

## Résumé of Opening Discussion

The specific purpose of this consultation was stated as being an attempt to probe together into the implications of inter-religious dialogue and to work together on some guidelines for the relationship religions have with the issue of peace.

Participants then replied with their comments to the two papers which had been presented, i.e., Dr. Samartha's paper and Dr. Iisaka's paper. It was stressed that the distinction between people lies not between people of different religions but between different styles within the same religion, a point which Dr. Iisaka had made with his illustration of the Good Samaritan.

The problem of getting into the field of ideas and, therefore, of language and semantics was discussed. It was stated that the critical thing in inter-religious dialogue is more than just mutual respect, but ultimately is a readiness to have yourself called into question. In real inter-religious dialogue, it is necessary to open oneself up to a varied religious experience. The further point was made that after a dialogic encounter, it is also necessary to return to the people of your own religion and encourage them to engage in such experiences also.

After a short coffee break, the discussion resumed and the chairman, Dr. Malalasekera, reminded the Consultation members that the discussion was to deal not only with the issue of inter-religious dialogue, but with its relationship to the crisis of world peace.

Nevertheless, discussion members felt they must explore further the guidelines for inter-religious dialogue and what it means

in realistic terms. One participant stated that the reason for engaging in dialogue is to reach an understanding of the truth. Another participant said it is not to get more knowledge, but to get shocked by the life of other people, not to give knowledge to each other, but to "break into each other." He stated that when he encounters people of different religions, what he gets from them is to be more of himself and to influence by his way of being his community. As a Buddhist, his emphasis was on individual change in relation to community influence as the basic way to bring about peace. He felt we must also discuss the techniques of action, but only after such a dialogic encounter. A Moslem and a Hindu participant also disagreed with the statement that the purpose of dialogue is an understanding of the truth. They felt that it is rather to understand truths and the relationships between truths, common points and points of differences, and to foster respect for other persons.

The discussion then turned to the relationship with the issue of world peace. A Buddhist participant said that religion must take the responsibility for sufferings (e.g., the War in Vietnam), elaborating on a point in Dr. Samartha's paper. Actually, it is a religious attitude that has led to actual war in Vietnam. He stated that Communism and anti-Communism are both religions. If a Christian in the U.S.A. gives money for work in Vietnam, but is not aware of what the politicians in his country are doing to his oversimplified attitude to further the religion of anti-Communism, he is promoting further suffering of the people of Vietnam unaware. But, he stated, there are some Christians who have begun to look at the total political scene rather than the simplified one other American Christians

see. When some U.S. Christians think about Communists, they have an image of non-humans, and they feel opposing Communism is doing the work of God. Dialogue must free us from this kind of dogma in order to see Reality.

Some participants felt the Vietnamese Buddhist was generalizing about Americans and Christians and others cited examples of Christians who were more radical than Marxists. It was agreed that there is much inside work to be done by religions among their own members. It is important for each religion to delineate and affirm the values of what they mean by "mission" and "peace" in 1970. There must be a recognition of two levels of inter-religious dialogue: individual encounters and social encounters. In social dialogue, we need inter-religious collaboration (on an organizational level) for specific practical ends to be reached.

One Christian participant felt that a religious organization cannot work for peace because if you take an activist position, you will split the organization. He cited the example of the U.S.A. where this has happened to religious organizations within the last few years. He felt that religious organizations should not take an activist position but should rather stimulate its members to express their faith in practical activist ways. Another Christian participant disagreed saying that religious organizations *must* work for peace and other social goals at the risk of splitting the organization. This is the only future for religion.

The idea of peace was expanded to include many problems of today: overpopulation, pollution, hunger. It was stated that religious organizations should not be attached so much

to dogma in dealing with these problems, but instead should see man as man rather than an instrument. It was then stated that it is not organizations which are in dialogue today but followers of different religious traditions.

It was felt important so distinguish religion from ideology, particularly when our religious view becomes just a part of a total ideological view, as has happened in many places between Christianity and capitalism.

In answer to the question of whether it is possible for some religions to take a collective political position, a Buddhist participant answered that the Buddhist attitude is different somewhat. Buddhism may work as a stabilizing power, like underground water which may cut off the underground root of a social evil. However, he warned that the danger for Buddhism is that it may fall into quietism or indifference to social problems. He felt that Buddhism should not remain merely underground water. He felt that Buddhism should learn from Semitic religions about positive reaction towards a social problem and in the future use both approaches in fighting social evils.

A Hindu further elaborated that the influence of Christianity has had a fruitful effect on Hindus in this area goading "other-worldly" Hindus to relieve social ills. Likewise, the Hindu religion has had beneficial effects on Christianity as well.