

FACING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN ASIA

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From 13 to 17 September of this year the Second Inter-Religio Conference was hosted by the Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, located in Hong Kong's New Territories, bringing together some 20 members and associates of the Inter-Religio network throughout Eastern Asia to discuss the theme: "Facing Religious Pluralism in Asia: Models, Problems, Prospects." Several of the papers presented on that occasion will appear in this and future issues of the INTER-RELIGIO bulletin. The following is a general overview of what took place at the Hong Kong Conference and a selection of the views expressed in the discussions.

RECOLLECTIONS

To you, Yahweh, I lift up my soul,
O my God, . . . make your ways known to me, teach me your paths.
Set me in the way of your truth, and teach me.

Citing the words of the 25th Psalm, Rev. Edward Khong of the Catholic diocese of Hong Kong raised a voice in prayer to inaugurate the Second Inter-Religio Conference. For those who stood around the conference-tables, already strewn with papers and reports and proposals that would fill up the next three days of meetings, it was the first moment of quiet we had experienced together. The dizzying rush through bus stops and train stations, airports and taxi stands that most of us had gone through to make our way from home to Hong Kong, and through the noise and bustle of the city up to the restful hilltop retreat of Tao Fong Shan, the emotion of seeing old friends and meeting new ones, the months of preparation and anticipation—all of that was now to be set behind us.

. . . in all that is right he guides the humble,
and instructs the poor in his way . . .
My eyes are always on Yahweh,
for he releases my feet from the net.

Try as one might, there are few things so difficult as making do with so brief a silence to snap the heart free from its ambitions and preoccupations in order to make room for a moment of grace. No matter how high up into the heavens the words may reach, the nets still seem to wrap themselves just as snugly about one's feet.

We sat down, and after a momentary rustle of papers, all eyes turned to the chairperson for the opening session, Jan Swyngedouw, expecting the first item of business. "Before we begin, let us pause another moment to honor one not among us today," he began, "nor ever to be among us again..." No one needed to be told who was missing, least of all those who had been at the first Inter-Religio Conference in Manila some eighteen months previous. Ever since the members had started arriving at Tao Fong Shan the night before, the name of Peter Gowing had been circling around from mouth to mouth, but this time it took on a special solemnity as the story of his sudden passing of a cardiac infarct in June on the eve of his departure for a sabbatical, the funeral, and the renaming of the Dansalan Institute in his memory were recounted briefly by his colleagues from Marawi. One could feel the nets beginning to slack, and a glance about the assembly was enough to know that others felt the same. There was more room for grace in that moment than perhaps at any other throughout the meetings. The very absence of Peter's contagious enthusiasm, strangely enough, put events in perspective. Or more characteristically, put them *en theos*.

After coordinating the agenda for the final session, the attention of the group was directed to the proposals made at the Manila Conference (see *INTER-RELIGIO No. 1*, pp.20-21). At this time recommendations for expanding the Inter-Religio network to other organizations were made and warmly encouraged. Albert Poulet-Mathis apologized for the delay in completing documentation on interreligious organizations in Asia and announced plans to circulate a questionnaire and collate the results for publication in the spring of 1984. He also announced that whereas the OEIA had not yet had occasion to make concrete use of the network as a source of research consultants for its ongoing seminars, plans to do so in the future were underway. The group reiterated its interest in the educational program being run by the ORCI at Santo Tomas, and asked for more regular and detailed reports of their need for supplementary staff, financial assistance, and the like. Finally, mention was made of the interest expressed by a number of European based funding agencies in the work of the network, which included the financing of the present conference.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Director of the Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre and our host for the Conference, Dr. Peter Lee, took up the theme of religious pluralism in the realistic context of the current Christian mission in [continued on p.37]

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[continued from p.35] Asia, arguing that as obvious a fact as it is in the Asian context, it will never be adequately acknowledged let alone become a source of creative inspiration until Christians in Asia can "break away from the theological mold and the missiological framework that we have inherited from the past" and embrace the challenge to forge a new and broader understanding of the centrality of Christ. Together with this call for new theological understanding Lee continually stressed the primacy of religious experience and the need for detachment from the Western predilection for logical systematization. (The text of the paper is reprinted in this issue of *INTER-RELIGIO*.)

In his response. Jan Van Bragt stated his agreement with the general direction of the paper and his gratitude for the tone it set for the discussions to come. After expanding on the theme at certain points, he raised a final question concerning the remark that Western missionaries, even the "enlightened" ones, are apt to get caught in biases imported from the West in the attempt to confront religious pluralism. Van Bragt wondered whether the Asians themselves were not liable to biases of their own in this regard, even without the influence of Western training, and asked for further clarification of what is in the Asian approach that the West seems to lack.

In reply, Lee was careful to note that the "Western" mentality he was criticizing is not something peculiar to Westerners, but is often upheld more vigorously by Asians themselves. In particular he cited the frequent oblivion or even outright intolerance among Chinese Christians, pastors, and theologians to the fullness of their own religious inheritance as Chinese. In some

detail he recounted his own experience as a Chinese trained as a theologian in the West and returning home, only to discover that his attempts to recover a Chinese style of thought and writing were resisted by his fellow Christians.

Notto Thelle observed that while most of us, whether Asian or Western, are "guilt-ridden Christians" when it comes to our record of encounters with religious pluralism, we should not forget that a good many Asian religions show the same attitude by reducing Christianity and other competing traditions to a second-rate expression of a truth more fully present in their own faith. He asked, however, whether a commitment to the ultimacy of one's own way is not really a better basis for dialogue than a standpoint of tolerant relativism that refuses to speak in superlatives of any religious way. "I do not resent when Muslims tell me that Christianity is a sort of 'middle school' whose adherents have not yet graduated to Islam," he commented. "What I resent is when I am not given an opportunity to *respond* to such claims."

Taking up the point, Peter Lee insisted that we not conflate the notion of "ultimacy" with that of "conquest." The former allows for dialogue, confrontation, and productive argument; the latter inhibits them. Here Thelle intervened with the short comment that all the "militaristic" language that has surrounded the Christian mission effort should be eliminated precisely because of the way it helps to bolster that conflation of ideas.

Thomas Immoos pointed to the case of the "East-West Spiritual Exchange" that the Nanzan Institute had been instrumental in arranging, in which Japanese Buddhist monks and nuns from a variety of sects were invited to spend time in traditional European monasteries. The fact that some of the participants reported afterwards that it had been the first time they had come into serious contact with Buddhists of other traditions, he commented, would seem to offer clear proof that the problem we have here is not merely a problem of East and West.

Jan Swyngedouw asked from the chair that we perhaps give more careful attention to the word "dialogue" before proceeding. Jim Heisig responded with the remark that religious pluralism is not only a fact—which requires only different religions functioning within the same cultural domain—but an *institutionalized* fact in virtue of the cultural structures that religions have devised to sustain and develop themselves within that pluralistic situation. At the same time, dialogue is also a fact, so long as there are people, and there must always have been at least a minority at the fringes of the major world religions, who attempt to deal constructively with those outside of their own faith. The question is: How can we institutionalize dialogue? At present, interreligious dialogue is more widely spread than ever before in the history of humanity, but that is because it has become dependent on modern communication media and transport, in the same way that the sale and distribution of commodities is dependent on them. In order to institutionalize dialogue, that dependency has to be broken, or rather transferred into the heart of a religious tradition itself. What Heisig wanted to know, then, is whether there is any model anywhere, East or West, religious or otherwise, that we might adopt

to give interreligious dialogue cultural, institutional roots, and to protect it from becoming a leisure enterprise that will pass with time.

While objecting to the term "institutionalized dialogue," Albert Poulet-Mathis supported the basic idea of strengthening the base for dialogue. He insisted, however, that we not let our idealism blind us to the other fact that had been mentioned: that ordinary Christians, as indeed ordinary believers in any tradition of Asia, have no exposure to interreligious encounter. That the broadening of the base of such exposure needs conceptual foundations to survive he did not question. His point was only that it must not become a branch of expertise in the process.

Raymond Renson objected to the term on the grounds that it might suggest a "dialogue between institutions" which he reckoned practically impossible. Dialogue is necessarily an event that takes place between persons or it does not take place at all. Dialogue, after all, presumes a readiness to change, and that is precisely what an institution by its nature cannot be ready to do.

Heisig intervened briefly to clarify that what he meant by "institution" was simply a structured transmission of habits of belief and action. In an age like our own, in which the awareness of religious pluralism in the technologically advanced nations has gone hand in hand with a weakening of the amount and depth of religious tradition being transmitted, the structural bases of that transmission needs careful rethinking. And that rethinking, he reiterated, has to include an interreligious dimension if it is not to turn its back on pluralism or be left to a small minority in academia or on its shirttails, which seems to be the only cultural moorings interreligious dialogue has at present.

