to realize that it is necessary to have mutual acceptance, generosity, and a spirit of dialogue. Such encounters serve to remove preconceptions and prejudice. And the desire for dialogue is strengthened when people realize that those belonging to another religion are deserving of respect.

Among the activities of the majority of Japanese who say they do not hold any religious beliefs, there are numerous expressions of belief in a god. People feel uneasy in the face of unknown energies and things like "fate," and there are people too who have a personal sense of mission. A number of people who do not belong to any religion have come to observe and enjoy the prayer meeting, which has become an event organized in a manner akin to a shrine festival, a temple exhibition, or a church bazaar. This meeting is about religious dialogue but also provides an opportunity for communication among people of faith and ordinary people who do not belong to any religion.

This dialogue, which takes place at the level of daily life, is not an occasion for comparing religions and their beliefs at an academic level. The essence of this dialogue is festival and play. Festival and play are not superficial realities. They bring joy to people's lives. The basic purpose of dialogue, and of religion, is to provide an opportunity for people to taste real joy and happiness in their lives. From another perspective, what this small gathering in Setagaya is showing is that we can learn from other religions. Through the influence of other religions, each religion's own identity and dynamism can be deepened.

In order to participate fully in this event, religious groups' speakers are selected from Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, and the New Religions, as they all present a real picture of religiosity and religious behavior in Japan today. Religions, as speakers always stress, should consciously and epistemologically protect their own traditions, adopt a tolerant stance toward other religions, and recognize through genuine dialogue the possibility of a path to salvation in each in order to become world peace bridge builders among peoples and nations. This broadening of focus is made necessary by the near disappearance of the older world of socially isolated tribal villages where people lived solely within the enduring relationships of family, kin, and neighbors.

Cultures coexist today. And postmodern cultures breed

impersonal interdependencies that link people throughout the globe. Moreover, multinational corporations, international voluntary associations, schools and universities, military organizations, and the mass media have contributed to span pluralism and multiculturalism in religion, race, and ethnicity. Religions link people of different regions, nationalities, languages, and cultures. Like other social institutions, they are systems of symbols providing meanings, giving consciousness to self and other social identities, which cannot escape a heightened and widespread awareness of the pluralistic world that penetrates their lives.

In Japan several religions coexist, and "the idea of belonging exclusively to one religious tradition or of drawing from only one set of spiritual, symbolic, or ritual resources is no longer self-evident."[1] Acceptance of religious pluralism and the practice of interreligious dialogue help people here to build up a community in which differences become complementarities, while exclusive religious practices are seen as a threat to the spiritual integration of society.

Today a globalized social system transcending individual nations is in operation. As globalization progresses, people interact with people of other countries while remaining aware of their own individual, national, and cultural heritage. It goes without saying that in comparison with the past, the spread of people, goods, and religions around the world is taking place at a fast pace. With the rapid progress in information technology and digital communication, people are absorbing and digesting much information. But they are not given time to fuse it with old traditions that sustain belief in religions. In an IT-dominated global society, borderless regions are expanding, the fluidity of time is accelerating, and the work-centered social organization is changing into a time-orientated system. Time has become a key factor that influences companies' behavior and their system of productivity. While IT- and industry-centered civilization has decreased distance among people, one may say it has also raised many problems that have a large influence on culture, language, education, politics, family life, religion, and social organization inherited from recent times. Even in Japanese society, in which attitudes stiffly based on Confucian values and Buddhist traditions have been maintained, the influences of the present communication and information systems are felt strongly. In such circumstances, with Japan being in the forefront of information technology, it would seem that religion, especially, will increasingly be subject to negative influences.

Meanwhile, as modern social structures centered on corporate mechanisms of information have been accused of reducing time and standardizing technology, stealing individual freedom through a sophisticated and organized free liberal market system, increasing suicide and conflicts between individuals and the outside world, breeding isolation and a sense of helplessness, and so on, religions should have the strength to bring hope to people who have lost their sense of themselves and are despairing in modern society. How can religions provide hope to such people? This is a modern social challenge that all religions have to confront and provide answers to.

In August 2009, the Tokyo Shrine Agency, a prefectural branch of the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honcho), organized a half-day study of Christianity and Christian life at Oriens Institute for Religious Research. Thirty-five Shinto priests and believers visited a Catholic church for the first time and stayed in its facilities to study the essence of Christian faith and liturgy in order to build mutual understanding and foster relationships between believers of both religions. The program of the day was created by the Tokyo Shrine Agency and focused on an introduction to the foundation of the Christian faith and Christian lifestyle; participation in the Sunday mass and liturgy; and an encounter with Christians and Shinto priests at a meal.

On the one hand, one could observe that the encounter was a real culture shock for both the Christians and the Shinto priests who gathered in the church to pray together, when the Shinto priests observed how the Christians reacted before God. On the other hand, this encounter raised interest among Shinto priests in how Christians live their commitment to God through Christ and understand Christian sacraments, and in their adaptation of some elements of Shinto celebrations to the Christian liturgy, and the encounter tested Christians' feelings about the Yasukuni Shrine problem.[2] And for Christians, what does Shinto rely on to continue ancestor worship and perform rites at its shrines?

This gathering is a good example of interreligious dialogue. Religions should not be considered as hermetic storehouses where a group of believers cultivate a feeling of hatred against others. Rather, religious leaders should work sincerely to bring people together and help them to see, talk, and appreciate other religions in order to build peace and stability on earth.

When people of different religions come into contact with one another, the need for a religious perspective on social problems begins to be felt. They discover, first, the significance of religion in society. Religion is something that everyone evaluates according to his or her own values, some rejecting it as noxious, others embracing it as a function of subjective needs. This is not a satisfactory attitude in the judgment of a monotheistic religion such as Christianity, which, though it positively accepts as given by God the religious experience of humankind, does not see this experience as merely a subjective affair.

As mentioned above, religions are systems of conventional symbols and rules understandable within a context of a certain religious language game. Their expression of the ultimate mystery is "primarily a language of mystical ultimacy, a language voiding itself before the numinous real, the divine. Religious experience should bring a sense of freedom and flexibility in dealing with the conventions of religious dis-

Photo: Courtesy of the Association of Shinto Shrines

In August 2009, thirty-five Shinto priests and believers visited a Catholic church in Setagaya Ward, Tokyo, and stayed in its facilities to study the essence of Christian faith and liturgy in order to build mutual understanding.

course. But when means and the ultimate are confused, the result is a sclerosis of the religious tradition, some form of absolutism, fanaticism, or fundamentalism. . . . When people take up religious words and attitudes, they are aware that they are subscribing to a historical tradition. Today that historical self-consciousness embraces not only one's own tradition but the wider community of faiths, bringing a critical sense of the non-absoluteness of one's mode of engaging with ultimate reality."[3] Will religions be sufficiently mature, in the twenty-first century, to cooperate in efforts to realize world peace and justice and to come together in mutual understanding?

The second thing one learns from interreligious encounter is how to view religious phenomena with objectivity. People are inclined to think that the religion they believe in is superior to others, and so it is not considered possible for them to objectively understand another religion. However, when one begins to understand more about the commonalities and differences among the world's religions, the ancient symbols and rituals that accompany the progress of the human race and have supported peoples' spirits and lives are seen in a new light, and the history of the human race itself is seen as the manifestation of something sacred.

In the light of the above indications, I am inclined to think, as Jacques Dupuis already has, that "the sincerity and honesty of interreligious dialogue with members of other religious traditions presuppose that one enters into it with the integrity of one's personal faith, it also requires openness to the faith of the other in its difference. Each partner in the dialogue must enter into the experience of the other in an effort to grasp that experience from within. In order to do this, he or she must rise above the level of the concepts in which this experience is imperfectly expressed to attain, insofar as possible, through and beyond the concepts, to the experience itself. It is this effort of 'comprehension' and interior 'sympathy'—or 'empathy'—that Reimon Bachika has termed 'intrareligious' dialogue, an indispensable condition for interreligious dialogue."[4]

Finally, encounter among religions is a source of new strength for all of them, and equips them to hold out to society the hope of spiritual recovery. For many people working in severe economic circumstances, one of the roles of religion is to change human weakness and despair into hope and joy. Japanese society needs this kind of revival, which might be comparable to what happened when it embraced Buddhist culture in the Nara period (645–794), or the new schools of Buddhism in the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

To bring religion to bear effectively on the ills of contemporary Japanese society, a wide and practical theology of religions needs to be developed. This will be a theology critical of religion. Religion is a human activity, and like politics and economics, has a lot of problems. Studying religions is not just abstracting religion alone and observing and introducing it; it must also include the condition of the human beings from whom religion came forth. Religion is an indirect encounter with God; it provides a medium that is "like a dim reflection in a mirror." In this aspect, Christianity is similar to other religions and can be subjected to the same empirical and anthropological study.

Such a theology of religions, starting from encounter, will emphasize dialogue in daily life, through sharing the problems and worries of other humans, true neighbors. In the encounter of religions, people living together on this planet, through prayer, reflection, meditation, faith, and worship, become aware of God, the Buddha, the ultimate reality, and receive the courage and hope to go on living in society. ❑

Notes

1. Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 1.

2. Controversial worship by political figures, especially by cabinet members at Yasukuni Shrine.

3. Joseph S. O'Leary, "Ultimacy and Conventionality in Religious Experience," unpublished document.

4. Cornille, *Many Mansions,* 63.

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Spiritual Growth Through Interfaith Encounters

by Hans Ucko

Religion is a player in this world and society. It has a tradition of ethical and moral values to offer for the discourse in society. Every religion has a contribution to make.

Let me begin on a personal note. Working for a Christian institute in Paris devoted to improving Jewish-Christian relations, my wife and I were invited to a concert organized by a Jewish organization. The program was interesting but nothing remarkable, and we were considering whether to leave at intermission. Looking at the program, we saw on the other hand that the first item after the intermission would feature the "Singing Rabbi from New York," announced as a surprise visit. Intrigued we decided to stay on. The Singing Rabbi introduced himself, a stocky man with a guitar. Next to him was a man with an accordion. It didn't look particularly promising or out of the ordinary.

As the Singing Rabbi began to sing wordless songs and chants of one or two verses from the Psalms, accompanied by the man with the accordion, we were mesmerized and enthralled. The songs and chants carried a spirituality soaked in the Jewish tradition, stirring responses of approval from the audience and making my wife and me all of a sudden aware that we were on holy ground. We were in awe, carried away into the very heart of religion or spirituality, no longer considering that our religious tradition was Christian and his Jewish. Boundaries disappeared, and yet we knew that this holy ground was not ours. It was not to be grasped.

We left the concert transformed, enriched, carrying with us a significant insight: the encounter with the other in his or her otherness is able to deepen our faith, open doors into the numinous or holy that we did not know and could not have known before. We realized that the other in his or her spirituality or religious tradition holds on to something that touches us in the very heart of our own faith, and yet, we cannot understand it, never grasp it, it will never be ours; there is no handle to this moment in time with which we could carry it away and package it. It is a brief moment of encounter with a religion or spirituality that is not ours but that nevertheless embraces us and makes us stand up renewed and changed. The other is not only an other but a significant other allowing us through his or her commitment, sensitivity, and attentiveness to realize that there is more, always more, that we haven't exhausted and could never exhaust God, the Ultimate Reality. There is only always more, there is always "Deus semper maior" or "Allahu akbar," and the only vehicle toward realizing this is our encounter with the other. We cannot own it, we cannot expropriate it, we cannot produce it, we can only experience it in and through our encounter with the other.

This experience of spiritual enrichment in and through our encounter with people of another faith is not a verdict on our own faith. It is not saying that our own religious tradition is insufficient and that the way of the other is the better way. We are not moving in a world of comparing performance or judging the best quality of a product. What we are witnessing in and through our encounter with people of another faith is at this particular moment in time a world of no boundaries or off-limits areas.

Religion has always known this and has always grappled with what to do with religious commitment striving beyond the limitations put up by religious tradition. This striving beyond is present in religious language, where mystics of every religion have sought to liberate themselves from the confines of religious traditions, trying to restrict, mostly in vain, the freedom of religious wandering. Among Christians they call it apophatic theology, Via Negativa, gaining knowledge of what God is not (*apophasis*), rather than by describ-

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ing what God is. Hindus in Jnana Yoga and Advaita Vedanta call it "*neti neti,*" meaning "not this, not this." We find it in every religious tradition.

The "religious" in the world's religions often look upon themselves or were considered by others as peripatetics, wanderers, wayfarers, vagrants, mendicants, saunterers. They feel at home in homelessness, making home and homelessness coincide, appreciating the encounter with the other as a hint to move beyond that which is given or narrowly defined. The sense of religious experience in many of our religious traditions mentions the way as being the best expression of what religion is fundamentally all about. Tao is the way that cannot be expressed, Shinto the way of the gods, Halakha the way of walking in interpreting Jewish law, Sharia is the "way" or "path" to the sacred law of Islam, and the first Christians referred to themselves as being on the Way.

Philosophers and poets have given words to the same experience of boundlessness as the only landscape worth exploring.

