

Asian Conference on Religion and Peace

East-Asian Area Seminar on “Crisis and Opportunities for Peace”

The Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP) held an East-Asia area seminar in Hong Kong on the theme “Crisis and Opportunities for Peace”, from February 21-23, 1994, with the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture as the host.

Some 25 persons participated in the seminar. They came from South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Buddhist sects, Christian (Catholic and Protestant) groups, Chondo-Gyo of Korea and Tien Ti Chiao of Taiwan were represented.

Two papers had been sent out to the participants before the seminar: “Religio-Philosophical Ideals for Peace in East Asia” by Dr. Peter K. H. Lee, and “East-Asia—Its Political, Economic and Military Problematics” by Prof. Yoshiaki Iizaka of the Peace Research Institute, WCRP, Japan. The participants in each country, with these papers as a basis, met to discuss both the religious resources and the hard realities of the world in their respective areas. The idea was that the seminar was neither to simply talk about religious ideas and beliefs in a vacuum nor to analyze the forces which threaten peace, but to see how religious resources could be brought into play to bring about peace. When the delegates met in Hong Kong they brought with them well-prepared national reports.

South Korea focused on “Looking to Unification and Searching for New Values.” The Hong Kong group considered “Prosperity, Stability and Peace.” The Taiwan groups took “Transforming Suffering into a Blessing” as their theme. Japan spoke on “From Dependence to Interdependence.”

After hearing the national reports, the participants were divided into three smaller groups. One group concentrated on the military and political issues. The second group went into the economic and cultural factors. The third group considered social and educational problems. Proposals were made by these groups for further consideration and action by the ACRP in regional and national chapters.

Two things became evident from the seminar: First, peace was not simply the absence of war but involves multiple aspects of human existence; and second, all great religions are concerned about peace, not in the abstract, but with its realization in concrete situations.

At the conclusion of the dialogue-seminar, the delegates realized that all the nations or areas (in the region and in the world) are interrelated and that all religions which are concerned about peace should and can work together for the promotion of peace.

The seminar was a good example of how a religion and peace conference can be a useful instrument for the promotion of peace by the different religions. It also showed that world peace and inner peace (the two are interrelated) are the best context for exciting and fruitful interreligious dialogue.

The dialogue-seminar was apparently so stimulating that post-conference discussions were continued by means of the fax machine. The semantic of peace and the hermeneutic of peace were felt to be important subjects by some of the participants. Peace is a rich concept, but it is also full of ambiguities. Moreover the meaning of peace varies from tradition to tradition and the implications depend on the context.

Another post-conference discussion via fax sought to answer the question raised but not answered at the seminar: "What makes East-Asia distinctive from the perspective of religion and peace?"

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