Bartholomew Tsui offered the sobering observation that a commitment to dialogue says something about a particular religion's self-definition, which may not in fact be shared by others and may not always be taught without endangering alternative self-definitions. Moreover, he went on, to instruct the young in interreligious dialogue the way they have traditionally been instructed in a particular religion's beliefs and customs would lead to a confusion of identity, or perhaps set the stage for the creation of new religions.

Thomas Immoos took a somewhat different tack here, noting from his own experience of contact with Shinto scholars that contact with Christianity has led some of them to begin thinking of their tradition as a "religion," and to search about the world of religious speculation for models of interreligious contact appropriate to Shinto. For Immoos the development is a positive one, and the catalyst has come from Christian theology.

Heisig, too, acknowledged the weight of Tsui's concerns, but repeated his point that incorporating interreligious dialogue into a tradition involves a revolution in the way a tradition is passed on, and does not mean teaching an absolute relativism or teaching nothing at all. Such a new way would give structural support to the experiential dimension of religion, encourage academics to carry on dialogue at their own level, relate religious realities to social life, and expose children to the religious pluralism of their own culture as a positive and profound influence on human society.

At this point Jan Swyngedouw questioned the apparent assumption that there is in fact no dialogue at all going on among ordinary people in everyday life. His own view was that a basis for dialogue does in fact already exist, and that the real issue was how to connect it to what we are calling the "interreligious" dimension of dialogue.

Poulet-Mathis agreed and stated his view that the broadening of the "dialogue of life" already occurring into a dialogue of spirituality and religious experience would give it a motivational base and help uphold it in time of conflict or upheaval. At all events we cannot remain content with a mere dialogue of life. It needs deepening.

Edward Khong wondered whether the use of the word "dialogue" can be extended to the sense of a "dialogue of life" without doing violence to the facts. The mutual toleration and respect that exists among people of different religions in Asia in their ordinary comings and goings seems to survive precisely because questions of religion are left to one side. In Tsui's opinion, to see it as a preparatory stage for interreligious dialogue may be going too far.

AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE ON INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER .I

Two alternative Asian perspectives on interreligious encounter were delivered at the conference by Michael Sastrapratedja and Dolores Sikat. In his presentation, Sastrapratedja stressed the cultural diversity of Asia and the need for caution in assigning the adjective "Asian" to any particular mode of thought or behavior. At the same time, he attempted to give a broad outline of two key features of Asian societies relevant to interreligious encounter: (1) the emergence of religious consciousness; and (2) the struggle of the people to overcome misery, oppression, and poverty.

Regarding the former, Sastrapratedja observed that the nature of the upsurge in religious consciousness differs widely—covering everything from the contemplative and mystical to the fundamentalistic and the political—and does not readily suggest a single explanation. For example, some see it as a sign of protest against rationalistic, technological, bureaucratic society, others as a protest against legalistic or moralizing religion. He himself took a more basic and positive approach to the phenomenon, arguing that it points to the irrepressible urge within the human being to *understand* its situation in the world and search for the truth, and demonstrates how religion is necessarily a historical task and not an absolute doctrine. "An Asian perspective on interreligious encounter," he concluded, "excludes any fundamentalism."

Concerning the struggle against poverty and oppression, Sastrapratedja insisted strongly that one cannot look at religion in Asia without remembering the inhuman conditions and unjust social systems to which the majority of Asian peoples are subject at present, since these same people are the living religious pluralism of Asia. The fact is, however, that religion in Asia tends unconsciously to legitimize the status quo and bolster the injustice. The ide-

ology of "haves" that equates poverty with lack of dignity and reduces the responsibility of the "haves" to a sharing of their dignity with the "have nots" is completely mistaken, and insofar as religion steps in to mystify the value of poverty it too ignores the true source of the dignity of the poor and oppressed. For theological reflection to close its eyes to social structures is to endanger its entire enterprise and to cripple the power of religious consciousness. An Asian perspective on interreligious encounter, therefore, must stress a prophetic and liberating commitment to the side of the weak and the poor.

In his response, Albert Poulet-Mathis expressed full agreement with the conclusions of the paper, but thought more attention should be given to the way in which they were argued. He wondered whether an analysis of the religious situation in Asia in fact enables us to speak of an "emergence of religious consciousness" as one of its main traits. Might it not be, as some are saying, that Asian people are *losing* the religious awareness that had for centuries been part of their lives? Although a Westerner, his twenty-five years of experience in Asia would confirm that view, Poulet-Mathis asserted, and this in turn raises a question about the evidence for the serious quest for self-understanding on the part of the Asian individual today and the openness to other approaches to truth. For this same reason, Poulet-Mathis felt that to exclude fundamentalism from the picture would not only be to exclude certain Western religions but a considerable deal of Asian religiosity as well. Finally, he offered the brief remark that the struggle against poverty and misery is not a major issue for those living in countries like Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, and therefore would not serve them immediately as a basis for interreligious encounter.

Sastrapratedja took up the objections by noting that any attempt to construct a perspective on the phenomenon of religion in Asia requires that we first clarify the general context of religion, culture, and socio-political conditions, as he attempted to do. The amount of construction of temples and mosques going on, as well as other signs of religious fervor, seem to him, from his vantage point in Indonesia, to point to a resurgence of religious consciousness, he noted, even though it is difficult to assess such things objectively. As to the openness to the truth, he pointed to his own educational training in which he was taught not to begin an encounter by arguing one's own point of view but by listening to the other. A great deal of the religious pluralism of Asia, he went on, is itself not simply the result of a clash between religions but of a confluence and assimilation among traditions. That fundamentalism exists in Asian religion is beyond doubt, but Sastrapratedja saw this less as a characteristic of the Asian mind than as a reaction against social and political structures. In these cases religion serves to consolidate the identity of a people, particularly in their effort to position themselves relative to the West. Lastly, he admitted that poverty and oppression are not universal in Asia, but insisted that to leave it out of the picture for that reason would be to miss something of great importance to the reality of religion in Asia.

From the chair, Jim Heisig opened the floor to discussion by applauding the

breadth and boldness of the paper, and asking that the assembly direct further attention to the critical issues left open by the exchange between author and respondent.

Jan Swyngedouw alluded to an international symposium held at the Shinto university in Tokyo in January of 1983, in which he and Professor Ryu had taken part. Aside from Robert Bellah and Peter Berger, all the other participants were from Asia. One of the main themes taken up on the occasion was secularization in Asia, concerning which the group concluded that it is extremely difficult to speak of "Asia" as a unity with respect to problems of socio-cultural change and religion. He asked whether, in the midst of all the interest in national identity in Asian lands, it is feasible to speak at this time also of an "Asian identity."

Jan Van Bragt directed a question to Sastrapratedja regarding his view of the emergence of religious consciousness, asking whether he felt that this included a reaching out by religionists in Indonesia to their co-religionists in other Asian lands. The response was in a cautious affirmative, citing the case of recent contacts between Buddhists in Indonesia and Thailand. Here Thomas Immoos made reference to his experience at the First World Hindu Conference held in Sri Lanka in April of 1982 (reported on in *INTER-RELIGIO* No.2, pp.30-32), which raises serious doubts about the state of the cooperation between co-religionists of differing national and political affiliations.

Paul Sye turned the discussion to fundamentalism, noting that the problem with this approach to religion is one of methodology in that it is concerned primarily with *texts* independently of their current *context*, thus isolating religious identity from cultural identity and rendering it sterile. The solution, however, is not to choose one or the other, but to realize their codependency, to allow sacred texts both to interact with our present concerns and to set them against a broader horizon.

Sr. Theodore Hahnenfeld noted that in the case of the Theravada tradition in Thailand, the scriptures are held to strictly and all adaptation to the present is considered out of place. Those who show openness to other religions, such as Buddhadasa Bhikku, are a rarity. Paul Clasper recalled from his time in Burma that the Buddhist monks there took their scriptures extremely literally, eschewing symbolic or poetic interpretations of texts. But beneath this fundamentalism there seems to be a layer of relativism that opens them up to other religious ways. He wondered whether this might not be a more widespread phenomenon, indeed whether all of us do not contain a layer of fundamentalism somewhere in our spirituality. In any case, he went on, the "fundamentalism" we find in Asian religions does seem to be different from what we find in Western Christianity. Sr. Theodore concurred with the point, remarking that the same Buddhists who hold strictly to their own scriptures allow for a wide interpenetration of folk rituals and superstitions that have nothing to do with their own doctrines but give them a sort of cultural depth, whereas Christianity in Thailand is more likely to introduce the element of the cross-cultural and the international while, at least officially, avoiding this

sort of interpenetration. Magdalena Villaba suggested that the "levels" of which Clasper had been speaking, whether or not in fact they are present in each individual, would seem to be an essential ingredient for any religion that has both an intellectual, reflective dimension and a popular, non-reflective but "lived" dimension.