> Inside the huge Romanesque church the tourists jostled in
> the half darkness.
> Vault gaped behind vault, no complete view.
> A few candle-flames flickered.
> An angel with no face embraced me
> and whispered through my whole body:
> "Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud!
> Inside you vault opens behind vault endlessly.
> You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be."[1]

Although we today struggle with the reality of religious plurality all over the world and particularly in societies that used to be homogenous, religious plurality is not or should not be a problem to overcome. It is true that we today through interreligious dialogue need to negotiate how we live in many plural societies, no longer dominated by one religion or for that matter by religion as such, whatever its expression may be. Religious communities and individuals need to find ways to cope in societies that are emancipated and claim religious neutrality. We need to find ways to live together and not in parallel societies within the same society; we need to grapple with what cohesion in society is all about and how this glue is to be construed and understood. We need through interreligious dialogue to find ways whereby our religious traditions serve not only their own religious community but society as a whole. We need to find ways whereby the best religious resources are used for peacemaking and not for fueling conflict. In a world where no religion is an island, interreligious relations, dialogue, and cooperation are indispensable, and we are not to be surprised that this is also one of the manifest realities of our century. It is as it should be. Great things have been achieved. There is a conversation between people of religious traditions that either used to ignore each other or at worst were only living in and with memories and histories of ongoing suspicion and hostility. Today there is a conversation going, and many broken roads between the religious communities are being repaired. There are people on each side making sure that the conversation is ongoing and progressing.

There are attempts to bring together people of different religious traditions to address together common concerns: the dangers of war, the plight of poverty, and the threat to our environment and habitat. Interreligious organizations, campaigns, and programs are present in many places, working on religious leaders to shoulder a common responsibility and encouraging people of different religious communities to see what they could do together.

Much has been achieved and merits our continued support. But there is a risk that something vital may get lost in the midst of the causes, activities, and actions proposed as concerns for the interfaith community. In trying to streamline the interreligious input in a way that it can become a stakeholder in society when addressing this or that particular issue, one can easily forget that crucial and particular characteristic that is religion itself, the numinous, the holy, the spiritual, the way that cannot be named or the "vault behind vault" with no complete view possible. Looking for the least common denominator is of course a good thing in certain contexts, particularly if a situation is in absolute need of at least one concrete signal toward peace or if you need to achieve something that is easily communicable. Calling upon religious leaders to agree on statements on peace and harmony is important in many respects. It can convey a sense of urgency in situations of conflict and impress upon the followers of the various religions involved the need to hold back from using religion as a weapon. It can bring home to society that religion is involved and so create space for religion in situations where religion has not always been considered a relevant player and participant.

The world or society should see the seriousness of religious leaders as they embark upon this or that concern. But there is here an additional aspect that needs to be pointed out. It matters for religion or rather religious leaders to be considered and appreciated. Religious leaders want to be respected to compensate for the many situations where religion is neglected. There is thus enmeshed in many of our religious and interreligious efforts also a sense of apologetics (*apologia pro vita sua*) or eagerness to be reckoned with, whatever the thrust of the program or project of the religious or interreligious community. In such situations one may not want to complicate things. One is result oriented and one wants it now. And so one tries to avoid the plural in the plurality and the religious in the religion! But the smooth running of an interreligious manifestation, proclamation, or declaration must not be the only consideration, and making every situation or context palatable entails the risk of losing the spirit that provides the very heart of religion.

Religion is a player in this world and society. It has a tradition of ethical and moral values to offer for the discourse in society. Every religion has a contribution to make. But

the very fact that we today reckon with the possibility of being together addressing issues of war and peace, poverty and development, human rights and human responsibility, should not make us forget the unique challenge of being together only as people of different religions, affirming the numinous or holy or ultimate, although different and contradictory. Although we can never run away from a focus on common threats and concerns, there should also be a space where we meet without a common agenda for action and achievement but only carried by the different readings of who we are in relation to each other. Our hopes, dreams, visions, although different, are not in danger from our being together. We no longer live in a world where I must be wrong if you are right. We live with religious traditions in a particular world, which offers mutually opposing keys to interpret being, life, and death. Ours is a universe of paradoxes, and this will keep at bay hubris and foster humility. It is for our benefit. And when we get down to the core of the matter, then religion is not first about creeds and speculative beliefs or moral rules. Religion is above all the sensitivity, the sensibility, and the taste for the infinite.

This is the story about the Turkish cadi Nasreddin Hoca. A man came to him complaining about his neighbor, and the cadi listened and said: "You are right." Then came the neighbor and complained. And the cadi said: "You are right." The wife of the cadi, who had listened to the rulings of her husband said: "How can they both be right? It is not possible." And the cadi said: "You are right."[2] Faith or belief or religious commitment has of course to do with ethics, morality, observance, discipleship, and so on, but is also a leap into the absurd. The individual places his or her absolute trust in something that is not evident or obvious. This is a paradox, and it is significant for any encounter in a world of religious plurality.

There are, to use Christian discourse, innumerable blessings living in a world of religious plurality, and I think the most significant is the discovery that there is a spiritual dimension in meeting the other as a significant other, being led onto holy ground, unexplored until this very encounter. In a way this is nothing new but an experience of everyday life. Let me illustrate by quoting from a letter by Fernand Braudel to a student from Paris. This student was to leave Paris for a year's study in London, and Braudel wrote: "Living in London for one year does not automatically imply that you will know England very well. But in comparison, in the light of the many surprises that you will have, you will suddenly have understood some of the deepest and most original features of France, those you did not know before and could not learn in any other way."[3] Of course the student from Paris will learn the structure of London, the way the underground works, the way to Buckingham Palace or Oxford Street. But all of these exposures to that which is foreign will not only send signals and make our student think of the Louvre, Champs Élysées, and the express metro RER but also raise dimensions hitherto unknown, which could only be prompted through the encounter with London.

In an encounter with people of other faiths, I can certainly learn about the pillars of Islam; the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha; the meaning of "Om Shanti"; and the death and resurrection of Christ. But through the encounter, "the other" affects me as a Christian or a Buddhist. The other does not go unnoticed through my spiritual universe. A light is lit in my innermost chamber, and another is blown out. Which way it works cannot be predicted. It does not come with the territory. It is uncharted. I cannot imagine which way my meeting with him or her, the other, will shape in the depths of myself, which questions I will finally put to that which is me or has been me until the very encounter.

I used to believe that I could only be me if I was truly me and you could only be you if you were truly you as ships passing in the night. Now I know that self and others are not independent variables. Rather, self and others are interdependent; they arise together. ❑

Photo: AFLO

A bronze statue of Nasreddin Hoca riding a donkey in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.

Notes

1. Excerpt from Tomas Tranströmer, *Romanska bågar,* translated from the Swedish by Robin Fulton in *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 2006), 191.

2. *Die verblüffenden Weisheiten und Spaße des unübertrefflichen Mullah Nasreddin,* ed. Idries Shah (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1975), 95.

3. Fernand Braudel, *Ecrits sur l'histoire* (Paris: Ed. Flammarion, 1969), 59.

Building a Common Ground for Religious Encounters

An interview with Rev. Juan Masiá

Rev. Juan Masiá has spent most of his life in Japan since 1966 and was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in Tokyo in 1973. Since that time, he has been a leading proponent of interreligious dialogue in Japan and his native country of Spain. When Father Masiá visited Rissho Kosei-kai in June of this year, Dharma World *interviewed him on how dialogue between people of different cultures and religions can be successfully promoted.*

What do we need to know when we begin interreligious dialogue?

At the beginning we normally talk about what we have in common. That is the easiest way to start our dialogue. Then, as we get along with one another, we become able to talk about differences in one another and even talk about points on which we do not agree.

When we go one step further in dialogue, however, we realize that there are differences of language and culture within the respective religions that can stand in the way of our understanding of each other. Buddhism and Christianity are great religions, but they are not religions that are invariable; both have changed a great deal through their long history of transformation and development. The history gave richness to both religions, but this richness also put a burden—the aftereffects of history—to bear on us. Both Buddhists and Christians, therefore, must go back to their origins and realize that they carry with them much richness, but at the same time the aftereffects of history.

We should therefore look into our own traditions to find both good and evil in ourselves and then change ourselves. By doing so, we can return to the roots of our own religion and at the same time come face-to-face with current conditions. For Catholics in the twentieth century, this took place when the Second Vatican Council was held from 1962 to 1965.

Buddhists, on the other hand, have been criticized for being indifferent to social problems. But now there are many engaged Buddhists. Now it is not very easy to tell which religion is more socially engaged.

Dialogue is easy when it comes to praying together, for instance. Going together to do social work or work for peace is not difficult, either. It would be more difficult to talk about theology, however.

It is even more difficult at the level of institutions or organizations, as there is a concern for power among theologians

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and their leaders. When it comes to theological discussions, theologians do not want to lose, which is very human.

So for theologians, I think that it is very important to know the concept of skillful means that is propounded in the Lotus Sutra. At the level of organization, Christians and Buddhists get along much better than they did a hundred years ago. But even so, at the level of theology, there is always some break.

You have referred to skillful means as a concept that can be used in interreligious dialogue. But how is the concept of skillful means understood by people in Spain?

When I talked about skillful means in Spain, the first reaction I got was that, in the concept of skillful means, there might be a tendency to relativism. People are afraid of relativism, and so, at the other extreme, there has been a tendency toward dogmatism. We have such dogmatism both in Buddhism and Christianity. In Buddhism, you have the tradition of the Abhidharma, which is based on ancient Buddhist works containing detailed scholastic reworkings of doctrinal material. The Abhidharma is extremely complicated and speculative. And in Christianity, we have a long scholastic tradition of philosophy and theology.

I understand the sentiment of being afraid of relativism. But we should know that there is always a tendency to the other extreme, of going into dogmatism. The good thing about skillful means is that the Buddha used them because he wanted to liberate all people by talking to them in a language that every hearer could understand. Jesus talked in the way people could understand, but sometimes purposely talked in parables to make it easier for people to understand. Jesus used skillful means.

You have been promoting dialogue among religions in Japan and in Spain. Are there any guidelines you have set for yourself?

When I am seriously engaged in a religious dialogue, there is an opportunity for me not only to look at my own faith and reflect upon it, but also to reflect upon and criticize the Catholic Church, to which I belong, and also reflect on how it might become better.

When I am criticizing, for instance, some official documents of my own church, that is a criticism from within. If I were outside the church, I would criticize the church without being critical of myself. But when someone within the church challenges his own church, it is seen as dissent within the church. Precisely because I am within the church I must always reflect on how the church might do things better; when I criticize it, I think I must first of all direct that criticism at myself. It is also very important to always go back to one's original intentions.

The scriptures tell us that we need to be continually converted. This is because even if, for example, we believe that we have met God during our meditations, we will always have doubts immediately afterward, because *satori* and doubt are two sides of the same coin, intimately connected. That is why it is imperative that when we do anything, there must be continual self-reflection. Unless accompanied by such continual reflection, even with the best of intentions, the result could be mere self-assertion.

At the same time, unless the church itself also accepts internal criticism from its members, its life is over. That is because it will not be able to grow as an organization. A community of faith cannot exist without a culture that accepts sincere reflection and criticism from within its ranks and that tries to return to its original state.

There is a very nice proverb in Spain about a totalitarian political party. If you mention just one point different from the party line, you are out of the picture. When they take the picture, you don't fit into the picture. But within the church, even if you say something different, you fit into the picture. Otherwise, the church would be like a totalitarian political party.

What are some of the conditions necessary for religious people to contribute to understanding among different cultures and religions?

In promoting understanding among cultures or religions, I think that it is important to avoid stereotypical viewpoints. There are many stereotypes, say, for instance, that Japanese are not logical and Westerners are logical, or that men are like this and women are like that. It is very difficult to get rid of that kind of stereotype.

We cannot, however, discriminate between things simply in an either-or manner. In Kobe recently, I saw a magnificent rainbow in which all the colors from red to violet were clearly visible. I would like to use the rainbow as a metaphor. As you know, rainbows form an array of all the colors of the spectrum from red to violet, but depending on weather conditions, there are times when red and yellow stand out in particular, even though all the other colors are also there. And there are also rainbows where the opposite occurs, and the blue and violet stand out. Just as it is with rainbows, cultures are also multilayered, with a variety of elements.

Let us say that Japanese culture is a rainbow in which the red and yellow stand out. And that European culture, on the other hand, features blue and violet where the red and yellow parts are not as strong. We should not look at these and conclude that Japan is red and Europe is blue. Yet it is a fact that among Japanese scholars who specialize in comparative thinking, there are some who think like that. The important thing is to not compare lopsidedly, using just the one color in the rainbow that stands out, but to discover the whole variety of rainbows in our own and in other cultures. And we must also reflect on the colors of the rainbows in our own individual, personal cultures.

The same can be said for interreligious dialogue as well. For instance, after the simultaneous terrorist attacks of Sep-

"We must reflect on the colors of the rainbows in our own individual, personal cultures."

tember 11, 2001, when people compared the mentalities of monotheistic religions versus polytheistic religions, there was a tendency to stereotype the people of monotheistic countries as fanatical and intolerant, and the people of polytheistic countries as moderate and conciliatory. But if you were to think that there has never been violence or terrorism in the Eastern world or Buddhist countries, you would quickly discover by studying history that, on the contrary, there have been any number of incidents in Buddhist countries. There are many different rainbows in both polytheism and monotheism. Before we get into interreligious dialogue, we should revise our way of thinking about culture and about comparative culture.

One of the best insights I have seen about that is in a book by Thomas Kasulis entitled *Intimacy and Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference.* He has a very good approach to intercultural and comparative dialogue and comparative studies. The comparison I just made about the many different rainbows in each culture, for instance, is very similar to what Dr. Kasulis says about a dominant pattern in a culture and many other patterns. That is to avoid those stereotypes about East and West and monotheism and polytheism, and all that we encounter.