To the question posed by the chair whether something similar has in fact taken place also in Asian Christianity, Edward Khong pointed out that one of the reasons it has not is that Christian education in the faith in Asia places a greater emphasis on catechetical instruction than, for example, Buddhism is wont to do. This, too, would argue against the simple transference of the Western notion of fundamentalism to traditional Asian religions, though it might be more fitting for some of the newer religions which follow the Christian pattern of instruction. As Van Bragt was quick to mention, the same would hold true in Japan where those belonging to the newer religions are more likely to be articulate in their faith than those belonging to the older Buddhist sects.

At this point Villaba added the comment that perhaps we should distinguish between a fundamentalism that grows out of a religion placing a high priority on rationalism and one that shows up in a religion that does not make so much use of intellectual structures to preserve its heritage.

Returning to the question of the awakening of religious consciousness in Asia, Peter Lee referred to the situation in mainland China, where Christianity has seemed to offer an outlet for dissatisfaction with the ruling ideology in a way that Confucianism and Taoism have not been able to do. The situation with Buddhism needs closer examination, but given its long history one might well expect something of a renewal there as well.

Moctar Matuan asked that we distinguish between religious consciousness as an awareness of one's own religion and an awareness of the religion of others. The awakening that has occurred among the Filipino Muslims is partly a result of the fear of losing the younger generation to Western ways on the part of Muslims trained in the Middle East and returning home. Far from a renewed sensitivity to the religion of others, what we are seeing is a new closure of that broader sense of religious consciousness, since the model for true religion is imported from the Middle East.

Heisig suggested here that the point be broadened to distinguish also between increases of religious consciousness measured in terms of practice, in terms of depth of reflection on tradition, and in terms of attention to spiritual experience, all of which may include or exclude the others.

Poulet-Mathis recommended that the category of the "search for truth" presented in Sastrapratedja's paper be included as another measure of increase in religious consciousness, even where it is not directly related to a specific religious system. To this Michael Diamond advised that we take care here not to confuse the quest for *certainty*, which is at the root of fundamentalism in both Islam and Christianity, with the search for truth. While the latter may be a genuine measure of the rise of religious consciousness, the former is not.

An Asian Perspective on Interreligious Encounter - II

A second Asian perspective on interreligious encounter was offered by Dolores Sikat, currently at the Ricci Institute, who began by offering apologies for the absence of Fr. Raguin who was at the time busy attending to the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Mateo Ricci's arrival in China. Her paper was composed in the form of a collage of personal reflections, as an Asian raised in the Christian milieu of the Philippines, on the shock of encountering the richness of other religious ways in Asia and the Middle East. Impossible as it is to summarize such a report without transcribing it in full, the nature of the discussion which it provoked should demonstrate how fertile a seedbed of suggestiveness it laid before the assembly.

Raymond Renson began his response by expressing full agreement with the statements that the formation of a dialogical attitude among Christians begins with the development of our own humanness and our own Christianity; that the success of dialogue should be gauged primarily not by the depth of the scholarship it produces but by the impact it has on the ordinary believer; that one of the critical elements here is the introduction of training in dialogue into our seminaries, both Catholic and Protestant; and that dialogue cannot survive if it does not bring an increased interiority to those most actively engaged in it. He then went on to single out a few of the questions the paper raised in his own mind. He wondered about its tendency to look upon Asia as a "self-sufficient and self-contained" unit of religious and philosophical traditions, particularly since it is through the affinities that Western Christianity recognizes with these traditions that a way to dialogue and mutual enrichment has opened up, a way of benefit to both sides. Further, he asked that we look a little more closely at the view, however widespread it be among Asians of all religions, that Christianity has brought disunity, chaos, and war to Asia. It is not merely, he noted, a matter of mustering historical evidence to re-examine our Christian past and give that popular opinion a fair hearing, but also of looking at the record of other religions in Asia with the same critical eye.

Magdalena Villaba opened the discussion by reinforcing Renson's insistence that a more objective treatment of Church history in Asia, as well as greater exposure to other religions, should become part and parcel of seminary training.

Notto Thelle asked for a clarification of the situation in the Philippines, whether it was not more important that they study Islam rather than, for instance, Buddhism, which has no real foothold in its history and culture. Sikat responded that one of the most important agenda in Philippine Christianity is its mission dimension within Asia, and that if it is not to end up in a mere exportation of Filipino Christianity, future missionaries must be given a deeper understanding of the religions of their Asian neighbors. Jan Swyngedouw was quick to note how the same may be said of Japan and other Asian countries as well, and Thomas Immoos reflected that what interest there is in Japan for foreign religious ways is most often not an interest sparked by the conscious-

ness of being Asian, nor does it produce, as one might expect, a greater spirit of openness and cooperation with other religions within Japan.

Paul Sye asked that the point not be lost that the "young Churches" in Christian Asia do in fact still wear the shackles of foreign masters, so that the search for "self-understanding" often ends up being a further attempt to acquiesce to the views of an older, foreign tradition. The controls in Catholicism are made visible by the presence of a central headquarters in the Vatican, but they are present in Protestantism as well.

Francis Clark voiced his surprise that the word "inculturation" had not once been used in the discussions. When is Christianity going to be allowed, he pleaded, to take root in the popular religiosity of Asian lands? Fear of "syncretism" may be real, but that fear must not become the basis for our choices, lest it rule us as strongly as if we gave in to it. What has happened to our fear of not taking root among the people? So long as we cling to accidentals as if they were essential, Christianity will continue to give a foreign impression in Asia and not to touch the hearts of the people.

Notto Thelle added his impression that it is the foreign missionaries, not the local Churches and their leadership, that are most interested in inculturation—indeed, in dialogue, as the composition of the present assembly testified—and most vocal in their views. He cited the case of the Protestant missions in Japan, where it was more the strong Confucianist training of the early Japanese Christians, and their bias against Buddhism, that dictated how they would adapt Christianity. The missionaries had to break through the bias of the national Christians before the local Church could be taught to recognize Buddhism as a vital force in the culture. How to apportion responsibility, therefore, is not always a simple matter. But the question still remains how we are to break through the deadlock that evolved.

Paul Sye reiterated the point that one of the principal reasons dialogue with other religions fails to make any headway among the Christians of Asia is that they have been taught an exclusivity by foreign missionaries. The fact that they pass this attitude on to those after them, in many and novel ways, may indigenize the agents of the foreign influence—though Sye was less willing to see these as the key figures—but does not alter the fact of its foreignness.

Jim Heisig asked whether breaking this deadlock might not have to begin with a reappraisal of where leading Asian Christian thinkers get their education. At present the best protection the Churches can give their bright and upcoming scholars is a Western diploma, for without that certification their advance in Asian Christendom is foredoomed. Whatever good may come from exposing an Asian scholar to religious education in other Asian lands, those in positions of leadership in the Churches know that no amount of such experience can grant the character of "Christian" that two years of graduate work in Europe can. Now understandably, teachers begin their careers by teaching what they know best and writing about what is most familiar to them, so that it is only natural that Barth and Bultmann, Rahner and Schillebeeckx have an

easy time edging out local competitors for a space in the theological curricula of our Asian seminaries. The process becomes complete when this procedure is defended as a display of the "universality" or "internationalism" of Christianity wholly appropriate to our growing global interdependence. In fact, it is only as international and universal as colonial expansion can be. Any international structure that restricts possession of a national identity to a minority of the participants is nothing less than the crassest form of nationalism.

Jan Van Bragt asked whether from his wide experience of seminary education in Asia Albert Poulet-Mathis might say something about how much effort is being given to evaluating Catholic seminaries in terms of preparation for interreligious encounter. Poulet-Mathis lamented in reply that efforts in this direction have not been very enthusiastic until now. The major obstacle, he noted, was that curricula are still so largely filled up with courses demanded by Rome that little time or importance can be given to other areas. Understandably, the rectors and deans of the seminaries are reluctant to strike out on their own. The policy of the OBIA has been to try to build up a consensus among seminary leaders and voice this consensus again and again before authorities in Rome in the hope of a breakthrough. Three or four years ago the office and its collaborating bishops were optimistic about its chances for success, Poulet-Mathis recalled, but now that they have met the opposition they are much less so. So long as preparation for priesthood has to be the same all over the world, Europe will continue to supply the models for Asian leadership.

Jan Swyngedouw ventured the idea here that it may not be so much actual Western missionaries in Asia but something in the structure of the Churches themselves, or at least in Catholicism, that obstructs process here. The discussion at this point unleashed a variety of examples from other areas of Church life where the chafe of the foreign leash is felt concretely by those in the Asia Church eager to strike out in new directions.