In order to protect life, to work for peace, to avoid violence, to realize peace where there is violence, and so on, we need to work together and to create a common ground, a common language together. And in order to do that we have to rid ourselves of misunderstandings. Now, this cannot be done by one person; this can only be achieved through encounter.

Could you elaborate on how such a common ground for mutual understanding might be created?

In an encounter, you need to put together two views, from the inside and the outside. For instance, no matter how hard I try to understand Japan, there are many things that cannot be understood because I am not a Japanese.

However, at the same time, precisely because I am looking at Japan from a foreigner's perspective, there are bound to be aspects that are understood for the first time. Reversing this and looking at Spain, there are aspects that cannot be understood unless seen from within, and also aspects that are noticed for the first time by looking in from the outside. It is important for dialogue groups to bring both perspectives to the table. By doing so, for the first time you can begin to have a common ground.

Criticism, evaluation, positive evaluation, and criticism from within and from without—this has to be done in groups, in workshops, through interaction, talking together, and sharing together—and it takes time. We started the Nerima Interreligious Forum in Tokyo in 2000. Since then, we have taken time to pray together, to talk together, to drink together, to learn about one another together, and to have ourselves understood, and exchange candid opinions. But all of this is part of the process of building a common ground.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, with which we understand that interreligious cooperation began on a global level. How do you see the present status of interreligious dialogue?

It is difficult to say in general. First, a lot of progress has been made. I think that is obvious, for example, in the relationship between, not only Buddhists and Christians, but also even with such difficult relationships as those between Muslims and Christians. I just came from Morocco, where there are many difficulties, but I met with a few university professors who were very open. They have deep knowledge about the Qur'an and Islam, and I was very satisfied with the way we were able to talk. Of course, there might be other people who are just the opposite within Islam, as in any other religion. But there is a lot of progress I think, and that is a positive thing.

At the same time, it is not enough to stay at the level of dialogue. We should emphasize more encounter, not merely theoretical dialogue, but encounter between people. As people walking the path of our respective faiths, we encounter one another along the way, walking together, and learning about one another, and doing things together.

A negative point, at least in one part, is that after the Second Vatican Council was held, for the past two decades there has been an undercurrent within Catholicism of a kind of involution, a going back, at the organizational as well as institutional level, and sometimes at the theoretical level.

It is understandable that church leaders would become cautious, after a huge change like the Second Vatican Council, in order to not become too radical. But I think that it would be good if this did not halt self-criticism and reflection. Fortunately, I believe that the tide of interreligious dialogue is now irreversible. ❑

The Task That Interreligious Dialogue Presents

by Nichiko Niwano

Rissho Kosei-kai's president, Rev. Nichiko Niwano, delivered an address in the guest palace of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome on June 16, 2009, during the opening ceremony of the Fourth Summit of Religious Leaders, held before the G8 summit of leading industrialized nations convened in July in L'Aquila, Italy. The following are adapted excerpts from that address.

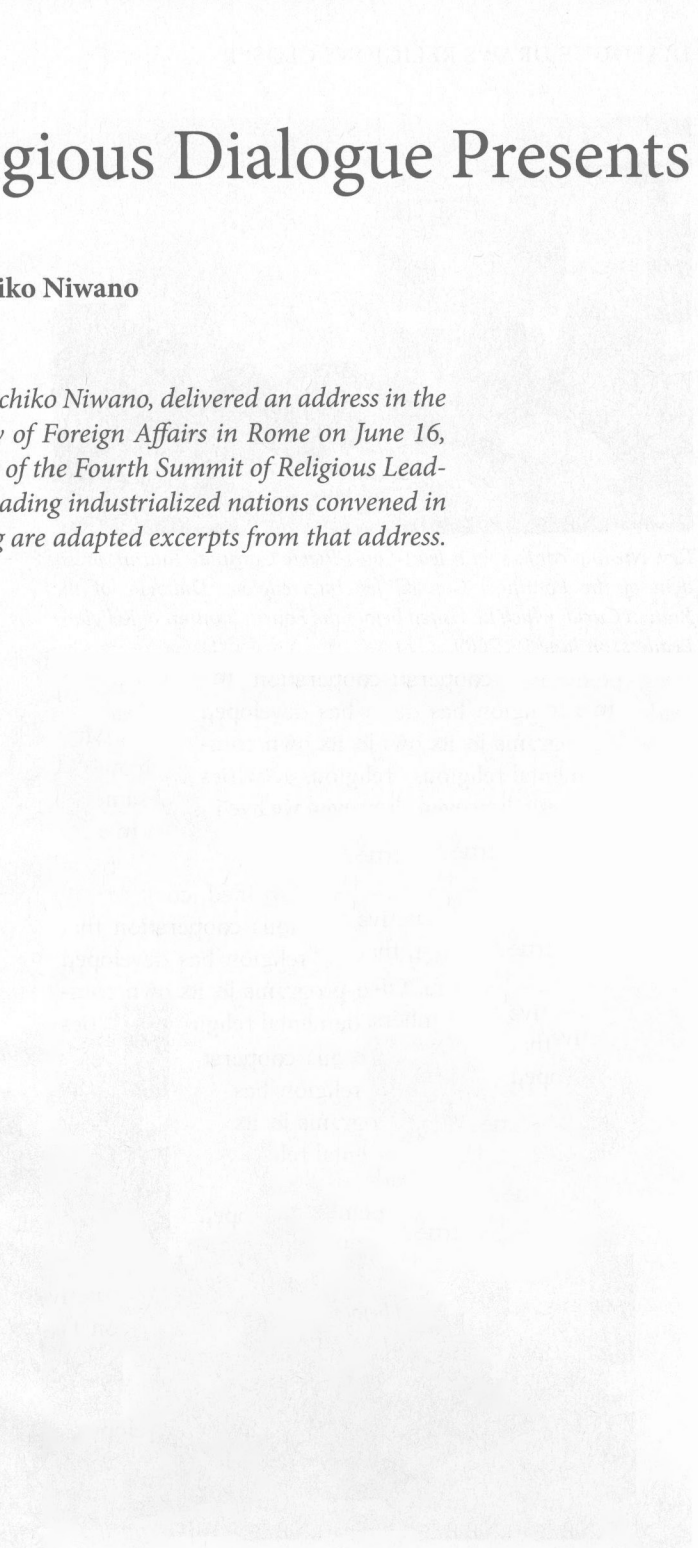
We have come here to direct our respective religious wisdom toward our common agenda. From the beginning of these plans, however, doubts were voiced about whether religious leaders are even capable of cooperating with one another. In fact, heated discussions have taken place at some interreligious conferences.

Gradually though, through the course of several meetings with people of other religions, in the end a connection is made from person to person and from mind to mind. If you were to ask me what makes these bonds real, my answer would be quite clear: they are the result of dialogue.

Dialogue is a precious gift, something of which human beings alone are capable. I would like to describe it in detail and identify five of its distinctive characteristics.

The first characteristic of dialogue is that it allows us to know other people as well as to know ourselves. Knowing other people is, above all else, part and parcel of the human condition because we are, so to speak, social animals. But if we fail to make an effort to get along with other people or judge them based on preconceived ideas or misinformation, then obstacles or friction may hamper our interaction. Knowing other people is also a way of knowing oneself. Interacting with and talking with other people allows us to see ourselves objectively, because they indicate to us who we really are in actual daily life.

The second characteristic of dialogue is that it makes us reflect on ourselves and encourages us to rise to a higher level. In the course of our exchanges with people of different religions, we gain a new awareness. For instance, we become aware of how other people view the world, and the form that their faith takes. This in turn then causes us to reflect on ourselves and realize that there are points we have neglected or areas in which our efforts have been insufficient.



Rev. Nichiko Niwano gives an address at the opening ceremony of the Fourth Summit of Religious Leaders, at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome on June 16, 2009.

The third characteristic of dialogue is that it makes us realize common values and universal truths. Generally speaking, we human beings give priority to things that are nearest to us. We put ourselves first. Next come our family and our relatives, and after that our town or city and our country. Only then do we begin to think about the world or the earth as a

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Rev. Niwano confers with Jean-Louis Pierre Cardinal Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue of the Roman Curia, which he visited before the Fourth Summit of Religious Leaders, on June 15, 2009.

whole. People who are able to say that the Milky Way galaxy or the universe is what is most important to them are very rare, indeed.

People of religion, however, do think that the totality of the cosmos is of the utmost importance. In Rissho Kosei-kai, we say that we take refuge in the Eternal Buddha, by which we mean the one life of love and compassion that permeates the universe, or simply put, God and the Buddha. Furthermore, because all things in this world are caused to live by God and the Buddha, they all form part of One Great Life. When we gaze upon all living beings from this cosmic perspective, we want to extend a helping hand to all of them, reverently, and in a spirit of genuine tolerance.

The fourth characteristic of dialogue is that it builds trust. The Japanese Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, through forty years of constructive conversations, has built trust among religious leaders. Of course, there are also personal friendships among members. Much more significant, however, is the belief that although our religious faiths may be different, at heart we share the same values. This sense of belonging and solidarity creates, in a true sense, trust in one other.

Finally, the fifth characteristic of sustained, constructive dialogue is that it leads to interreligious cooperation that brings about concrete action. Each religion has developed its own particular practices and programs in its own community or region, and these fundamental religious activities must be given all due respect. At present, however, we live in an age that no longer permits any of us to think that all that matters is that our own society or country enjoys peace and stability.

For instance, when we consider environmental problems, events on the other side of the globe can have a major impact on our own daily lives. In the many disputes in the political sphere, politicians always try to advance their own national interests. We religious leaders, however, must be capable of transcending selfish barriers and grappling with common issues, forming our own network and taking action together. This is the task that the present age has entrusted to us as people of religion living today. ❑

Prior to the Fourth Summit of Religious Leaders in Rome, Rev. Niwano visited the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome on June 13 and conferred with its founder, Professor Andrea Riccardi, and other leaders of the community, and the headquarters of the Focolare Movement in Rocca di Papa near Rome on June 14, where he talked with the Focolare president, Ms. Maria Voce.

Applying Buddhist Values for Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics

by Parichart Suwanbubbha

One of the most important values in Buddhism is tolerance, not a "lazy tolerance," but rather accepting everything and everyone as they are. This value implies an acceptance of plurality.

When one investigates how Buddhist values may contribute to a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics, one comes to realize that Buddhist teachings are not more perfect than others. In fact, it is helpful to know that every religion shares the ethical and moral teachings for reducing human problems. According to John Hick, all religions propose salvation/liberation as "the actual transformation of human life from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness" (Hick in Whaling 1986, 151). Each religion may be different in the light of different propositional truths. That is, "there are many belief-proposals that are accepted by the adherents of one religion but rejected by those of another" (Hick 1981, 122).

It is often said that each religion is full of pragmatic truth; each intrinsically contains values, morals, and ritual conduct. If this be true, then it suggests that one accept both the differences and the unique identity of each religion. This article presents an alternative effort to apply Buddhist values to interreligious dialogue on ethics. It is guided by an effort to pursue my view that one should follow through on one's convictions when one has come to grasp the necessity or worthiness of a concept or idea.

The Nature of Buddhist Ethics

Buddhist ethics studies right and wrong actions in the light of Buddhist teachings both for the ordained and for laypeople, in terms of the *vinaya* (monastic rules) for monks and *sila* (precepts) for the laity. Buddhist ethics identifies moral values and behavior classified under the rubric of performance and avoidance. Buddhist ethics is derived from natural law; it considers cases when there are no rewards—nor punishments in case of violation. It goes hand in hand with the law of the "fruit of action," *kamma* (*karma* in Sanskrit), as reflected in a well-known Buddhist text:

> By oneself indeed evil is done,
> By oneself is one defiled,
> By oneself is evil avoided,
> By oneself is indeed one purified.
> Purity and impurity depend on oneself.
> No one can purify another.
>
> —*Dhammapada*, 165[1]

The quotation implies that human beings are themselves a center of responsibility. Humanity itself is a source of both good and bad actions. No one controls human beings. This is a crucial belief that would support a worldview and practice necessary for every kind of proper interaction among human beings.

Buddhist ethics not only is related to the understanding of *kamma* but also is connected to another important Buddhist teaching called *paticcasamuppada,* which accounts for the existence of living beings. Phenomena that occur are an unending process of rising and ceasing, being the result of many causes and conditions. "When there is not this, there is not that. Ceasing this ceases that" (*Majjhima Nikaya* II: 32). This Buddhist teaching points to the reality that everything

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is interconnected. The fruition of all actions depends on their related causes:

> Knowing kamma is knowing Paticcasamuppada.
> Thus the wise, seeing dependence-upon origination-paticcasamuppada, proficient in the fruit of action (kamma), see this action as it really is.
>
> —*Sutta-nipata,* 653

Everything is interdependent. Whenever there are things, the concepts of plurality and of the diversity of all things are more or less implied. Within the diversity of things, similarities and differences are included. Buddhist ethics suggests that one should see things as they actually are—that is, in holistic fashion.