Thomas Immoos then raised the interesting question of what sort of theological education was being given to Christians in China, where there is no visible outside control. Peter Lee, who has been following the problem for a number of years, replied with a brief account of the state of Protestant Christianity in China before and after the "Three-Self Patriarchate" movement in the early 1950s. Call it the left hand of God if you will, Lee reflected, but the outcome was an abrupt halt to foreign controls, finances, and ideologies. On the one hand, there was a fair degree of political pressure that the Protestant Churches had to come to terms with, and this meant being deprived of accustomed supports; on the other, the move effected a certain degree of liberation at the same time. Pockets of resistance there were, but they did not amount to much. In the 1960s and 1970s the Churches did undergo considerable hardship, but in 1978 they began to surface more visibly, and contrary to the expectations of everyone, not only did not die but experienced a resurgence in the last few years. The Chinese Churches can now rightly say, he concluded, "We are rooted in Chinese soil." In this context, the themes of resurrection

(after having passed through the valley of death) and creation (understood much more optimistically than the usual Protestant preoccupation with the depravity of the human condition allows) are central to the self-understanding of these Churches. By our standards, seminary education there may lack appreciation for current theological trends, but Lee expressed the view that if the Churches in China be allowed a few more years to continue as they are, they will come up with something still more substantial in this line.

Heisig noted here that in the absence of such conditions, the development of an openness to native sources of theology or to other native religions depends upon a demand arising from within the Churches—whether from seminarians or their teachers, from parishioners or their pastors, or from the hierarchy—for change. He asked whether there are any signs of this demand surfacing other than from among those who have made a career of promoting such a demand.

Poulet-Mathis reported that a decision had been taken among Catholic bishops of the FABC gathered in Malaysia some two months previously that the priority assigned to promoting dialogue in the seminaries these past few years be shifted to a priority to offer seminars on the theology of dialogue for the bishops themselves. He admitted, when questioned, that a number of the bishops felt that too much emphasis had already been put on promoting interreligious dialogue, but added that the leaders of the FABC itself did not share that view.

To Raymond Renson's question about the part that the EAPI can play in this process, Francis Clark stated that to date any impact made on the few bishops who actually choose to participate in the courses offered at the institute, was individual in nature and did little to build up solidarity among the bishops themselves.

Hideo Yuki reported on the state of Protestant seminary teaching in Japan by giving a brief report on the history of attempts at the indigenization of theology during the war years, which ended up in an extreme form of nationalism. As a result, Protestants later became hesitant of such directions, to the point that the study of other religions has at best only a token presence in theological schools at present. At his own university, Doshisha, new but still cautious attempts are being made to recover from this over-reaction. But in general when Japanese Christian scholars today talk about indigenization, it hardly exceeds the level of the intellectual dream of scholars to become ordinary people. No *real* effort is being made.

Thelle next turned the discussion to the comment made in Sikat's paper that authentic Asian Christianity requires having "clear and concrete goals and objectives." For him, this smacked of Western organizational models that, at least from his experience in Japan, was not appropriate to the Asian mind. Sikat clarified that she had intended the remark only as a criticism against the tendency to exhaust our energies in clarifying theories and logical connections without bringing them to bear on lived reality. The apparent underdevelopment of metaphysics in Chinese thought, she remarked, needs rather to be seen

as a deliberate impatience with the abstract. The same may carry over into the Asian concept of dialogue.

Edward Khong commented that for him an invitation to dialogue always means something extremely concrete, something like "Let's play cards." Before beginning, one has to assess how much one has and how much one is willing to lose. As Christians we are very conscious of what we already possess as truth, and often sit down at table with the attitude of enjoining the others, "Don't touch my pot." Were dialogue merely a form of broadening one's circle of friends or one's knowledge, it would be simple enough. Were it merely a question of selling wares at our own prices and on our own terms, there would be no problem. But if it is to be the case that we are transformed by the encounter, we need first to become conscious of the concrete goals of dialogue and enter it with our eyes open.

To conclude the discussion, Thomas Immoos indicated the importance of the psychological dimension of this dialogical transformation by showing how "dialogue with the other" only really comes about when it is at the same time a "dialogue with oneself."

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN CHINA

The first of three "case studies" on religious pluralism in Asia was to have been presented by Whalen Lai of the University of California at Davis, but unexpected last minute complications with his travel documents prevented him from attending the conference. In his stead, Peter Lee offered a summary of Lai's interesting and informative paper to open the discussion.

Noting the two conflicting tendencies in the three Chinese religions (or "Teachings") of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism to syncretism on the one hand, and to conflict and persecution on the other, both of which crystallized most clearly in the Ming period, Lai attempted to resolve the contradiction by placing it in socio-historical context. In doing so, he argued we find the same dynamic principle at work in both syncretism and persecution: the subservience of religious tradition to civil order through an ideology of "consensual orthodoxy" promoted by those in authority. What we find in Ming, however, cannot be called religious pluralism in the strict sense of the term, and due to Ming influence true pluralism appears to be absent throughout the nineteenth century and perhaps the twentieth as well. For Lai, whatever the benefits of consensual orthodoxy for civil order, its danger is that it promotes uncritical identification of the moral good with the particular mores of a society, as we see from the adverse attitude it produced towards the Christian missionaries. The question now, he concluded, is whether a half century of peaceful coexistence within Ming culture and a political upheaval that has brought both religion and culture into question offer a backdrop against which the Three Teachings can revitalize themselves as China faces the future.

Bartholomew Tsui opened his response with three areas he felt deserving

of further discussion. First, he noted the chronological correspondence reported by Lai between each of the Three Teachings and one of the stages of human life, and wondered to whom we might ascribe belief in the scheme as a whole: to Buddhist monks? Taoist monks? Neo-Confucians? Second, he questioned the apparent conclusion that the failure of Christianity in China was due to the self-sufficiency of the Three Teachings syncretized into a unity, since such a judgement overlooks the more complex dynamics of the conversion process. And finally, he thought it would be worth while to apply the notion of "consensual orthodoxy" to the current regime in China to see if any pluralism, in the strict sense, can be said to exist there. Tsui ended his response by drawing a number of distinctions he felt missing but on which, unfortunately, it was not possible to have the author's own views: between relations of each of the religions to the ruling authorities and relations among themselves; between the scholar's view of religion at the time and that of the people; between synthesis, eclecticism, and syncretism; and between the religious division of human needs into natural, social, and transcendent, and other possible interpretations of human need that would not share religious presuppositions.

Thomas Immoos, who expressed his appreciation for the originality of the paper, nevertheless felt that more attention might have been given to the role of economic factors in accounting for such things as the persecution of Buddhism in China, an idea that has long been in circulation among scholars of the Ming period.

To Notto Thelle's questions about how much of the spirit of the Ming era spoken of in Lai's paper was lost during the Marxist era in China, Tsui and others provided further background information. From there the discussion turned to the role of Christianity in China, on which point the assembly was drawn into the long and devoted China-watching tradition of Tao Fong Shan for a brief but fascinating overview.

Jan Van Bragt took up the first of Tsui's questions to note that the question of *who* the agents of religious synthesis or religious persecution are is one that applies to the partners in interreligious dialogue as well: are they the scholars, organizational representatives, common believers, individual subjects of religious experience, or perhaps some combination of these? Dolores Sikat pointed out here that as long as we tell the history only of the upper classes who had access to the courts of political power, as in the case of the Ming era, we are touching no more than a fraction of 1% of the population. Folk religiosity, she suggested, has a history all its own which consists in far more than mere consumption of crumbs falling to them from the tables of the literati. This is not to say that it is not syncretistic—quite to the contrary, it tends to be much more so—but only that the preoccupation with questions of religious "pluralism" or self-reflective synthesis would not be of any interest to the "uneducated" masses, and even ventured the view that the same might well be said of the ordinary educated Taiwanese to this day for whom religion remains a category apart.

The difference between the so-called great tradition and the minor traditions into which it filters down is always present, Tsui was quick to observe, but the dynamics are so confused and the data so scanty that one would hesitate to say too much on the subject. Paul Clasper recalled the experience of initiating a course, with Tsui, on the study of folk religion in the Religion Department of Chinese University. It raised not a few eyebrows among their colleagues ("Why would anyone want to go to university to study superstition?"), opened the eyes of not a few students to places and events they had been unaware of in their own neighborhoods, and made the two professors themselves more sensitive to the importance of these "little traditions," even among a highly educated people.

Edward Khong introduced a less optimistic point of view here with the remark that the Chinese people are fundamentally more interested in achieving certainty than in the quest for truth, which facilitates the fusing of disparate teachings into a unity and promotes mutual tolerance among a variety of traditions.

Jan Swyngedouw was anxious to know what the consequences for interreligious dialogue are if one agrees to bring folk religiosity into the picture. We know something about organizing dialogue among scholars or official representatives, Swyngedouw said, but what would it mean to "dialogue" with Buddhism at the level of folk belief?

Khong was the first to reply to the question, from the Hong Kong context, noting that much of the interreligious display that is graced with the name of dialogue in fact amounts to little more than certain religious leaders making friends with other religious leaders. As far as this may be removed from the grass-roots reality of belief, it is still further removed from the genuine spirit of dialogue.