In Buddhism, precepts are known as *sila. Sila* envisage a harmonious living on the globe. "If the purpose of observing *sila* is to gain more worldly material wealth and pleasure, it is inferior *sila—Hina.* If the purpose is to gain salvation (liberation) and to serve others, it is excellent *sila—Panita*" (*Visuddhi-magga* 12). This implies that practicing the precepts can also lead people to their own spiritual development. In other words, it is necessary for a Buddhist who would like to reach the highest goal not only of avoiding evil and doing good but also of purifying the mind. In the process of purifying one's mind, one will gain the insight and wisdom to understand the reality of this world.

> Wisdom is purified by virtue, and virtue is purified by wisdom.
> Where one is, so is the other.
> The virtuous person has wisdom, and the wise person has virtue.
> The combination of virtue and wisdom is called the highest thing in the world
>
> —*Digha Nikaya* I: 84

Criteria of Buddhist Ethics

One of the simple criteria of Buddhist ethics for justifying whether an action is ethical or not is to ask whether an action causes harm to either oneself or others. In other words, any "skillful" action in Buddhist ethics should include both loving oneself and empathizing with others, including not causing trouble to others.

As mentioned earlier, any action (*kamma*) one performs will bring results in accordance with the law of cause and effect of actions. *Kamma* is the cause and *vipaka* is the fruit, the effect. The cause produces the fruit, and the fruit explains the cause. Intentional action, either wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*), creates kammic effects. A Buddhist text explicates the word: "The word 'kusala' means 'good health,' 'faultless,' 'skillful,' 'productive of happy sentient results,' etc." (*Atthasalini:* 38).

According to Buddhist ethics, "skillful" or wholesome actions are derived from the absence of the three root causes of evil: greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Whether an action is good or bad, be it in terms of physical, verbal, and/or mental behavior, depends on the criterion of whether or not it is caused by one of these three evils.

Consequently, the criteria of Buddhist ethics cover the entire cycle of skillful intention, skillful means (*upaya*), and skillful ends. If any of these is absent, one will not be able to justify the action as being ethically sound. Intention is also an indicator of *kamma.* Without intention, such behavior is not kammic action. In the teaching passed on by tradition the Buddha taught: "Monks, I say that intention is *kamma.* When one intends, one acts by deed, word or thought. Sense-contact is the source of *kamma*" (*Anguttara Nikaya* II: 82). That is to say, whatever is considered to be a wholesome action includes skillful intention, skillful means, and a skillful result.

This skillful trio cannot be based on greed, hate, or delusion. For example, if one has the good intention of supporting the revival of female ordination in Buddhism, one needs to select the proper way of skillful means, such as not using harsh words to attack the whole community of monks. Otherwise, one is using the old stereotype of judging all monks, including the liberal ones. Another kind of violence (one of a "liberation type") will sooner or later occur, possibly in the form of verbal or even physical reaction. It implies an angry quality of mind that may be mixed with hate. Moreover, if one calls for the effort to tear up some parts of scripture, instead of reinterpreting them, one may not be ethically accepted by the community due to the unskillful means of delusion. Although one may have a good intention to help and to broaden the religious space of women and to further the range of women's opportunities, the verbal action is mixed with delusion, "not having enough information on the importance of religious scriptures." Therefore the ethical quality of action in Buddhism depends on awareness and mindfulness of one's mental factors, on fulfilling the ethical cycle of skillful intention, skillful means, and then receiving skillful ends.

Put in another way, such ethical behavior should consider different methods in conducting a constructive dialogue on such topics as human rights or a feminist perspective with experts in Buddhist scriptures. All should have "a chance and a safe zone" to hear participants' different points of view on the basis of the nature and criteria of Buddhist values mentioned above. One may attempt to do so to see how such views may be applied to a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics.

Buddhist Ethics, Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics

Generally speaking, dialogue is a "deep listening" (Bohm 1996, 1–2). Interreligious dialogue on ethics then is a deep listening to different truth claims and other related ethical religious beliefs and practices. However, it does not mean that one should set side by side the scriptures of each religion to know about the ethical issues of each religion. Instead,

one strives to put today's global problems of humanity at the center and to listen to each problem with loving-kindness and compassion, which are inherent in all religions. The crucial point in interreligious dialogue on ethics is listening to, and empathizing with, the problems of people and treating one another humanely in order to join together in solving people's ethical problems in accordance with each religious tradition. Above all, dialogue should not be an isolated, separate action, a "finished product." It needs a properly prepared process of listening repeatedly until the values of deep listening are naturally embodied in each actual action with each partner in the dialogue process. Such an attempt might lay claim to being a contribution to a successful interreligious dialogue.

Humanity Encounters Humanity

When humanity seeks to encounter humanity, Buddhist values may be helpful; they can contribute to an "interreligious dialogue of life,"[2] by emphasizing the concept of "human beings and their conditions as being at the center of all considerations." This is reflected in the Buddha's declaration that

> in this one-fathom long body along with its perceptions and thoughts, do I proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the path leading to the cessation of the world.
>
> —*Samyutta Nikaya* I: 62

This quote focuses on the size and length of a human body. People are supposed to manage any problems by themselves. In most cases, human beings involved in difficult situations must make decisions on their own. It is suggested that realizing these problems and interrelating them (as being a concern of joint interest and responsibility and solving them together) is much better than choosing one specific ethical doctrine alone. In this way, a problem involving different cultural values can become a topic of dialogue among adherents of different religions. Giving priority to ethical problems will go well with the understanding that interreligious dialogue is a process that needs to be conducted continuously and humanely in daily life. Not listening to one another humanely, or merely comparing ethical teachings of various religions, is not enough; nor is this suitable to the social conditions of an interreligious dialogue on ethics at the present time. Put in another way, placing real ethical situations of life at the center of an interreligious dialogue on ethics is as important as solving the problems themselves. One must treat any person having different ethical convictions humanely.

The Ultimate Reality of Buddhism is *nibbana* (liberation); it seems to be a sophisticated, far-off goal and an ideal for many Buddhists. Still, a notion of *nibbana here and now* is an encouraging one for us today. According to the late Thai Theravada monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, anyone who is on the threshold of getting rid of the sense of "me and mine," even in the near future, is considered to be someone who touches and tests temporary *nibbana.* This interpretation can be an assurance that Buddhist teachings, and particularly Buddhist ethics, should also emphasize community-focused ethics. This means that Buddhist values pay special attention to being personally free and taking care of the real-life problems of people in the community. If such be the case, Buddhist ethics could play a role in both "top-down" and "bottom-up" moral practices. Making efforts in interreligious dialogue for mediating conflicts is an example of "bottom-up" moral practice, a "community-focused ethics" in action.

To repeat, it is necessary to focus on present ethical situations from the perspective of a given religious tradition when conducting a "global responsibility dialogue." Problems such as those of medical ethics due to the gap between rich and poor, making inadequate claims for a "just war," discussing the rights of homosexuals or the right to have an abortion, the disaster of ecological violence, and so forth, all fall within the ambit of Buddhist ethics and values. Accordingly, interreligious dialogue on life based on ethics is a challenging task for every religious community, especially for any socially engaged religious community.

Interconnectedness, Diversity, and Tolerance

I have already said that Buddhist ethics realizes that everything is interconnected. Human beings are willy-nilly involved in the web of complicated relationships; for Buddhists this is due to the concept of rebirth. Anyone can be born as a father, mother, or relative in a family in any birth. Buddhism teaches people to be aware of such interconnected relationships in accordance with the concept of *paticca-samuppada.* Being aware of interconnected relationships implies that one should be mindful of seeing things as they are. At the basis of this worldview is the idea that everything is ultimately impermanent, that there is no absolute, intrinsic self, nor is there suffering in the final analysis. This understanding underscores the two ideas of diversity and tolerance. That is, since there is interconnectedness, many things, many ideas, many points of view, and many convictions are possible. When variety exists, differences are bound to occur. Different identities, different worldviews, and different religious ethical explanations should be welcome. Therefore one needs to respect and to be tolerant of any kind of diversity.

In conducting interreligious dialogue on ethics one should welcome different ethical reasonings. One must not judge other ethical beliefs according to one's own ethical system. For example, eating meat is acceptable in the teachings and practices of many religious and ethical systems. The concept of vegetarianism should not be used to find fault with the different ethical situations of others. This acceptance should be derived from sincere tolerance, not "lazy tolerance" (Hill 1990, 195), in order to avoid any "confrontation of conflict" at that moment. The danger of accepting something on account of a lazy tolerance is that it will lead to a concept of relativism, which would preclude the need or the pos-

sibility of compromising when people are in the process of interreligious dialogue. Sincerity with oneself and with our partners in the process of dialogue is highly recommended in order to reach sustainable understanding and cooperation. In fact, the religious values of sincerity and tolerance can be found in any religious tradition. On this subject, one may say, "It seems to me that religious ethical values in any religion will be useful as long as they are taken into action" (Suwanbubbha 2006, 46–53).

What Are the Purposes of Dialogue?

People misunderstand the purposes of interreligious dialogue if they think that it is meant only for the exchange of religious or ethical information and views. In fact, such dialogue challenges our ability to translate good ethical teaching into action. That is, when people engage in interreligious dialogue, they need to exercise such inner values as open-mindedness, loving-kindness, and patience, and to have a self-critical view. This is in addition to being able to accept constructive criticism coming from our partners. Therefore, the purpose of dialogue is not only "to learn, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly" (Swidler 1987, 14), but also to have an inward striving for spiritual development.

As to the question of observing the precepts (*sila*) in Buddhist ethics, Buddhist laypeople are advised to practice them step-by-step, until they attain the highest goal. The teaching is as follows:

> Cula Sila: simply observing the basic principles of good behavior.
> Majjhima Sila: developing higher moral values for his/her own happiness
> Maha Sila: actively making an effort to uphold a noble livelihood.
>
> —*Visuddhi-magga* 12

As Gunasekara (2009) phrases it, "in Buddhism the goal of ethical conduct is self-control, self-understanding, and self-development. It is an essential prerequisite for the training of the mind, the elimination of ignorance and the attainment of enlightenment." This means that to practice Buddhist values, one needs to face the challenges of mental development such as self-control and many other kinds of positive mental attitudes. In the process of interreligious dialogue, one needs the same type of courage and mental dispositions as when one listens to various religious ethical explanations or when one engages in religious practices.

To repeat, observing precepts should be basically applied to one's daily life step-by-step by understanding and practicing them continuously until one becomes aware of the reality of being on the path of spiritual development. This is also the basic requirement needed for gradual spiritual transformation when engaging in interreligious dialogue on ethics. "Patiently pursued dialogue can become an instrument of new 'revelation,' a further 'unveiling' of reality on which we must then act" (Swidler 1987, 16).

Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics: Heart-to-Heart Dialogue

In the process of authentic dialogue, people listen to each other through the heart, not only through the ears. That is, people are supposed to listen with loving-kindness, without prejudgments, and with empathy for the different criteria espoused in other religions and their ethics. Buddhism suggests that people exercise unconditional loving-kindness and compassion as well as empathy when living in a pluralistic world.

> A state that is not pleasant or delightful to me must be so for him also; and a state which is not pleasant or delightful for me, how could I inflict that on another?
>
> —*Samyutta Nikaya,* V 353.35–354.2

Although each religious tradition has its own, different ethical explanation, people can still listen and learn from one another. The more one listens to how one differs from others, the more will it be possible to realize and understand one's own tradition better. Paul Tillich, for one, proposed the way of "dynamic typology," by which he meant that "in conversation with other religions, believers would rediscover latent or recessive dimensions in their own tradition" (Tillich 1963). Migliore (1991, 162) adds that in such a dialogue "all would be enriched." This is very true; it may happen with many partners in a dialogue circle.

As an example of such open-mindedness, let me cite the case of interreligious dialogue that took place between Buddhist monks and Muslim leaders in the deep south of Thailand. One Buddhist monk shared his experience in organizing a fund-raising campaign for a poor senior Muslim neighbor, in order to give him a chance to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. This occurred at a time when insurgents wanted to use religions (Buddhism and Islam) as tools to create distrust and do injustice. This action by the monk profoundly moved the people directly involved in that circle. One Muslim leader responded by deeply thanking his Buddhist friend because it was very helpful for him to better understand the word *zakat* (giving money or things to help the poor and needy) as taught in his own religion.

One Buddhist teaching proposes an attitude that may lead the open-minded to listen to and learn from others. According to that teaching, "to be attached to one thing (to a certain view) and to look down upon other things (views)" is inferior; the wise man calls it "a mental hindrance" (*Sutta-nipata:* 889, 891). This attitude shows that although people have faith and maintain different standpoints in accordance with the truth claims of their own religion, it is necessary to open one's eyes, ears, attitude, and mind to listen to others.

Above all, listening through a "heart-to-heart dialogue" includes patience to contemplate and reflect upon what one

learns from others. That is, in the process of interreligious dialogue, one can listen to (1) oneself and one's own religious values, (2) others and their religious values, (3) silence, and (4) the result of listening to oneself and others.

As far as listening to "silence" in such a process is concerned, it is done when every partner is mindful of what she or he has heard and talked about. It implies that all partners are aware of what they are going to say responsively. In the process of interreligious dialogue, silence is supposed to be "a ground of openness." Such silence is deep, rich, positive, replete with meaning, and far from empty. It is the opposite of a silence between strangers. In other words, practicing listening to others through the heart is the process of mindfulness. It may also be regarded as an inner activity in the dialogical process. Certainly, Buddhist values support this by paying particular attention to the "noble silence for mindfulness." As the Buddha is said to have taught:

> Mindfulness, O monks, I declare,
> is essential in all things everywhere.
> It is as salt to curry.
> Mindfulness, verily, brings great profit.
>
> —*Anguttara Nikaya* I: 3

Listening contemplatively to the result of what is going on in interreligious dialogue on ethics is very important because it implies the mental factor of mindfulness of reflection, the appreciation and gratitude to be open-minded to learn different ethical worldviews, to instill better understanding, and to change any bias and prejudgments. Buddhist values recommend a moment of regular reflection while engaging in dialogue. The following quotation is a conversation between the Buddha and his son Rahula, whom he ordained:

> "What think you, Rahula? What is a mirror for?"
> "To reflect, sir."
> "In just the same way you must reflect again and again before doing every act, in speaking every word and in thinking every thought. When you want to do anything you must reflect whether it would conduce to your or others' harm or both, and if so it is a wrong act, productive of woe and ripening unto woe. If reflection tells you this is the nature of that contemplated fact, assuredly you should not do it. But if reflection assures you there is no harm but good in it, then you may do it."
>
> —*Majjhima Nikaya* I: 415

Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics beyond Identities

Although this paper begins with the traditional explanation of the nature of and criteria for justifying what people should do in the light of Buddhist ethics, the important task of the paper is to encourage a transformation of society so that it would correspond more closely to the desirable model of a sustainable community. It therefore stresses that morality should be applied in everyone's daily life.

There are some noteworthy cases of interreligious dialogue on ethics being implemented in the Youth Detention Center in Narathiwas, in the deep south of Thailand, known as a province with much unrest. This center is where children undergo correction after committing crimes. A working group from the Mahidol University Research Center for Peace Building conducted dialogues in order to propose nonviolent action among Muslim and Buddhist children—all of whom are under eighteen years of age.

The children were being taught to practice a type of dialogue within a group of three. The exercise involved one boy sharing his dilemma story, which depicted a real ethical situation in his life. Then the second and the third boys advised him by giving reasons to support or challenge his decision. For example, one boy shared the story that he hesitated and was unable to choose between his mother and his friends. His mother wanted him to buy a bag of rice. His close friend, whom he had not met for a long time, wanted him to use drugs with a group of other friends. One of the listeners was a Buddhist boy, another a Muslim one. In the beginning, we dialogue facilitators did not know who belonged to which religion. Nor did we learn much about the religious ethical reasons or lack thereof contributing to their decision. What the three of them experienced after "the deep listening" was a loving-kindness, listening without prejudgments, with sympathy and empathy. The first boy who shared his story reflected his feeling that it was a great relief for him and that he felt comfortable sharing his nagging problems and learning that both friends tried to give reasons to support his decision as much as possible. He said, moreover, that he received a lot of encouraging advice from his friends. Although this was a very simple and humble ethical situation for the minority group of children, it depicted for us the human quality of trust displayed in the dialogue circle.

This example might be said to have been a charged space within which an interreligious dialogue of experience and feeling was occurring. It involved an authentic human quality of struggling to account for suffering with the hope of arriving at human happiness as soon as possible. This interreligious dialogue on what one should do and should not do transcended the boundaries of the participants' different religious backgrounds. We dialogue facilitators did not know who were Buddhists and Muslims, but what we learned from the experience included the common concerns and the human condition of the children in that dialogical circle.

Applying Buddhist values should take place in real social situations and communities in order that Buddhist ethics will be not merely individual or doctrinal ethics. The following example took place at a dialogue-training session at a youth detention center in another province, Songkhla, Thailand.

On the last day of dialogue training, children were asked to write down two possible life plans they might have after leaving the center. They were also to list on Post-its two important things they would like to do most if they were going to die. After each child finished writing, he read out what he

had written; others listened to his choices with open hearts. We had a chance to hear their plans, which reflected the moral teachings of both religions. For example, one Muslim boy wanted to kiss his mother's feet before he died. Interestingly, what he said reminded me of the saying from Muslim communities that "paradise is under a mother's feet." In addition, he would like to use his mother's prayer clothes to cover his corpse and pray to Allah until he died! Buddhist children in that circle were asked to listen to all these wishes with empathy.

At the same time, other Muslim children needed to practice listening kindly to a Buddhist boy who wanted to be ordained a monk in order that his mother might be able to touch his yellow robe in paradise. All of these stories indicated a different "coherent truth" of theistic ethics and atheistic ethics stemming from the children's own religion and influencing their moral behavior.

Although people would like to claim perfect exclusive moral values and practices, they still need interreligious dialogue on ethics to be able to hear other alternate ways of learning from others. People can even use ethical rules learned from others as a critical catalyst. As Hans Küng suggests, "Christian faith in dialogue may serve as 'critical catalyst' for the other religions, helping to bring out in them what is deepest and best; and conversely, Christian faith will be challenged and clarified in the dialogue conversely" (Migliore 1991, 163). In the case of the Muslim and Buddhist children at the center, they had a practical chance to listen to one another's stories with empathy. Their openness to their friends' moral behavior was a learning process in their own lives.

However, there was one Buddhist boy who wanted to rob a bank to get money to give to his mother before he died. It was, therefore, time for us to help him so that on his own he could analyze what was good or bad. We found that he had a good intention to express his love and concern for his mother for the last time. But his means involved delusion, not knowing that his crime would bring sadness and illegal involvement and suffering to his mother, and that she might even go to jail after receiving the stolen money. His good intention coupled with unskillful means would bring unskillful results and suffering to himself and his family. Sharing and discussing this moral lesson from a Buddhist-values viewpoint is a way toward interreligious dialogue because other people's experiences can be useful for other religious followers. Everyone, Buddhist and Muslim, became an active participant; this led to an enhancement of mutual sympathy and understanding. The positive qualities of mindfulness can hopefully become an expected outcome when conducting interreligious dialogue.

Summary

I have attempted to show that Buddhist values may be applicable to everyone, both the ordained and laypeople. Engaging in interreligious dialogue on ethics is for everyone, whether they are professional ethical academics or young laypeople. Both Buddhist ethics and interreligious dialogue on ethics are generally performed so as to appreciate both the outer and inner strivings of each participant. All skillful values in Buddhist ethics always support the effective ground rules of interreligious dialogue on ethics such as sincerity, equality of the participants, patience, self-criticism, trust, sympathy, empathy, loving-kindness, awareness, and open-mindedness. All of these are regarded as mental factors important in Buddhist morality and as being necessary mental components for a possible successful interreligious dialogue on ethics. Above all, one may realize that all three kinds of interreligious dialogue on ethics (study, experience—or prayer—and dialogue of life) are interconnected. However, what should get more attention is interreligious dialogue of life. Community-focused Buddhist values, focused on "here-and-now ethics," are in the last analysis most desirable for supporting a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics.[3] ❑

* A slightly different version of this essay appears in the book *Sharing Values: A Hermeneutics for Global Ethics,* edited by Ariane Hentsch Cisneros and Shanta Premawardhana, published by Globethics.net in September 2010.

Notes

1. All quotations from Buddhist texts are taken from Dhammananda 1994.

2. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference recommended three different forms of dialogue, that is, (1) the dialogue of prayer or religious experience, (2) the dialogue of study studying each other's doctrines, and (3) the dialogue of life. See more details in Hill and others 1990, 203–4.

3. Thanks to Jayandra Soni and John Raymaker for their kind reading of the manuscript.

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Working Together for Lasting Peace

by Nikkyo Niwano

This essay is part of a continuing series of translations from a volume of inspirational writings published in the latter years of the last century by the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. DHARMA WORLD *will continue to publish these essays because of their lasting value as guidance for the daily practice of one's faith.*

People all around the globe yearn for world peace. This hope will only grow in the future, for the entire human race will share the same fate if nuclear weapons continue to proliferate as they are at present. It is therefore the duty of all thinking people to begin, one step at a time, to make this earnest desire for true world peace a reality, however difficult our individual efforts might seem in achieving meaningful results at an early date.

Now more than ever, we all must think about issues globally, going beyond our individual national borders. The lack of general awareness that we are on the verge of a crisis is due to the indolence of too many people of religion. I believe, however, that a great advance for humankind was achieved when more than ten great religions came together and acted beyond differences in doctrine and institutional structure to organize the World Conference of Religions for Peace as proof of a great human awakening. To be awakened is very close to being liberated. Unless we courageously put this awakening into practice, however, there is no guarantee that we will not lose all the gains that we have made. This is why we must unite in our efforts to continue resolutely calling out for true world peace.

Buddhism teaches the Six Perfections. The first is donation, or selfless giving. If you do not practice donation, you are not qualified to perform the religious practice of the other five perfections. Donation takes many forms, including giving both material objects and giving one's physical act. The degree to which we serve others through donation is decisive in whether our activities for religious cooperation will bloom and bear fruit or wither and die.

As we move toward the attainment of our greatest goal, lasting world peace, it is only natural that people of religion should stand together. It is nonsense, however, if people of religion advocate peace while at the same time entrenching themselves within their own beliefs, denominations, and groups, feuding and disagreeing among themselves. The idea of that kind of "peace" does not convert to a true guiding force. It is very clear that what is really necessary is that people of all religions join hands and show the world that they themselves can live in peace and friendship and can combine forces to tackle the problems inherent in achieving real peace.

There are some people, however, who suspect that cooperation among people of religion is impossible, since each person believes that his or her own faith is the best or the only one. In fact, the basic principle of all religions is the same, as soon becomes apparent when we look honestly at other religions, studying them diligently and discussing them with their followers. Once we realize this, it is only natural that the vestiges of exclusivism and self-complacency about our own faith will fall away. It is vitally important that people of religion take a firm stand on loving others as they love themselves so as to promote interreligious cooperation from a broader standpoint. On the other hand, it is no less important that people of religion devote themselves to planting the seed of true religious sentiment from their respective positions while recognizing that all religions share a basic truth that is expressed in various ways that seem to denote differences separating them.

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and was honorary chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999.

In July 1969, Founder Niwano visited the Vatican and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva to ask for their cooperation with the World Conference of Religions for Peace, whose First World Assembly convened in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970. In the photo at left, Founder Niwano shakes hands with Pope Paul VI during a private audience, and in the photo at right, he confers with Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, the WCC's general secretary.

I am a Buddhist who is achieving visible results by practicing interreligious cooperation based on the conviction that at root all religions are one, though they have differences in such aspects as rituals and terminology. Christ did not teach that different faiths be established to fight each other, and Shakyamuni Buddha did not instruct that various sects and denominations be formed to dispute one other. They simply wholeheartedly gave their teachings to the world with the fervent hope that people would use them to combine their strength for contributions to human happiness and peace.

There is no doubt that religion can provide a guiding light to people, and I regard it as being absolutely vital for the future of humankind. I can state this positively because it became very clear to me, on the occasion of the First World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, held in 1970, that all the great religions at root are one, although many beliefs exist. The essential unity of faiths reveals the possibility that people from around the world can also be united.

Christianity, with its long history and traditions, has made remarkable contributions to the advancement of human civilization and will continue to play a key role in the future. I believe that Buddhism too will grow in relative importance to other faiths in the coming years. I think that because Buddhism is both rational and tolerant, it represents a way of thinking that many people are looking for today. In fact, it is a religion that seems most needed by much of humankind, and that gives me as a Buddhist a feeling of great confidence, as well as responsibility.

Today, one-third of the world's people suffer from hunger, and large numbers are struggling with the distress caused by discrimination and war. As people of religion, and as fellow human beings, we cannot ignore the misery being endured by so many people, and it is our responsibility to tackle the sufferings of others as we would our own and do whatever we can to help alleviate them. By accepting the reality that the world is one and that all members of humanity are bound together, we will be able to seriously assume the tasks that face us and gradually make our hope come true.

This is a natural consequence of having a broad view of the world, a view that makes us more impartial and imbues us with a sense of togetherness. I am convinced that over the long term, humankind will move with this current. At the moment, though, many things are happening in the world that seem to run counter to this flow. They are the result of the egotistical human deeds that continue to haunt us. We can liken these counteractions to the sediment and shoals found even in swift-flowing rivers, and to the whirlpools that eddy in some places, and the back currents formed by them. But despite these spots of slowness and reversal, the river flows on, however sluggishly, toward fusion with the sea.

If you simply entrust yourself to the current, you do not know when you may eventually reach the ocean. If you really want to bring people to liberation as rapidly as possible, however, you must help the current to flow smoothly, by removing everything that hinders the river's flow, dredging the sediment from the riverbed and clearing the shoals and removing any obstructions that cause dangerous whirlpools to occur.

The Second World Assembly of Religions for Peace was short and its schedule tight, but at the end I felt strongly that we were contributing toward peace through our individual religions while we strengthened our solidarity. It is up

to us all to nurture this small bud into vigorous and healthy growth. It is not enough simply to desire peace just by praying for it. We must establish the conditions for peace and strive to make them effective. It is in this sense that I believe that "religion is not a matter of doctrine but of sincere practice."

However puny my efforts may be, I want to spend my whole life advocating the way of correct religious belief and the necessity for it, in order to bring happiness to people and peace to the world. I hardly need say that today chaos and confusion continue to pile up on all sides. The Age of the Decay of the Law is embodied in what we are experiencing, as predicted twenty-five hundred years ago by Shakyamuni. It is no exaggeration to say that these very conditions urge us to solve the riddle of how to bring about the necessary change. It is at such a time that religion has to fulfill its primary role of making world peace a lasting reality.