Clasper next complained of the resistance within Christianity against a dialogue between theology and folk belief, while Poulet-Mathis emphasized that what we mean by dialogue is an encounter between persons self-consciously committed to the search for truth, whatever particular tradition they belong to. When that dialogue reaches the level of doctrinal discussion, we discover a limit to the dialogue with folk belief because there is no single tradition to be discussed here but only a scattered body of loosely constellated habits of belief and practice. This is not to say we should not be interested in popular religiosity, only that it is not a proper partner for dialogue.

Heisig felt that the challenge of folk religions entails more than merely how to draw them into the dialogue already going on. After all, the notion of dialogue as the enterprise we are engaged in represents the attempt of certain religionists (notably, the Christians) to encourage other religionists to look at their tradition in a new way for mutual benefit. The fact that we meet a form of religious life that does not fit into the pattern should first make us have another look at the pattern. It may be that there are tacit assumptions in interreligious dialogue that generate those sentiments of self-dissatisfaction at being too academic, too removed from life, too narrow, and so forth that

keep coming up at meetings like this.

Lee mentioned the difficulty of conducting formal dialogue among those who lack a religious self-identity, at the same time as he admitted that there are different levels of dialogue, each with its own proper procedures. In his own experience, it is really a quite restricted number of people who are able to communicate with one another in dialogical fashion, even though they may find the concept appealing for one reason or another. He also stressed the fact that in our admiration for the often remarkable syntheses achieved in the course of Chinese religious history due to the flexible temperament of the Chinese people, we should be wary of simply accepting the syncretic process in religion uncritically, be it at the level of folk religion or among the scholars, since there are no doubt undesirable aspects to it as well. The question for us is then: Can Christianity synthesize the positive elements in Chinese religiosity in a creative fashion so as both to remain fully Christian and yet become fully Chinese?

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN JAPAN

Notto Thelle's condensed but tidily organized paper treating Japanese models of religious pluralism attempted to outline the form of separate co-existence that the three traditions of Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism have come to achieve with one another on an organizational level, as well as the organic intermingling of all three that is part of the ethos that most if not all Japanese inherit unconsciously from their society. While the former may classify as a "pluralism" in the sense of a cultural system recognizing the right of more than one ultimate worldview to exist within its confines (and which is mirrored in various ways within the traditions themselves), it is difficult to speak of a pluralism in the case of the latter. Christianity, with its demand for absolute and exclusive allegiance, has a long history in Japan of resistance against both models, obviously an easier task at the organizational level than at the popular one. What prohibits the great religious diversity of Japan from advancing to self-conscious and creative encounter with one another and the individuals within society is not to be sought in any of these models, however, but in other values and traditions "of more ultimate character than religion." The primary concern under which a plurality of religions are allowed to coexist, Thelle suggested, consists of an unsophisticated acceptance of social harmony, which both weakens the commitment to ultimate values within particular religious traditions and strengthens the ultimacy of nationalistic sentiments.

Jan Swyngedouw began his response by noting how difficult it is to comment on an analysis one agrees with so fully. He then attempted to add still more weight to the notion of social harmony—or what the Japanese call *wa*, and by which they mean harmony within Japan—by arguing that it is itself religious in nature. His own view is that all religions in Japan can in an

important sense be called "sects" of this one religion of "being Japanese." Prior to the war, it was the state that had given recognition to the various religions within the general social order, but after the separation of religion and state imposed on Japan by the occupying forces, the religions themselves stepped in to fill the void. Within this context, the interreligious dialogue so flourishing in Japan has largely to be seen as a further attempt to preserve and contribute to this wa, which is why it so often gets trapped at levels of social formality and why it is welcomed by those in power. At the same time, Swyngedouw, concluded, the state of dialogue would seem to indicate an awareness on the part of those participating of the overall lack of influence by religion on Japanese society.

After considerable discussion related to details of the religious situation in Japan, the question was raised by Thomas Immoos whether the phenomenon in Japan might not be a more widespread phenomenon among developed nations of the world, where traditional ties to a particular religion have slackened to the point that all that remains is a sort of weak and woolly "UNESCO religion," hardly a self-conscious pluralism conducive to interreligious dialogue. Granting the point, Jim Heisig still wondered whether we should look at forms of pluralism open to criticism from a point of view that values conscious, reflective religion and tends to give rise to deliberate aggression or deliberate cooperation as altogether negative. In reply, Thelle and Swyngedouw in turn spoke eloquently of the truly positive aspects of wa as a "religion of the blood" Japan.

Yuki Hideo reconfirmed much of what had been said, noting how foreigners living in Japan for many years often perceive crucial dynamics to which the Japanese themselves are blind. The usual practice of thinking of religion in Western terms—as affiliation with one organization and commitment to a transcultural ultimate—does not apply to Buddhism, Shinto, or Christianity in Japan, despite attempts to adopt the Western model. As pointed out, there is really no pluralism in Japan, but only different facets of the one religion of being Japanese. In a sense, therefore, our efforts should go to "destroying" the Japanese concept of religion as social harmony.

Swyngedouw noted a certain anomaly in the fact that Christian attempts at dialogue in one sense contribute to the problem precisely insofar as they do not also embrace that radical task Yuki had spoken of, but tend to slip away from local problems to the safer areas of "World Peace" and the like.

Yuki went further to point to the limitations of what he called "Rotary Club" dialogue, calling for a new form of dialogue, signs of which are already beginning to appear. Those religionists engaged in human rights issues, for example, have begun to recognize Japanese harmony as one of the strongest enemies of human rights. It is an issue that forces dialogue away from the conference tables and out into the world. The call for change does not mean that we fail to appreciate the important role that formal, parlor dialogue can play, only that we do not remain content with achieving that level of encounter.

Paul Sye observed certain affinities between the situations in Japan and Korea, and also the importance of any interest in the question of human rights. As a people that had suffered at the hands of Japan, forced to change their names and language and to pronounce allegiance to the Emperor of Japan, the Koreans welcome all attempts by the Japanese to re-examine the ideology behind such practices.

Michael Sastrapratedja remarked on elements in Indonesian society comparable to the Japanese *wa* where the role of religion is concerned. The "secular religion" of which Robert Bellah speaks, relative to American society, as an underlying ideology unifying a situation of religious pluralism is applicable also to Indonesia and posits many of the same problems as those mentioned in the discussion for Japan.

Thelle returned to the question raised in the previous discussion of who the proper partners for dialogue are. Yuki's suggestion of broadening the dialogue out into issues such as human rights in fact amounts to an engagement with different partners and can have a positive effect on religious dialogue overall. In the same line, Immoos cited the opinion of Professor Doi, director of the center to which Yuki belongs, that in choosing partners for dialogue we should be conscious of the danger that interreligious dialogue be expropriated by those with the strongest financial base and used to their own purposes. Sr. Hahnenfeld, chairperson for the session, tried to get the assembly to speak more directly to this issue, but there was a general hesitancy to do so, the feeling being that more research and preparation is called for in this rather delicate issue.

Peter Lee asked that we not let the importance of Yuki's observations on the need for a new form of dialogue slip by too quickly or fade off into the more familiar concern with who might be the proper partners for dialogue. It touches the very core of the malaise that much of the interreligious dialogue in Hong Kong suffers from, and he was anxious that Yuki return to say more in future sessions regarding the shift from intra-religious preoccupations to concern with subjects of a wider social nature neither directly generated by nor under the control of organized religion.

Dolores Sikat drew attention to the problem of women's rights in many of the countries of Asia as a specific area of human rights that could become a focus for interreligious dialogue.

Stating the question in more general terms and returning to a comment along the same lines made by Thelle, Heisig noted that in addition to the traditional category of "orthodoxy" with its concomitant notion of heresy as a departure from doctrine, we now feel the need to incorporate the category of what is called "orthopraxis" whose accompanying heresies of failure to act in accord with belief may well be applied to the enterprise of interreligious dialogue insofar as it fails to make the shift of which Yuki was speaking. At present, we lack adequate criteria within religion to apply the category in the concrete comparable to those that we have forged for orthodoxy.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND ISLAM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Michael Diamond began the summary of his paper on Islam in the Philippines by noting a major difference between the tradition of dialogue in Marawi, of which he is a part, and that in most of the other countries represented at the conference: "While you are engaged in dialogue because you choose to do so in accord with an ideal you ascribe to, our dialogue originated in the conflict and killing. I envy you. It is something we often forget." Since first going to the Muslim area of the Philippines in 1969, Diamond said, there has been continual fighting. Official government figures list 100,000 dead, but the real totals are much higher. Under such conditions, the mere fact of being present as Christians in a Muslim environment and living there without strife is the most important contribution we have to make, even if a contribution whose value goes unrecognized by the Churches and which is viewed with suspicion by most Islamic officials as a covert operation aimed at converting the region to Christianity. After detailing the history of Islam in the Philippines, which goes back some 200 years before the arrival of the Spanish in 1565 and grows into a story of continued persecution under first one government and then another up to the present, Diamond tried to highlight some of the main spiritual and cultural values in Filipino Muslim society that conflict with those of the capitalistic, Christian majority, and further to stress the important, reconciling role that attempts at dialogue have to play.

Moctar Matuan, speaking as a Filipino Muslim himself, responded to the report by giving us a closer look at the concrete methods used by the non-Muslim state to expropriate Muslim wealth and lands and to reduce them to the status of a political minority in their own region, trampling in the process on time-honored and sacred beliefs. "To the eyes and minds of our grandparents and even to some present-day educated Muslims in the Philippines, the Spaniards, Americans, and Christian Filipinos are one because of their religion and commonality of purpose to subjugate the Muslims under a Christian dominated government."

To Jan Swyngedouw's question about divisions between "modern" Muslims and those who follow an older and stricter line, Diamond and Matuan spoke of the growth of Arabic influence in the education system and among the religious leaders, but noted that the friction this aroused cannot be said to reach the level of open conflict.

Magdalena Villaba asked how the apparent awakening of the Marcos regime to the "Muslim problem" and attempts made to amend oppressive laws are actually received by the Muslims themselves. Matuan said that most Muslims would see the changes that have occurred as a minor victory at best, aimed at appeasing the masses and attracting some of the intelligentsia to its side. The real danger lies not in what the government (whose Ministry of Muslim Affairs is headed by a Christian) *is saying* but rather in what it *is not doing*, in the fact that changes in law are not actually executed, which makes the situation worse than if nothing at all had been done.

Jim Heisig wanted to know of Matuan what the motivations for Muslim dialogue were, to what extent they were political in the sense of providing a foothold among the ruling Christian majority, and to what extent they can be said to be mainly religious in nature. Matuan pointed to the fact that it is not the Muslims themselves who are initiating any dialogue, to the best of his knowledge, and that those who do participate do so in response to Christian initiatives, as at their own Centre.

Michael Sastrapratedja contrasted the situation in Indonesia with that of the Philippines. There Islam is not so deeply rooted in the culture, having arrived only in the fifteenth century after which its efforts at inculturation had to contend with Dutch colonialism; while Hinduism and Buddhism go back to the sixth century and have helped much more to shape Indonesian culture. In addition, the formation of the state does not create the problem of a national identity formed in favor or in opposition to any particular religion, except for a minority of Muslims who would prefer an Islamic state to the current secular one. Though commonly spoken of as a "Muslim country," in fact it is merely a country in which Muslims are in the majority. In fact, the government avoids the terms "majority" and "minority" when it comes to religious belief.

Matuan found it hard, as a Muslim, to accept such an explanation, since Islam understands government, society, and religion as one. To depart from that unity would be too loose an understanding of Islam for him. In reply, Sastrapratedja reported that the Minister of Religious Affairs in fact had recently made the statement, shocking though it be to Muslims, that Islam has no relation to political form, no political conception.

Sr. Theodore spoke of a comparable problem in the south of Thailand where a heavy concentration of Muslims occupying a small strip of land are seeking secession from Thailand because of infringements on their rights and Islamic customs. Government opposition is adamant but it has not sparked the level of conflict that we see in the Philippines, and a certain level of dialogue among Muslims and Christians is able to go on there through youth work and the like.

At this point the discussion turned to the way Muslims elsewhere in the Philippines relate to the majority Christian culture, and the impact this has on the Muslim cause. Contrary to expectations, it was reported that this did not, by and large, lead to any breakdown in Muslim identity nor create any pockets of Muslims content to live under conditions similar to those just described for Indonesian Muslims. The migrations are generally seen as temporary.

Sastrapratedja volunteered the idea that the root of the problem may be less cultural-religious than it is economic, which afforded Diamond the occasion to show more explicitly, by way of a vivid contrast between "lowland" and "highland" cultures in the Philippines, the connections that exist between economic wealth and social-religious consciousness.

Sikat argued, from examples she was familiar with, that it is important here that we not identify all the doings of the current regime with the Christian majority, since a fair share of injustice occurs precisely because of

political forces that intervene between Filipino Muslims and Christians, even to the point of pitting soldiers against the Muslim "rebels" for reasons that the soldiers themselves do not understand.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND KOREAN SHAMANISM

Tongshik Ryu approached the question of folk religion and its role in a religiously plural society by focusing attention on the case of Shamanism in Korea, its history, traits, and meaning. He showed, through drawing careful distinctions between the beliefs, rituals, and manner of transmission of the Shamanistic tradition how it came to be a virtually universal element in all religious phenomena in Korea, including Christianity; how it provides the basis on which religions other than one's own are approached; and how it continues to function, in his term, as a "religious guerrilla" teaching the Christian Church how to survive in the complicated, pluralistic society of Korea. Ryu left no doubt, in his solid and balanced paper, that despite the superstitions and magical elements that have accrued to Shamanism and need to be recognized as negative elements, it is nevertheless a source of revelation that the Christian Churches need to learn to listen to, interpret, and respond to. It has offered and continues to offer a means of expression for the cries of the oppressed reaching out to the heavens for justice, for the gratitude and joy of a people blessed with abundance, for the ordinary problems and frustrations common to us all as human beings.

Paul Sye responded to the paper with a note of admiration for the depth and clarity of presentation it brought to so complex and still living a tradition as Korean Shamanism. His own study of scripture, he told the assembly, had constantly suggested parallels between practices recorded in the Bible and those of Shamanism. He did, however, take exception to Ryu's statement that it was the elite classes who were the first to adopt the high religions that came to Korea from abroad, offering the case of Catholicism which originally appealed to many of the poor and oppressed precisely because it offered them an alternative to the ruling system of privilege and caste. Finally, he stated his agreement that current attitudes towards Shamanism in the Christian Churches can only be sustained by shutting one's eyes to the reality of Korea today. During times of persecution by native and foreign powers, it has been the Shamans more than any other religious group that has tended to adapt its religious practices to voice the political will of the people and criticize their oppressors.

After fielding a number of technical questions on the state of Shamanism in Asia in general, its attitudes to nature and cosmos and afterlife in its Korean form, the role of ecstasy in this and comparable folk traditions, and points of contact between the beliefs of Shamanism and Christian theology, Ryu replied to Peter Lee's concern about how dialogue with a tradition like Shamanism can become a personal encounter, and how it can be realized among those who lack

the expertise to see beneath its surface to its deeper history and meanings. Though there are said to be 20,000 Shamans in the Seoul area alone, he said, the number of Shamanists who believe in the practice as a way of life are almost impossible to find and initiate dialogue with. He sees the study of folk religion as something basically *for us*, which is where it differs from other forms of interreligious dialogue spoken about at the conference. He cited his own experience of having taught a course on the subject at the Catholic seminary in Kwong-ju as one step in that direction. Sye stepped in at this point to applaud the move and to insist once again that Catholic pastors *must* know something of Shamanism if they are to understand the mind of the people.

Jan Swyngedouw and Hideo Yuki spoke of the fact that in Japan there are commonly persons of Shamanistic traits (e.g., those belonging to the *Shugendo* tradition) participating in meetings of dialogue, in spite of the typical resistance to new religions founded by Shamans, even if they were later to become far removed from their origins. Ryu noted that there are some 200 to 250 new religious movements in Korea, some of which have also been originated directly by Shamans. Even the Unification Church, where the gnostic element is more in evidence, shows the presence of Shamanistic sentiments.

To Jan Van Bragt's query about ties between government and Shamanism, Ryu noted that up until the fourth century, the King was considered a Shaman possessed of special charismatic powers, in strong contrast to the present where since 1970 Shamanistic practices have been openly discouraged by the government, as well as by many new religions, as "superstitious," which makes it all the harder for Christianity to encourage greater attention to these traditions.

Michael Sastrapratedja noted the presence of Shamanism in present-day Indonesia, where the emphasis is on cosmic order, adding that for a long time the Christian Churches failed to see that for all their preaching of sin as an act against God the Indonesian was predisposed to see it rather as an offense against the cosmic order.

Dolores Sikat suggested that in the Philippines devotion to the saints and to the "Nino Jesus," even though of Christian origin, functions in quasi-Shamanistic fashion. Magdalena Villaba added that we have to recognize the fact that these customs survive first and foremost because, in one form or another, they are efficacious in a way that official religion and science are not.

Moctar Matuan informed us that similar elements were also present among Filipino Muslims in the past, as a result both of an assimilation by Islam of the native system of belief it encountered on first arriving in the area and of later Christian influences. As more and more leaders receive training in Egypt and the Arab world, however, a desire to purify Islam of such foreign elements has gained strength, even though there is no denying the efficacy of certain practices, as Villaba had pointed out.

Francis Clark stated his impression, from his Philippine experience, that the element of fear was dominant in Shamanistic attitudes to higher powers,

and thought that the emphasis Christianity placed on love in this regard might be liberating in its own way. Ryu, however, preferred to characterize the basic attitude in Korean Shamanism as one of neither love nor fear but of a "recognition of dignity" inspiring reverence in many forms, including love and fear.