Fortunately, an opportunity has now arisen for men and women of the various world faiths to transcend their mutual boundaries and band together to pursue the great goal of building true peace. I want to join with them and add my efforts to theirs striving toward this goal, in the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism. At first glance this may seem an impossible dream, but we should remember that just as everyone has a birthday, so each person possesses the noble buddha-nature. The task of believers such as ourselves is to bring forth this buddha-nature and spread its radiance in all directions. This, I believe, is closely related to bringing us true world peace, and as long as I have life I will not rest until the world becomes one based on universal religious principles. ❑

Participants in the Interim Advisory Committee meeting visit Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople (center, second row) in Istanbul. Some twenty religious leaders took part in the Interim Advisory Committee meeting (February 1969) and decided to hold the First World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970.

Left: Forty-five religious representatives gathered in Kyoto for the Preparatory Committee meeting of the First World Assembly of Religions for Peace, December 3–5, 1969. Right: Participants in the First World Assembly of Religions for Peace chat after a commemorative photo session held in the course of the assembly.

Self-Defense and Defense Against the Self

by Jack Miles

Opening remarks at the Symposium on Religion and Peace, held under the theme "Global Militarization—Religions' Response," at the Student Center of the University of California, Irvine (UCI), on May 13, 2010.

It is a pleasure to join all of you on a springtime evening sacred to Buddhists all around the world for a symposium on religion and peace, a pairing of subjects of ever more intense interest not just to Buddhists, surely, but to everyone on our beleaguered planet. I am honored by the invitation extended to me by Rev. Shoko Mizutani, director of Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America, to offer opening remarks this evening, and I am grateful to the members of Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America, the UCI Buddhist Association, and the several other Christian, Jewish, Unitarian Universalist, and secular humanist sponsors for the support you have lent to this evening's conversation.

When it comes to religion, the United States has been characterized through various metaphors, most of which seem to have something to do with food or drink. We are a cafeteria of religions, some say, or we are a Chinese menu ("Pick one from column A, one from column B, etc."). Or, moving from China to Sweden, we are a smorgasbord of dishes hot and cold. Among all of these metaphors, my favorite is this: We are a no-host bar of religion. By that, I mean that no American religion, however large, can claim to be the host or home religion in the United States in a way that would render all others mere invited or uninvited guests. At a no-host bar, anyone may buy anyone else a drink, and anyone may accept the drink without conceding thereby that his benefactor owns the bar and may throw him out at closing time. It doesn't work that way in the United States. As we mill about this no-host bar, serving one another rather than sitting serenely waiting to be served or not by some head bartender of religious beverages, our confusion is our glory.

Why are we gathered here this evening? What is our subject? With due deference to Buddhist tradition, let me propose that our ultimate subject is mindfulness. It is concentration in the sense in which one of the most quoted writers in the English language, Dr. Samuel Johnson, used that word *concentrate* in one of his most famous quips: "You may depend upon it, sir, when a man knows that he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

Wonderfully and terribly at once, we may want to add, once past the initial smile. A retired country doctor in rural Wisconsin once observed that his long years of practice had been a great school of humanity not because he had sat at the bedside of so many dying patients. No, the moment of death was not the moment of truth. The moment of truth, so often repeated, had been the moment just after he had told a patient who thought himself or herself well and healthy that he or she had only a short time to live. *That* moment, he said, was the moment of truth.

Of what truth, exactly? Beyond the truth of the patient's mortality, there was the doctor's own mortality, and beyond that the mortality of all whom he had known or ever would know. "Sad mortality o'ersways [our] power," Shakespeare wrote.[1] Or, as Dr. Johnson's immediate contemporary, Thomas Gray, put it:

> The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power
> And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
> Await alike th'inevitable hour.
> The paths of glory lead but to the grave.[2]

Jack Miles, distinguished professor of English and religious studies with the University of California at Irvine and senior fellow for religious affairs with the Pacific Council on International Policy, is a writer whose work has appeared in many publications. His book God: A Biography *won a Pulitzer Prize in 1996. He is currently at work as general editor of the forthcoming* Norton Anthology of World Religions.

Dr. Miles delivers opening remarks at the Symposium on Religion and Peace at the UCI Student Center.

The truth of that repeated moment in a humble physician's life is the very truth that launched Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, upon his search for enlightenment so many centuries ago. Enlightenment is not knowledge, though it begins from knowledge. It is rather what one does with the knowledge already disturbingly in one's possession.

The Buddha's search for enlightenment interrupted the life he had been living until the truth of universal suffering and death intruded upon his consciousness—namely, a life lived within the illusionary cocoon of property and power. Jesus spoke of that cocoon in one of his parables:

> The lands of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do since I have no room to store my harvest? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my old barns, and build new ones and larger; and there will I store all my harvest and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry! But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy life be required of thee. Whose then shall those things be, which thou has provided?[3]

The rich farmer knew that at some point God would take back the life God had given. It was not knowledge that the man lacked but wisdom. And where lay the path of wisdom?

Later on in his discourse, Jesus gave an answer of which the Buddha might have approved. He said:

> Fear not, Little Flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not age, a treasure in the heavens that never runs out, where no thief lurks, nor any moth devours. For where your treasure is there will your heart be as well.[4]

Well and good, I hear you say, but why bring up these tales of private inspiration at a symposium on so large and public a subject? What's the connection? Let me begin my answer to that question with an unhappy woman in T. S. Eliot's play *The Cocktail Party.* Why am I unhappy? she wonders. She doesn't know, but she hopes there is something wrong with her, she says, because, if not, there is something very wrong with the universe. We understand her question easily enough, but if there is something wrong with the world, can she possibly hope to be untouched? Or if there is something wrong with her, can its effect possibly be separated from the collective effect upon the universe of the human species to which she belongs?

The life of the individual and the life of the species are inseparable. So much is this the case that we must now contemplate the real possibility that our species will go extinct, just as so many have done before us. As we meet this evening, some of the world's most distinguished scientists, like concerned physicians drawing conclusions from a syndrome of symptoms, are poised to give the diagnosis that *Homo sapiens* may have only a short time to live. They are contemplating the possibility that the ten-thousand-year epoch of geological stability during which human civilization arose may be coming to an end. Called the Holocene era, this epoch might have lasted another ten thousand years were it not for the profound effect upon the planet of the activities of our species, especially over its past century of life.[5] The Holocene epoch is yielding to what some propose to call the Anthropocene era but which, as one reads the details, seems worthy of being called the Anthropocidal era. To be blunt, we are slowly killing ourselves, and so the question of the day—and of this evening in particular—must be: Can we defend ourselves against ourselves? We are putting ourselves on the road to extinction. Can we stop ourselves in time?

The details of how the various forms of anthropogenic pollution threaten the very conditions of life on planet Earth are not the most predictable or proper subject of this evening's symposium. But if you were listening closely, I constructed the bridge from these opening remarks to the subject of the symposium in the closing questions of my previous paragraph—namely, "Can we defend ourselves against ourselves?" Perhaps we can, but when one is one's own enemy, the first step in self-defense must be a change in our understanding both of defense and of ourselves. And because the mortality that heaves into view at the dawn of the Anthropocene is not personal mortality but species mortality, the needed change of consciousness must be species wide. Culturally different in its expressions in different cultures, it must nonetheless be analogous to the change that Siddhartha Gautama sought when he left the wealth and comfort of his father's house, or the one that Jesus sought when he counseled his "little flock" in Galilee not to trust the treasures of earth but only those of heaven.

Still thinking defense, let me propose a small thought-experiment to you. We have all been following with horror the continuing spectacle of an uncapped oil well spewing a monstrous lake of oil upward from the ocean floor into the Gulf of Mexico. This gusher lies a mile beneath the ocean

Photo: AFLO

An attempt to rescue wildlife in the oil-filled waters off Queen Bess Island, Louisiana, on June 5, 2010. The massive BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has fouled the marshlands and harmed wildlife.

surface in an environment that we understand less well than we understand the surface of the moon, as one scientist remarked to National Public Radio. One-third of all the seafood consumed in the United States is now at most serious risk. Preliminary estimates of the damage that will be done to food production, ocean and river shipping, tourism and the revenue it brings, as well as the physical health of all who live and work along the coast, climb very quickly into the trillions. All this you know.

Let me now ask you to ask the following question: What if rather than an industrial accident, the explosion at the Deepwater Horizon oil rig had been an act of war? What if al-Qaeda had been behind it? What if this accident had been an act of war? What would be our response?

Is it not immediately obvious that our response would be both military and huge? Would it not be like our response to the attacks of 9/11/2001? No less a figure than Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates used the word *gusher* to characterize the near doubling of the U.S. defense budget that occurred in the aftermath of those attacks, a doubling *exclusive* of the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In a roundtable discussion with reporters, after a speech announcing unprecedented cuts in the Pentagon budget, Secretary Gates said, "The gusher has been turned off and will stay off for a good period of time."[6] But note well, the as much as $15 billion that Secretary Gates intends to cut come from a Pentagon budget of fully $547 billion, again leaving aside the cost of current conflicts. After the cuts have been made, the budget will be 97 percent intact. Given the history of a budget that has gone ever upward, the *Los Angeles Times* had some reason to refer to "sharp cuts" in a May 9 report.[7] And yet, at the same time, we do well to recall that the threat that has become reality in the Deepwater Horizon blowout was a threat against which the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), rather than the Pentagon, would properly be seen as the first line of defense. And what is the EPA's budget?

Last February, President Barack Obama and Lisa P. Jackson, administrator of the EPA, held a press conference to trumpet a whopping 34 percent increase in the EPA budget—that is, however, an increase from $7.8 billion to $10.5 billion.[8] In other words, even after so large an increase by percentage, the *entire* budget for the defense of the country from environmental disaster equaled less than the announced 2.7 percent *reduction* in the military budget. When environmental breakdown can have the ominous consequences that we are witnessing in the Gulf of Mexico, we might well expect a nationwide outcry against this blatant misallocation of defense resources. How much less safe would the nation be if the EPA budget were tripled to $22 billion, which could be accomplished with the same $15 billion by which the Pentagon budget is to be reduced?

But we know, don't we, that no such general outcry is to be expected. And why is that? It is because, to return to the language used earlier, we are, as a species, much, much better at defending ourselves against others than against ourselves. We are hardwired for intraspecies conflict, adapted for it by eons of natural selection. Not everyone would say, as General George S. Patton does in the film that bears his surname, "I love war." But we men, in particular, are addicted to combat in some form. The World Cup thrills the world as it does because it simulates world war, and nothing so galvanizes our attention. But this is the very element in our evolved human nature that now most imperils us. This is the part of ourselves that we must defend against if we are to meet the larger enemy that no army can defeat.

Through the late 1970s and into the 1980s, Syria and Iraq came repeatedly to the brink of war over the water of the Euphrates River. Syria was smaller but upstream. Iraq was larger but downstream. Then, suddenly, they made peace and formed a common front against Turkey, larger than either and upstream of both. Turkey's massive Ataturk Dam made allies of erstwhile enemies.[9] So it has often happened before, and so it will surely happen again, for, sadly, resource wars and resource alliances seem an ominous probability as political efforts to find a common, peaceful solution continue to come up as lamentably short as did the recent Copenhagen conference on climate control.

Photo: AFLO

The Euphrates River in Syria. It sustains the livelihood of people in Syria, Iraq, and Turkey, and is used for irrigation and hydroelectric power. The Euphrates is the longest and historically the most important river of Southwest Asia.

And yet we may ask, we must ask: Is it not within our reach to, as it were, move figuratively upstream from the region where military victory or defeat is paramount? If we can do this, then we may still have a chance to defend ourselves against ourselves before it is too late. Such is the question before this symposium. As political leadership falters, as resources continue to be so grotesquely misallocated against the range of threats that truly imperil national and international security, can the religions of the world, and especially the two most strongly represented here this evening, step into the breach? Can they teach the world that moving upstream of war is not abandoning defense but rather engaging the real enemy? Later this evening we shall hear more about the "Arms Down!" campaign,[10] whose specific goals—and they must be specific to be effective—may seem a step removed from the environmental crisis, but there is a hidden connection between that crisis and everything that is bought and paid for in the name of "national security." And there is in both Buddhism and Christianity a connection between recognizing illusory security as illusory and beginning the quest for true security.