LIVING OPTIONS FOR THEOLOGY: A CATHOLIC VIEW

After admitting that the time is not yet ripe for an elaborated theology of religions consistent with the change in attitude within Christianity towards other religious ways, Jan Van Bragt approached the subject by means of "13 Theses," condensing what he felt were the principal prescriptions and proscriptions applicable to such a venture. Basically they fall into three main areas of concern: (1) that a moral and spiritual conversion on the one hand, and a concerted reflection on concrete practice on the other, accompany our more academic efforts; (2) that, beginning from the standpoint that all religions are imperfect instruments of what transcends them, a Christian theology should not only grow organically out of its own total past (both Catholic and Protestant, though Van Bragt saw more hope for the former), but grow into closer organic unity with "theologies" and reflections on the human condition belonging to traditions other than the Christian; and (3) that the overemphasis on salvation dynamics to the neglect of creation dynamics be redressed or perhaps even reversed, so that salvation not be made to serve as the pivot for a theology of religions.

Responding to the paper, Yuki Hideo called into question the idea that a theology of religions would show more continuity with the traditional Catholic and Greek Orthodox accents than with Protestant ones. He preferred to reformulate the thesis in such a way that each has "its own possibilities" distinct from the other. The emphasis on localization, variety, and particularity that marked the time of the Reformation, he felt, was one that carried on to the present and provides a link between our current concerns and Protestant tradition. The commitment to a priesthood of the laity so strong in Luther—though often enough offended in Protestant practice—is another area that should help loosen theological frontiers for its encounter with other traditions. The dangers of the principle of "sola scriptura" to this end are often pointed to, but Yuki thought we should also attend to the positive side:

that it enabled Protestants to be far less selective in their dialogue with science, philosophy, the arts, and other religions than Catholicism had been because of its proliferation of traditional material and their papal system of controls.

The point was well taken by Van Bragt and the rest of the assembly, and the discussion that followed focused attention accordingly on others of the theses. Edward Khong asked for further clarification on the shift from salvation to creation dynamics spoken of in the paper, to which Van Bragt replied

by noting both how salvation-theologies tend to close our eyes to the way in which religion—in religious ways other than the Christian may be clearer here—seeks to place humanity within a wider nature and its corresponding responsibilities to that larger picture. Jim Heisig added a comment in support of the thesis to show that the “anthropocentrism” inherent in theologies that stress the relation between God and the individual or God and a chosen people tend to relieve us of our primary duty to the earth in a way that religions stressing the total redemption of “nature” or “sentient beings” do not. Restoring the tradition of a theology of creation to a place of greater importance would be the Christian way of reinstating a sense of that duty.

Paul Clasper agreed with the thrust of the thesis, paraphrasing it in terms of Tillich’s idea that each period of Christian history can be characterized by its notion of salvation. It may be that it is not the notion of salvation itself that is obsolete, but the particular sense we have given to it. To this Van Bragt insisted, nonetheless, that the proper tactic at this time would be to leave the notion of salvation to one side in attempts at a theology of religion precisely because what its present meaning leaves out of the picture is central to such attempts.

Jan Swyngedouw argued that the entire discussion may lead us back to the fact that the solution to the problem may not be resolvable within the confines of religion, or still more seriously, that even if religions turn outside of themselves for a solution, it may not make any difference at all except to the world of religion itself. In short, to assume a posture of openness to moral and intellectual concerns not immediately generated by or related to religion would seem to reconfirm the growing indifference to religion in the contemporary world. Van Bragt replied that we come here to a minimum presupposition for interreligious dialogue: that religious traditions constellate in a special and important way a range of human aspirations and a depth of awareness that is not so constellated elsewhere in other traditions. Not to hold to that premise, he stressed, is to doom our dialogue from the very outset. In addition, religions would appear still to be *the locus* for transcultural dialogue.

Thomas Immoos expressed his doubt about that final point, given the efforts going on in this direction outside of the world of religion, leading Van Bragt to restate the point in terms of religious traditions representing the “deepest” locus for transcultural dialogue.

Notto Thelle spoke from the chair to ask for further input on the shift of emphasis Van Bragt was calling for, stating his own conviction of the poverty of Christian creation theology in the face of the present world, and wondering how other religions might enrich us here.

Paul Sye remarked from his own experience with teaching Old Testament in Korea that the most difficult concept to teach is not that of a universal salvation *from* the world of sin and sorrow, but the call of the prophets to see the creative hand of God at work *in* time and history for those outside of Jewish tradition.

Clasper referred to his time in Burma, where the greatest majority of

Christians are Karen (the largest minority group), a people with confused identity despite a heritage of stories about their greatness. Becoming Christian galvanized them as a people and supplied them with a "national identity" in opposition to other tribal groups. Their sense of affinity with the Old Testament is uncanny, since they have no trouble applying the story of a chosen race protected by God to themselves. At the same time, this shows a real danger of retribalizing Christianity even as it becomes more concrete in time and history, and thus closing it off from a broader sense of creation spoken of here.

Francis Clark noted that such developments do indeed neglect the broader scriptural notion of creation. It has long been one of his wishes, he noted, that a feast of Creation be installed in the liturgical year precisely to celebrate the dimension of "all things groaning to give birth" and to balance our emphasis on God's providence over our particular human history. Alas, the liturgists are opposed to the idea.

Raymond Renson brought up the practical suggestion that a group like ours might take positive steps to organize ideas relative to a theology of religions growing out of its cumulative experience with interreligious dialogue for presentation to the wider theological community. Thelle observed here that efforts in this line would also be of service in helping to counteract caricatures of Christianity still rampant among representatives of other religious traditions.

LIVING OPTIONS FOR THEOLOGY: A PROTESTANT VIEW

Paul Clasper began the resume of his talk with a disclaimer to be representing the Protestant view. On the contrary, since Jan van Bragt's "Catholic" view had already made such heavy use of the likes of Langdon Gilkey, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Donald Dawe, Carl Braaten, and John Taylor, he begged forgiveness for drawing his inspiration from such as Bede Griffiths, William Johnston, Anthony de Mello, and Thomas Merton. After arguing that the plurality of worldviews common to Asian cultures may itself suggest a paradigm for people throughout the world living in a global intellectual environment, where the plurality of "plausibility structures" makes it possible to choose and practice most any faith in most any place. Recent breakthroughs showing connections between modern physics and traditional forms of Eastern mysticism enhances this possibility, but far from relieving us of the responsibility to make fundamental options of faith and worldview, only heightens it. Clasper then singled out what he saw as three mandates implicit in this situation: (1) that Christian faith be more closely related to the "perennial philosophy" and hence to the mystical traditions of Asian Wisdom; (2) that the study of Wisdom traditions extricate itself from the Babylonian Captivity of the scientific mind-set that has for too long dominated the disciplines of theology and history of religions; and (3) that a "paradigm shift" occur from the fragmented

world of the scientific mind towards a holistic vision touching every aspect of life.

Thomas Immoos centered his response on a key element in the paper close to his own concerns, the resurgence of interest in the mystical tradition, and tried to show that its study teaches us that the paradigms shift called for are not so new or so radical a break from the past as we may have been led to believe. He entered into a brief but fascinating excursus on the meeting of the scientific intellect and Eastern wisdom that took place over four centuries ago in the person of the Swiss esoteric philosopher and founder of modern medicine, Paracelsus, and after him in Goethe, Novalis, Carus, Schlegel, and certain key figures of German mysticism. This stream of "pan-sophia" is coming back into its own thanks to the encounter of the West with the East, Immoos observed. He concluded with the question of how parts of the Christian revelation, such as the cosmic Christ, that have long been shunted aside as "esoteric," can be brought again to the fore in our theology.

Clasper welcomed the suggestions of Immoos, only to note that they are still held in high suspicion by the Christian circles in which he moves. While rejecting attempts like those of the anthroposophical movement to break away from the tradition out of which they grew, he felt that we should embrace the esoteric and mystical elements in our past as an essential, organic dimension to Christianity which provides a real link to other religions.

Bartholomew Tsui turned the discussion to the use of the term "Eastern Wisdom," anxious to know concretely what contribution it might make to interreligious and intercultural encounters, whether they are being embraced merely because they support current habits of thought or whether they are seen as potentially transforming in a way that might otherwise not be open to us.

Here Clasper and others were firm in reasserting the openness to transformation, while admitting that it is an ideal far more preached than practiced.

Francis Clark cited the words written in the *Fore-Words* to the first edition of *INTER-RELIGIO* as apropos of a problem he sensed with the ideals being expressed. Referring to the growing interest in interreligious encounter as coming to a world equipped with previously undreamed of technological equipment for negotiating relationships with one another, the passage goes on:

If the turning of those tools to constructive use requires that we recognize our dual citizenship as members of one country and of a common earth, it also seems to require that we no longer merely belong to one religious tradition but recognize ourselves as heir to the entire religious wealth of the world. Never before have the dangers been so great. Never before have we so needed to confess a common spiritual reverence for life in all its rich but fragile variety.