In the very longest run, of course, even the sun will go dark. Life on Earth is not eternal life. The answers of the Buddha and Jesus are ultimately directed to questions larger than the question of preserving life on a single planet lost in the immeasurable vastness of the universe. But the solitary planet matters, the solitary individual matters, and what happens to the soul—whether it rests in the illusory security of wealth and arms or achieves the mindfulness that I said at the start was our ultimate subject this evening—matters as well. It is easy to laugh at the thought that the inner peace sought by the religions has any connection at all with the outer peace that must now be the condition of human survival. But there is a connection, and my hope is that through the remainder of this evening we may come a little closer to it. ❑

Notes

1. William Shakespeare, Sonnet 65:

> *Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,*
> *But sad mortality o'ersways their power*
> *How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,*
> *Whose action is no stronger than a flower?*
> *O how shall summer's honey breath hold out*
> *Against the wrackful siege of battering days*
> *When rocks impregnable are not so stout,*
> *Nor gates of steel so strong, but time decays?*
> *O fearful meditation! Where, alack,*
> *Shall time's best jewel from time's chest lie hid,*
> *Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back,*
> *Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?*
> *O none, unless this miracle have might:*
> *That in black ink my love may still shine bright.*

2. Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard."
3. Luke 12:16–20.
4. Luke 12:32–34.
5. Cf. Bradford Plumer, "Planet Doom: Nine scenarios for imminent apocalypse—only one is global warming," *New Republic,* May 13, 2010, 23–25.
6. Greg Joffe, "Gates: Cuts in Pentagon bureaucracy needed to help maintain military force," *Washington Post,* May 9, 2010.
7. Julian E. Barnes, "Gates Seeks Big Cuts in Military Spending," *Los Angeles Times,* May 9, 2010.
8. Amanda Wills, "Obama's 2010 Budget to Increase EPA Funding by 34 Percent," http://earth911.com/news/2009/05/14/.
9. Cf. Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2001), 161–89.
10. The Arms Down! Campaign for Shared Security is a worldwide campaign collecting signatures on petitions calling for every nation to reduce its military expenditure for nuclear and conventional weapons and reallocating the money toward achieving the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The Significance for Today of Gandhian Philosophy

An interview with Ms. Ela Gandhi

Ms. Ela Gandhi, a South African peace activist and a granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, visited Japan from October 30 to November 7, 2009, to call at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters and Dharma Centers and to meet Japanese parliamentarians. Dr. Pema Gyalpo interviewed Ms. Gandhi in Tokyo for Dharma World *on her long-standing involvement in social work in South Africa and on the unfading significance of the Gandhian philosophy in the twenty-first century.*

Motivation to Become a Social Worker

Pema Gyalpo: Since you not only are a great descendant of Mahatma Gandhi but also have inherited his philosophy and practice his teachings, I would like to ask you about your activities in Africa, especially your social work and work with children. Also, I believe you've been involved in helping people suffering from domestic violence, which is a common issue in developed countries as well as developing countries.

Ela Gandhi: I worked for a number of years as a social worker in the child and family welfare field, so I was involved very closely with families where there was discord and with children who were affected by various family problems, and so on. Part of my work was arranging foster care, adoptions, and foster care for children who were not getting proper attention and care, and also looking at families and helping children to develop and helping families to develop and lead a better life. That was broadly based on a lot of detail that one can go into in terms of social work philosophy.

My work started in the early 1970s in South Africa. At that time we had a lot of repression. You work in different racial groups, and the country was very racially divided. Being of Indian origin, I had to work with Indian families. So my first contribution there was my decision that we could work with other racial groups as well. Contrary to the South African law, I started working in the African community in South Africa in the early 1980s, when we started setting up organizations. Even in our office, we introduced a nonracial approach. So that was the first act of defiance.

The second thing was that as a social worker, in terms of the philosophy of social work, which was very American-based, we found that there was a lot of emphasis on the individual and no emphasis on the community. But we felt that an individual is part of a community and you cannot separate the two, that you have to work together with the individual and the community. So my second emphasis and contribution to the profession was to broaden our outlook, move away from just the emphasis on the individual to a broader emphasis on problems of the community.

Using the terminology of social work, one would say "from case to cause." Looking at the broader social causes of what was happening to the individual and tackling those broader questions naturally led to political involvement. And so, in a sense, that was my entrance into politics in South Africa: analyzing the problems faced by the communities, organizing communities, getting communities to begin to understand the causes of their problems, and taking action to protest against these causes, which were a result of the apartheid policies imposed on the people. We organized and mobilized people to protest and take action and in this way empower communities through united action.

Pema Gyalpo: What motivated you? Was it the circum-

Ela Gandhi, a member of parliament in South Africa from 1994 to 2004, is founder of the Gandhi Development Trust and chancellor of the Durban University of Technology. She also serves as a member of the board of trustees of the Commission on Religious Affairs of the African National Congress and as an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

Pema Gyalpo, PhD, is a professor in the Faculty of Law and the Graduate School of Toin University of Yokohama. His fields of research include international and regional studies in South and Central Asia. Born in Tibet in 1953, he has lived in Japan since 1965 and now serves as director emeritus of the Tibet Culture Center in Tokyo. He is also a popular columnist and commentator for Japanese media.

stances or was it the influence of your father and grandfather?

Ela Gandhi: Well, I think the influence of my father and grandfather played a big role in the sense that it made me conscious of what was going on and of the fact that you don't accept it, if you see that there's something wrong, because by accepting it you're saying it's okay.

Pema Gyalpo: Yes, I read somewhere that Mahatma Gandhi also said that if you stay indifferent to social injustice, then you are also part of it.

Ela Gandhi: Exactly, yes.

Pema Gyalpo: I believe you were also involved in the United Democratic Front.

Ela Gandhi: I was involved in the United Democratic Front, which we formed in the eighties to oppose the government's offer of separate homelands for all the African people, dividing them into linguistic groups. It offered separate representation in separate parliaments to the Indian South Africans and the so-called colored South Africans. Thus we had three houses of parliament. The Indians would vote for an Indian representative in the Indian house, as would colored and white, and this was totally against what we believed in, that is, universal representation in parliament with a common voters' roll.

This kind of division was furthermore unfair because in terms of funds the African people got the least, Indians and coloreds were in the middle, and the white people got the most, and that's how the funds were divided by the white parliament, which controlled the economy. The resources of the country were also divided in this proportion, leaving the African people destitute and with the least resources. The land too was similarly divided. For the African people, in particular, and for all South Africans in general, it was an absolutely unjust system.

Apartheid was trying to enlist Indians and coloreds to join whites in their oppression of African people. Whites believed that African people didn't have the ability to govern. They believed that African people were not yet prepared to attain freedom. This was totally wrong, and because whites didn't provide education or employment opportunities to African people, many continued to remain illiterate and unskilled. Anyone with education and skills can compete equally with anyone else, regardless of race. That is what I believe, and I believe that the whole system of apartheid was based on a completely flawed Calvinistic interpretation.

This is why apartheid had to be removed. The United Democratic Front, on the other hand, brought people together. All white people who were against apartheid joined the black people who were also against apartheid. In the United Democratic Front we had religious organizations, cultural organizations, youth organizations, and workers' organizations. They were all brought together into the United Democratic Front, and the whole idea was that we must oppose this abhorrent apartheid system. And we succeeded.

Pema Gyalpo: Like Mahatma Gandhi, you also studied law, because you felt it necessary to have a knowledge of law in order to arm yourself to fight social injustice.

But do you think Gandhian philosophy can work in countries with totalitarian regimes, which don't even have a notion of law, like Burma, where Aung San Suu Kyi is still under house arrest after all these long years?

Ela Gandhi: That hopefully is going to change. I think that there are moves now to negotiate with the Burmese people and with Aung San Suu Kyi and the government. So if it works out, I think that there is a possibility for change. South Africa was very, very opposed to any democratic system, and some people think that there wasn't much repression in South Africa because they don't know what we underwent during the times of apartheid. The information that went out to the world was what the government sent out. The real facts were hidden to a large extent, such as the fact that so many of our people died in prison as a direct result of torture and ill treatment.

There was no application of real justice in South Africa. So, very similar to what's happening in Burma and what's happening elsewhere, what happened in South Africa wasn't known in the rest of the world. South Africa was a powerful country and enjoyed the support of the Western world. But we can't say that it was only our liberation struggle that brought about the changes. The changes were brought about by a lot of people, a lot of people throughout the world. We had powerful anti-apartheid movements in every country; India had one, Britain had a powerful anti-apartheid movement. And it was those movements that got their own governments to oppose South Africa, as well as through the work they did in the community by boycotting South African products, by treating white South Africans as second-class citizens. The same treatment that they gave us in our country, they got outside their country. So for a white South African to go out of South Africa was not a pleasant thing. People shunned them; people treated them badly. You know, the minute you said you're a white South African, people would say "Oh" and walk away.

Pema Gyalpo: But then didn't that become kind of an eye for an eye?

Ela Gandhi: I don't think it's an eye for an eye. I think it's to say look, you have got to go and change the laws in your country. It was telling the white South Africans that they could not continue to enjoy the privilege and protection that apartheid provided to them, that they had to get involved in changing the government. It was a reminder. So what I'm

saying basically is that no country can fight its own battle by itself. It has to get support from the outside world.

Pema Gyalpo: So, you not only think but also strongly believe that the methods applied by Mahatma Gandhi and the teachings that were relevant about a century ago are still very much relevant and also needed in the present century. Do you think the world is better off today than in the time of Mahatma Gandhi?

Ela Gandhi: No, I don't think so. I think we have gone back, we have retrograded. In many ways, I think that the suffering that people are experiencing now—the natural disasters, all the human suffering that's going on—is largely due to not heeding what Gandhiji said. And his message was not just about *satyagraha* and nonviolence but about a way of life. It wasn't just an absence of violence.

When you look at what that way of life that he talked about was like, it was about equity, about building an egalitarian society, about learning to live with each other peacefully, about learning to protect nature, about learning to live within what is a certain boundary and not to go beyond that. What we see today is an unharnessed consumerism. People are wasting the world's resources. We're not looking out for future generations.

We just use and use and use. We produce and produce and produce. We have more luxuries. We have more riches. In the past, in Mahatma Gandhi's day, a millionaire was a very rich person. Today it's billionaires who are considered rich, and the gap between the billionaires and the poor is much bigger than in those days, and that gap has widened, and because it has widened, the bridge is longer to cross. It's more difficult today to change that than it was in his day. So I think the situation is worse.

What Is Peace?

Pema Gyalpo: His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and many others have been trying to spread the teaching of nonviolence, but nevertheless, unfortunately, especially in South Asia, I feel that though it is the sacred birthplace of both the Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi, assassination has become a kind of political culture of that region. And what do you think, or how do you define peace, for example? According to the Gandhian philosophy, what does peace mean?

Ela Gandhi: I think it means much more than the absence of violence. I think it resonates very closely with the Buddhist philosophy. It resonates very closely with the real Christian philosophy, and with the real Hindu philosophy, and with Islam, the real teachings of Islam. Unfortunately, what has happened is that the modern Muslim, the modern Hindu, and the modern Buddhist are all different from their predecessors. They've moved away from the real teachings of their

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religions and have taken to a kind of interpretation that suits them, that suits their own ideas, whatever their aspirations are, and unfortunately those aspirations are not really good aspirations.

So you find that the religious basis has collapsed in every faith. And if you look at the present day, if you look at what the Dalai Lama is trying to teach, or what my cousins and Bishop Tutu are trying to teach, and the ecumenical movement in the Catholic Church, they all have a similar philosophy. If we bring all of them together, if we can unite and take their message even more strongly to the world, it is preaching a different kind of life, it's preaching more love, it's preaching tolerance, it's preaching respect, it's preaching simplicity. All the things that Gandhiji said are what these movements are talking about.

If we can all get together and strengthen each other, I think we can make a difference. But we also have to have the power to be able to change our own religions, because you see Hindus that are killing in the name of Hinduism, you see Hindus who are practicing the caste system and committing a lot of atrocities against women and so on. That is not real Hinduism, and Gandhiji said it was not real Hinduism. It's a misinterpretation of the scriptures.

Just as apartheid was based on a misinterpretation of the Bible. Supporters of apartheid said that the Bible says that whites are the chosen race, and somewhere in the Bible there is something about the chosen people, so they said they were the chosen people and blacks were supposed to serve the chosen people.

That is how they interpreted something in the Bible. But it was a total misrepresentation. Unless you confront these religions that are becoming powerful in the world and that are preaching hatred, violence, and so on, we're going to be on a collision course, I think, and we're not only going to destroy ourselves but we're going to destroy the world.

Pema Gyalpo: In an old book of quotations of Mahatma Gandhi's, he says first that God or religion is truth, but then he said truth is religion, and in that sense what is truth? I mean, how can we differentiate something from truth and untruth?

Ela Gandhi: Well, in my opinion, and this is my own interpretation, I think that Gandhiji's first contribution to that was that you have to be humble. Even he, in that same book of quotations, says something to the effect that if you want to reach God, you must first humble yourself as much as you can, and that's when you can communicate with God. You can't communicate with God from a position of arrogance.

So the first point is humility, to be able to say I believe in this but I'm not saying that that's the only answer; there could be a different answer. Let's discuss it, and let's find the right answer.

The second point is to be able to listen, to hear, to communicate with others, and then arrive at the truth, because no one person has a monopoly on the truth.

I think religion is important. I believe that when Marx said religion is the opium of the people, he said that because there were people who were using religion to mobilize people in a different direction, and that could have made it the opium of the people. But real religion, what your faith teaches you, is important. Gandhiji also said that you have got to have a teacher; there are people who are more enlightened than you are.

He himself put questions to other people, and I've got a book that says he was at a crossroads in South Africa, because in his early years there, between the age of twenty-three and forty-four, he met very powerful Christians and Muslims who wanted to convert him to their own religion. That put him in a dilemma, so he wrote to his friend Shrimad Rajchandra and asked him a series of questions about the soul and beliefs and so on. When you read those questions and the answers, you begin to realize that here's a person who felt this deep dilemma within himself.

But eventually what he came up with was: Look, I have a certain set of beliefs; it's not that my beliefs are superior to your beliefs, but I would rather keep to the beliefs that I've got, and that you believe in what you believe in, and let's live together in harmony. There can be harmony, because I don't have the right answer and you don't have the right answer. We can't prove our beliefs scientifically, but my faith tells me that reincarnation is what happens; and I believe in karma. If you don't believe in it, you have the right to disagree, because I can't prove to you that my belief is the correct belief. That's the attitude that he arrived at.