For Clark it is not a question of taking exception to the viewpoint, but only of

asking if it does not entrust the responsibility for the future of religious tradition to a highly educated minority who have opportunities for travel and reflection.

Clasper felt, in reply, that the struggle of ordinary Christians in Asia—and their numbers are increasing—to integrate their religion into their own cultural past, to reconcile the differences and oppositions in their own minds, in some sense represents the most important level at which this process is taking place. The primary task that the wide-travelled and educated Christian has is to attend to that struggle, give it a voice where it lacks one, and build up from there.

Van Bragt, too, felt that the *fact* of dual-citizenship remains a fact whether or not particular individuals happen to be *conscious* of it yet. This is certainly the case in Japan. Dolores Sikat observed something similar in the Philippine situation, where the eagerness for contact with other countries is growing increasingly stronger, without necessarily jeopardizing one's sense of being Filipino. Merely to complain of a loss of former patterns of thought and mobility is to miss the fact that something of great moment is taking place.

Thelle asked that we not forget in all of this that for all those who dream of international travel and contact, it is but a small minority who can actually realize their dreams, while far more significant numbers of people are being uprooted from their homelands by war or famine or natural disaster without any such idealism to inspire them.

Clasper stepped in here once again to stress the potentially de-provincializing power of the Christian message, not only with regard to the sense of space but also to the sense of time so that we can become contemporaries with those of other centuries. To this Magdalena Villaba added the observation that the importance of the "dialogue with the self" that Sikat and Immoos had stressed in previous sessions takes on broader meaning when encounters with the "other" are of such a nature as to promote the sort of de-provincializing and universality of which Clasper was speaking.

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Sr. Theodore Hahnenfeld began the next discussion with a summary of the main points of a paper prepared for the conference by Seri Phongphit, who was not able himself to attend the meetings. Taking the Thai situation as the context for his remarks, Seri gave a brief history of interreligious contacts in the country. He focused in particular on the precarious teeter-totter of Buddhist-Christian relations which has proved itself only recently to be far from over, despite positive advances made in the past two decades through the efforts of such organizations as the Coordinating Group for Religion and Society and the Thai Interreligious Commission for Development. The former continues to be active today, particularly in the area of human rights, while the latter has been concerned to promote models of development based on religious princi-

ples, offering a forum where intellectuals and social activists can meet and discuss. What the Catholic Church is finding, as a result of its participation in these movements, is that the construction of a contextual theology for Thailand cannot grow out of a Catholic minority seeking, consciously or not, to "absorb" Buddhist elements into itself from a superior point of view, but needs to understand and develop out of the "logic of the majority," 90% of whom are Buddhist. In this sense Seri looks upon recent Buddhist-Christian conflict as a good opportunity for both sides to re-examine their complicity in the tensions.

Jim Heisig's response was divided into two parts. First he pointed to Seri's peculiar use of the "majority/minority" model in evaluating Christian motivations for collaboration with other religions extremely helpful as a way to state a common bias in the way Christians face religious pluralism. If the "context" for a contextualized theology is itself only a partial or selective reflection of the whole cultural reality, excluding in principle traditions of religious values not Christian, then it is not a context but a ghetto wall. Whatever consolation may come from importing theological ideas from foreign lands where Christianity enjoys majority status only helps further to isolate religion from society in the mind of the Christian minority. In the evolution of things this may be a necessary first step, but its necessity is only justified when the minority's self-image is reexposed to the dominant cultural reality for examination. It may well be that the most difficult task contextual theology in Asia has to face is forging a Christian "minority" standpoint out of the stuff of a "majority" religious tradition that is not Christian. Second, Heisig noted how Seri's analysis of the Buddhist-Christian conflict in Thailand reminded him that in all our talk of respect for the heights of "wisdom" in the East we should not neglect to recognize the depths of "stupidity" to which Eastern religion is no more naturally immune than our own Christian tradition is.

After a number of requests for further information on the Thai situation were answered by Sr. Theodore, Francis Clark voiced his disappointment with the all too common Christian impatience with religious traditions that resist enthusiastically embracing the "call to dialogue." History leaves its scars and those who refuse to take them seriously are being grossly unfair in a way not so different from the straightforward fundamentalistic approach to other religions. What is more, he went on, there may well be "mission" situations in the Church where it is less dialogue than instruction in the faith and baptism that is the felt need of a people. By what standards do we stifle that call?

Jan Swyngedouw added that the amount of contradiction present in official Christian documentation on other religions, even within a single Christian Church, must be a further source of confusion to those of other Asian religions and make them all the more wary of heeding our call to dialogue. Along another line, he observed that it is not uncommonly perceived as a threat to a cultural majority when a foreign religion of minority status begins to look and act and speak indigenously.

Asked what steps the Catholic Church is taking to counter recent protests lodged against "Vatican interference" by some Buddhist groups, Sr. Theodore

noted that the present approach is to weather the storm silently rather than attempt to initiate further dialogue.

Magdalena Villaba, chairperson for the discussion, directed the group's attention to problems of the betrayal or squandering of religious heritage in the East suggested by Heisig's reference to the "stupidity of the East," and wondered what role interreligious work might have in the line of mutual purification.

Thomas Immoos repeated Rudolf Otto's famous injunction against comparing the ideals of one religion with the reality of another, to remark that Western enthusiasts of Eastern thought frequently bolster their infatuation with its wisdom by denouncing the failures of present Christian leadership.

In reference to models underlying Minjung theology in Korea, Paul Sye noted the influence of South American theology, but said that the chief inspiration seems to come from Korean reflection on the experience of oppression, both Christian and otherwise, which may then be adopted to shape a Christian point of view. As a minority people, of course, the Christians have their own history of persecution, even at the hands of other religious leaders, which becoming fully "inculturated" should not simply obliterate from their memory.

Peter Lee told the group that he has been facing with fear and trembling a coming workshop on "Asian Spirituality" at which he is supposed to direct a discussion on Chinese spirituality, since the assumption is that Chinese religions have something at present to offer. The historical fact is, however, that practically all of China's religions have undergone crises leading to a degeneration—he hesitated to call it outright a "stupidity"—that cannot be overlooked in the attempt to single out what is of positive value, nor can the question simply be avoided of whether our Christian faith can serve in some way as a purifying force.

With regard to the problem of "majority/minority" models relative to Christians in China, Lee noted how organizational growth and stability tends to establish a minority and reduce the urgency of coming to grips with the surrounding majority culture and its values.

Asked how he would envisage the creation of a minority Christian theology on the basis of a different majority religious value system, Heisig stated that his own tendency would be to follow the lines suggested in earlier discussions of probing beneath the skin of living religious tradition to unearth common traits of popular "folk" belief, rather than begin with the developed doctrinal system of a non-Christian religion.

CONCLUSION

A number of agenda, deliberately set aside for the end of the conference, were taken up by the assembly in a final general session. Among them were an airing of views regarding proposed plans for a Pan-Asian Center of Missiology

in the Philippines, progress towards an Interreligious Center in Thailand, a discussion of the currently debated problem of "ancestor worship" in Japan, suggestions for revising Christian catechetical texts in the light of interreligious dialogue, the coordination of efforts towards an Asian theology of religions, and the place and theme of the next meeting of representatives of the network. As the conclusions reached there take more concrete shape, they will be reported in the pages of these *INTER-RELIGIO* bulletins.

While it may not be appropriate to speak of a deliberate "consensus" having emerged from the four days of meetings, there were clear signs of a growing concern with two areas of interreligious dialogue. On the one hand, new weight and importance were given to the place that "folk religiosity" or "indigenous spirituality" merit in the construction of models for interreligious research. For all the concrete complications this might cause for current patterns of dialogue, the frequency with which the subject appeared and reappeared in the discussions would seem to indicate a common feeling that it is a dimension that cannot simply be shunted to the periphery.

On the other hand, a fresh sense of urgency was expressed time and again for shifting the central focus of interreligious concerns away from strictly intra-religious matters and out into immediate, concrete problems of society. This too, was seen to be an ideal upsetting to present models of dialogue, but one that fidelity to the reality of the Asian situation requires us to face.

As trying a task as it has been to sift through all the rich variety of opinion expressed at the Hong Kong Conference and commit it to print, the rewards of being forced to recall the words and feelings we shared together at Tao Fong Shan have proved more than compensation. I am reminded, too, that when the Norwegian missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt first established the Christian community in Nanking in 1922 which five years later was to relocate in the New Territories of Hong Kong, atop a scenic mountain he called "The Mountain of the Logos (Tao) Spirit," its doors were thrown open wide, offering a "Brother House" to religious seekers of all ways. In a way, it is a story that one who has been to Tao Fong Shan is not at all surprised to hear. It just makes one all the prouder to have walked through those open doors with one's friends.