How Mahatma Gandhi Might See the World Today

Pema Gyalpo: What do you think Gandhi would have been doing today if he were alive? How would he see the world, and what would be his advice to people today?

Dr. Pema Gyalpo

Ela Gandhi: I think he would have been very sad. I think all the things that he spoke about and all the things he wanted to transform didn't happen. Especially the media. What is going on in the media is just terrible. The media have such a bad influence. Gandhi's first book, *Hind Swaraj,* contains the basis of all of his ideas, and it was these ideas that inspired the Hind Swaraj Centenary International Conference in Delhi in November. He wrote that book in 1909, and it was based on Tolstoy's ideas, and in it he wrote about the meaning of civilization. He describes all of these evils that were happening because of the newspapers, what the newspapers were doing, with their emphasis on sensual pleasures. As a result we see more consumerism as opposed to care of the soul or of others and the community. So when you compare these beliefs and witness what's happening now, you see that we have totally discarded all the Gandhian teachings, of love, sharing, simplicity, conservation, and spirituality, and have moved rapidly toward individualism, luxurious life styles, prejudices and hatred, and religious fanaticism based on misinterpretation of the scriptures. The world is going completely in the opposite direction today.

Pema Gyalpo: When I try to understand and read the works of Mahatma Gandhi, I find that his teachings are very close to the Buddha's teachings. Recently in Bangkok I bought a book called *The Constitution of Living* by a Thai monk, which is a collection of Lord Buddha's teachings on how we should live, and it's very much about self-discipline and self-respect.

I think today we are losing self-respect in many ways. People just do anything for money or for fame. In doing that we lose our self-respect or we ask others to respect us but don't respect ourselves. I remember Mahatma Gandhi saying that those who cannot discipline themselves will be disciplined by others. This is, I think, very much what's happening in today's world.

Ela Gandhi: Yes, I agree with you. I usually talk about Gandhian ideas as being based on Four Pillars. The Four Pillars are *satyagraha* [nonviolent political resistance], *sarvodaya* [prosperity for all], *swaraj* [self-governance], and *swadeshi* [not supporting exploitative industries]. If you unpack each of those terms, they form the basis of his entire philosophy. He says *swaraj* doesn't mean license to do whatever you want to do. Liberation is not about untrammeled behavior. *Swaraj* is actually self-control, self-discipline. So he was talking about discipline, as you have so aptly described.

Pema Gyalpo: I think that's also the exact meaning of freedom. Freedom doesn't mean that you can do anything that you want. But when you really respect freedom, you exercise restraint. Instead of others imposing restraints on you, you—

Ela Gandhi: You impose the discipline and restraint on yourself.

Pema Gyalpo: I was telling my students that sometimes people talk as if freedom and democracy were the same. But they aren't, because without the rule of law, people will just think that they can do anything. The rule of law is respected in democracies. Could you please kindly explain the Four Pillars in your own words?

Ela Gandhi: Okay. Gandhiji talked about *satyagraha* as being truth force, or soul force. And basically it means striving toward truth: first, finding out what truth is, and second, ensuring that you follow that path, striving toward truth. That's the first pillar.

The second pillar is *sarvodaya.* In other words, when you follow the path of truth, you don't think only of how a few people can benefit, or even how the majority can benefit, but all people. *Sarvodaya* is the good of all. When some people said *sarvodaya* meant the good of the majority, Gandhiji said, no, it's not about the good of the majority, it's the good of all. So that was the second pillar—how to ensure that everyone is included.

The third pillar is *swaraj,* and that is about liberation. By liberation, we don't mean license to do whatever you feel like doing. It's about self-control. Self-control is what Gandhiji meant when he talked about rights and responsibilities. If you want rights, if you want to enjoy liberation, you have to think about the other person's liberation, about the other person's rights. You respect the other person's rights, then you have rights yourself. So that's *swaraj.*

Swadeshi is about economics. How can you bring about change? How can we build an egalitarian world where everybody has access to all the benefits? Gandhiji said you can't do it from the top down. Some of us are saying that if you try to bring about change from the top, it will filter down to the people. But he said no, change must come from the bottom up, beginning with the smallest unit, the village. You start looking at your village to see how you can improve the conditions of the people there and how you can empower the people at that level, and in this work you involve everybody in your village.

If you can get everyone in the village to become self-sufficient and have access to everything, all the basic necessities of life, and it's replicated, then everybody will have access to the basics. So you start right from that village, and Gandhiji used the spinning wheel to bring about the necessary reform. He believed that spinning wheel would create employment for all. In this is based the economic model that Gandhiji advocated. So, those are the Four Pillars of Gandhian philosophy for me. If you think of them and you elaborate on them, they are the basis of Gandhiji's philosophy.

Pema Gyalpo: I think especially that majority rule, or democracy as a system, has become really oppressive in a way, because only numbers count. Like Buddhists, however, we think that today's environmental issues have made us more aware that our lives are interconnected with all other lives, including those of animals and all other beings. So I think what Gandhi meant is that it's important for politicians in democracies to review their thinking, especially so that majority rule will not be oppressive.

Second, I think about the social necessities. Lord Buddha mentioned four necessities: shelter, food, clothing, and medication. These are the social responsibility, or community responsibility, to ensure for everyone. Everyone should have access to these four necessities. I think, of course, that democracy has brought a lot of benefits to the modern world, but it has become a very rigid system, and we are becoming slaves to that system.

Ela Gandhi: Absolutely! That's why I think that today we really need to go back to studying the basics of everything—of our politics, of our economics, and religion, because we have forgotten the values of religion. You know, we talk about Christianity, and you talk about "churchianity." Today, it's "churchianity," or emphasis on rituals and no longer on basics. That's what needs to change.

Pema Gyalpo: I think there is another phrase that Mahatma Gandhi used when some missionaries went to him and said that they were generous in helping people who nevertheless didn't seem interested in becoming Christians. Gandhi suggested to the missionaries that they might more easily convert people if they stopped thinking about conversion but let people see the missionaries' virtues. Gandhi also said he respected Christ but not Christians, or something like that. He said that exactly, I think. I think he would say the same thing about Buddhism in today's world.

Involvement in the World Conference of Religions for Peace

Pema Gyalpo: You have been actively involved in the World Conference of Religions for Peace for some time, haven't you?

Ela Gandhi: Yes, I have been involved in Religions for Peace since 1984, and currently I am an honorary president of Religions for Peace.

Pema Gyalpo: How active are they? What do you do there?

Ela Gandhi: We first joined Religions for Peace South Africa in 1984. At that time, we were still struggling for freedom, so our chapter was very active in politics. Sometimes we had some differences with the national and international bodies, but we were very active in politics. During that period we participated in all the struggles at home. We had religious leaders leading our different marches and demonstrations.

What Religions for Peace achieved was to ensure that religious leaders were there and they were in the front line with us. But in 1990, when things were changing, we called all the religious bodies together, with the leaders, and we drew up a declaration of the rights and responsibilities of religious communities. They were definite things that each religious group should do in order to prevent conflict. One was to shift emphasis from proselytization, as one of the things that led to conflicts. We put this in a document and we gave it to our constitutional body. Now it's part of the constitution.

Some of the clauses are in our constitution in the Bill of Rights. We have a commission on the right to language, religion, and culture, to ensure that there's equality among all those languages, religions, and cultures. Religions for Peace also helped establish South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and we did research for it.

There were other countries where there were similar processes. We looked at the processes. We looked at the pros and cons of each experience, and then we called our politicians together and we helped them to draw up the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act. We had the help of Yasmin Sooka and Desmond Tutu. So that was one of the things Religions for Peace did during the nineties.

After the nineties, it was about delivery to the people. What the government was doing, how we could help the government, and how we could ensure that the government also followed some of the religious basis and values. At the moment what Religions for Peace does is look at issues of HIV and AIDS, and AIDS orphans. We are looking at the issues of communities that are experiencing problems like those of people who are living in shantytowns and experiencing problems with access to resources, and other social and economic problems. We have a lot of informal settlements in South Africa and we try to see how we can assist in giving voice to those people as well as in assisting in that process.

The third thing is domestic violence, and violence against women and children, which is also something that Religions for Peace is working on together with other organizations. We try to listen to what our religious communities are saying and think about how we can improve the position of women, both in terms of women within churches, women within religious organizations, and women in society, because at the end of the day, violence against women arises because of the power relations between men and women. And power relations are determined a lot by religious communities as well. So it's an uphill battle, but we are trying. It's not easy. It's a long-term program, but we are getting there.

The fourth thing is environmental issues. We have an environmental body, and it is looking at environmental issues as well as at the education of children and how education can be geared toward improving the mind-sets of children in terms of the environment, in terms of violence, in terms of values, and so on. That's what Religions for Peace is very active in. It's still existing in South Africa.

Pema Gyalpo: I see. So you are very active in what you're doing.

Ela Gandhi: We've got a lot of people who are more active than me. I am part of it, but I don't take all the responsibility. There are lots of people who are involved in it. ❑

BOOK REVIEW

An Encounter with Buddhist Spirituality

Buddhism for a Violent World: A Christian Reflection
by Elizabeth J. Harris
London: Epworth Press, 2010
182 pp. Paperback

In the present globally troubled period, when mistrust, suspicion, and often worse can dominate in contacts among the world's major religious faiths, this new book is especially timely. Elizabeth J. Harris is a leading specialist in Buddhist-Christian relations, and this volume represents a culmination of all that she has learned from her encounters with Buddhist spirituality over more than a quarter of a century, including her years in Sri Lanka, when, in her own words, she was "never in violence-neutral territory, divorced from conflict."

It is important to note that her account is mainly intended for other Christians by a devout member of the Methodist Church, but one who probably has attained a greater depth of understanding of Buddhist philosophy and the compassion that underlies it than most of her academic peers. The book should also be of interest, however, to nonbelievers who seek to learn more about the historical challenges faced by both sides in the Western world's encounters with Buddhism.

Dr. Harris writes from her personal experience in undertaking a journey into a faith about which her curiosity had been heightened and which challenged her as a person of an entirely different religious persuasion. Her interest grew not because of the many obvious ways in which Buddhism was unlike her own steadfast belief in the redemptive power of Jesus, but also because its teachings continue to serve as guidelines for living for countless millions of men and women across much of Asia, and increasingly in Europe and the Americas, as well.

Most of the direct experience that inspired the present volume occurred in Sri Lanka, which the author visited for the first time in 1984, and where she subsequently lived and studied from 1986 through 1993. She received her PhD degree from the Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies at the University of Kelaniya in that country. Her time there was a period of ethnic conflict and civil unrest that frequently resulted in appalling acts of violence on both sides.

For readers who may be unfamiliar with the history of Buddhism, the author explains that the faith has two main divisions: Theravada Buddhism (translated in the glossary at the end of her book as the Way of the Elders), followed in Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam, and Mahayana Buddhism (translated as the Great Way), followed in Bhutan, China, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Tibet, and also Vietnam. There are differences in practice, but most of the basic teachings are the same. While Dr. Harris's direct knowledge and experience are associated with Theravada Buddhism, she is familiar with Mahayana from her visit to Japan and other sources.

She makes it clear to her readers that she is in no way suggesting they give up their present faith or become hyphenated Christian-Buddhists. Instead, as she states succinctly at the very beginning of this book, "Its message is that the world today needs wisdom from more than one spiritual source." Dr. Harris persuasively conveys that deeply held view throughout these pages, with special emphasis in the chapters devoted to meditation and interfaith relations. She is currently senior lecturer in the comparative study of religion, specializing in Buddhist studies, at Britain's Liverpool Hope University, and president of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies.

In addition to the already mentioned glossary, *Buddhism for a Violent World* has reference notes at the end of each chapter, suggestions for further reading, and a thorough index and ends with an epilogue in which Dr. Harris states, "My journey [into a faith not my own] was not orientated towards being strengthened in my own faith. It was about entering another religious world view and speaking another religious 'language', because such other 'languages' exist and spiritually feed millions of people."

Her book is certainly not a how-to manual for novices, nor is it a prescription for quickly achieving interreligious cooperation and understanding. Instead, it is a deeply personal account of learning the invaluable wisdom that intimate contact with another faith can make possible. ❑

William Feuillan

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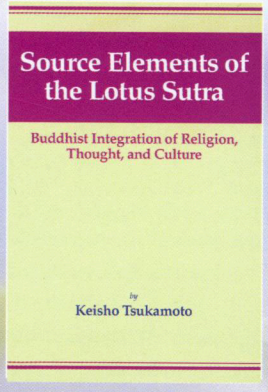

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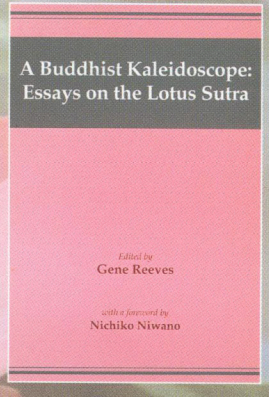

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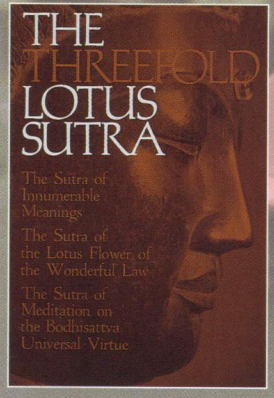

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